

UNDEF Update – March 2018

## The International Women's Day Issue

To celebrate the approach of International Women's Day, the UNDEF team presents a selection of our projects on gender equality and women's empowerment. Some of the initiatives are the first of their kind endeavored in the countries concerned; all of them are innovative, implemented by civil society organizations, and work against the odds in challenging environments. They range from strengthening networks of Syrian women refugees in Jordan and Lebanon to engaging



with local communities to fight female genital mutilation in Guinea-Bissau, from access to land rights in Sierra Leone to educating women about their rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Women's empowerment and gender equality are also priority themes for UNDEF's new round of projects, as you can see from the story below. With this Women's Day issue, we at UNDEF salute all our courageous women civil society partners around the world.



## UNDEF receives 2400 new project proposals -- one quarter focus on women's empowerment

UNDEF held its Twelfth call for proposals in November-December 2017, and received 2429 project proposals. For the Twelfth Round UNDEF particularly welcomed proposals in the areas of gender; rule of law; media; or electoral processes focusing on elections scheduled for 2020 at the earliest.

Proposals for projects to support women's empowerment represented 24% of all applications, the highest number by theme. The proposals originated from organizations in 139 countries, the vast majority local NGOs in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Now follows a thorough and rigorous process of assessment, quality vetting, due diligence and lessons learned from previous Rounds. A team of eight international assessors, combining more than 100 years of programme and project experience, scored each proposal against 10 set criteria and produced a long-short-list of some 300 project proposals. To narrow down the list further, UN Resident Coordinators and Experts of the UNDEF Advisory Board are invited to provide comments, quality vetting, and views on how proposed activities would fit in the overall context of existing UN work in the countries and fields proposed. The same comments are sought from the UNDEF Programme Consultative Group, making use of the specific expertise of each of its entities: the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Peacebuilding Support Office, the UN Development Programme, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and UN Women.

Once the short list is approved by the Secretary-General, the proposal moves into the final stage in the selection process: the invitation to short-listed applicants to submit a project document, which is in effect a contract to be negotiated between UNDEF and the grantee. This negotiation requires the applicant to provide a more elaborated project design, and involves detailed input from both UNDEF and the applicant, as well as scrutiny and due diligence enquiries by UNDEF. Only upon successful conclusion of the project document will the project proposal formally be approved for funds disbursement.



Because of the large volume of proposals, UNDEF is able to contact only those applicants who advance to the short list. This is expected to be in mid-2018.



## Podcast of Academic Council of the United Nations showcases UNDEF's unique role:

A podcast hosted by Alistair Edgar, Executive Director of the Academic Council of the United Nations, ACUNS, features an interview with UNDEF Head Annika Savill on the unique role of UNDEF within the UN system in working directly with civil society organizations around the world to build democratic and participatory processes. The podcast describes how UNDEF focuses increasingly on projects that have a longer-term impact and move beyond implementing outputs to ensuring sustainable and measurable outcomes. ACUNS, as a global professional association, brings together educational and research institutions, individual scholars, and practitioners active in the work and study of the United Nations, multilateral relations, global governance, and international cooperation. It promotes teaching on these topics, as well as dialogue and mutual understanding across and between academics, practitioners, civil society and students. The podcast is available on the ACUNS website at <https://acuns.org/current-issues-69-undef/>.



## Governments, civil society, academia to join UNDEF event during UN Commission on the Status of Women

During the March 2018 Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, UNDEF will host a side event on women's empowerment through democracy, civil society and innovation. The event, to be held on 22 March at UN Headquarters, will focus on innovative UNDEF projects in a range of areas, from sanitation and climate resilience to refugee community leadership and slum-dweller activism. Scheduled speakers include Ambassador Jürgen Schulz, Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany to the UN; Ambassador Tanmaya Lal, Deputy Permanent Representative of India to the UN; Ambassador Kelley Currie, U.S. Representative for Economic and Social Affairs to the UN; Annika Savill, Executive Head, UNDEF; and UNDEF Board member Wairimu Njoya, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Williams College, whose research focuses on the role of women's civil society organizations in strengthening respect for human rights.

Dr. Njoya will moderate an interactive panel discussion featuring UNDEF projects, bringing together Bhavani Rao, Director, Ammachi Labs, Amrita University, India; Mr. Monin Nong, Research Associate, Cambodia Development Resource Institute; Lina Abou Habib, Executive Director, Women's Learning Partnership, with a focus on the Middle East; Nehad Abul Komsan, Chair, The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights; Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi, Executive Director, Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre, Nigeria; Luisa Córdoba, Director of International Cooperation, TECHO, Latin America.

For more details and access to the event, please contact Beth Baja at [baja@un.org](mailto:baja@un.org)







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## UNDEF launches two new projects to empower refugee women in Lebanon and Jordan

The latest UNDEF Project Zeytuna for Syrian refugee women was launched in Lebanon at an opening ceremony in Beirut in December 2017.

This project is modelled on earlier UNDEF initiatives empowering Syrian refugee women. The earlier Project Zeytuna in Turkey provided the participants opportunities to develop skills in project management and communication as well as educating them about their rights.

The Lebanon project – also run by **Mandat International** – aims to empower Syrian women currently refugees in Lebanon to develop their own projects that will allow them to more fully participate in democratic and economic processes.

The Beirut event brought together nearly 100 refugee women and representatives from national and regional human rights and legal organizations. A representative of the Minister of State for Women's Affairs, Government of Lebanon, Mrs. Nada Makki addressed how to rethink women's empowerment within a refugee setting and the right to education for Syrian refugees.



The women participants learned about opportunities for participating in politics and decision-making and actions to involve women in peace processes. The opening ceremony also launched the process for the women to develop their own empowerment projects in Lebanon.

Also working within the region, a project to increase Syrian refugee women's ability to create positive change for their communities. The project, implemented by the **Women's Learning Partnership**, will work to empower individual Syrian women in Lebanon and Jordan, and with local organizations providing services to them.

Building on their work with refugee communities the project will conduct culturally adapted training programmes for Syrian refugee women on leadership, human rights, and community organization. Some Syrian women will be given the opportunity to be further trained as advocates for refugee populations in Jordan and Lebanon.



## Upholding the law against violence for women in Lebanon

In Lebanon, after years of lobbying and advocacy from women's groups, penal code article #522 was finally abolished in 2017. This article had effectively allowed rapists to evade justice if they married their victim. A new UNDEF project will focus on ensuring that Lebanese legal frameworks reflect the abolition of the code and ensuring that its abolishment is enforced.

The project is being implemented by the **ABAAD Resource Center for Gender Equality**, who played a leading role in the campaign to abolish article #522. In addition to working directly with female survivors of sexual and gender-based violence – who will lead their own initiatives to tackle violence – the project will also work with members of the Lebanese security forces to enhance their capacity to adequately address and investigate allegations of sexual violence.

Since Lebanon's article #522 is not unique within the region and other countries have similar legal loopholes, the project will also have a regional dimension. Bringing together women's rights activists from across the Middle East and North Africa, regional best practices and challenges will be documented to come up with a list of regional recommendations for improving legal protection for women from sexual violence.







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### Women and men as equal partners in local government in Tunisia

Recognizing the crucial role that men must play in bringing about gender equality, a new UNDEF project in Tunisia is promoting women's political participation and building their capacity to stand for office in local elections.

The project – implemented by the Tunisian NGO **Lam Echaml** – is launching a range of innovative activities to engage elected officials on the importance of gender equality policies. The project will also engage with traditional local media and citizen journalists to raise awareness and to develop a "good practice" manual on promoting gender equality.

The project also complements Tunisia's decentralization process by mainstreaming gender equality in local governance and public life at municipal and regional levels.



### Working with men to overcome violence against women in Afghanistan

An innovative UNDEF project in Afghanistan works with young men to overcome attitudes that make violence against women acceptable. Implemented by the **Welfare and Support Afghan Women Disability Organization (WSAWDO)**, the project has identified youth leaders who led their own awareness campaign sessions for other men and boys. These young men have become resources within their own villages who can advocate for women's rights.

Based on the results of the workshops, dialogues and awareness campaign, the project had a positive impact. The men who participated in the project have a much better understanding of the causes of violence against women and how to improve gender equality.

As one participant explained, *"before being involved in the project I believed that violent behavior towards your wife was part of being a man".* He has now come to understand how damaging that belief is and has vowed to overcome violence towards any woman or girl.





## Working with communities to keep girls safe in Nigerian schools

In the shadow of recurring attacks on schools in North East Nigeria where over 105 girls are feared to have been kidnapped, an UNDEF project has been working with the Nigerian government to improve school safety and security for girls.

The project – implemented by the **Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre** – recently held a national dialogue on safety and security in schools. At this dialogue the Nigerian Minister of Education, Mr. Adamu Adamu, confirmed the government was developing a national policy to guarantee safety and security in schools nationwide.

The dialogue also highlighted how the UNDEF project has promoted community dialogue to improve the safety of school children, in particular girls, using a participatory approach to build the capacity of schools, communities and civil society to engage authorities on school security and safety programmes. It has also put in place an SMS early warning system for teachers and students.



While the project focused on three states in Nigeria, the impact has been nationwide.



As Abiola Afolabi, Head of the Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre explained, "Our work with schools and communities from Kaduna North, Kaduna South and Zaria with the support of UNDEF, has led to the development of standards and guidelines and a plan of action for safe and secure schools which are the minimum requirements for all schools in regard to safety and security"

Abiola Afolabi will also be discussing this project as part of UNDEF's CSW side event – see page 2.

## Fighting female genital mutilation in Guinea-Bissau

An UNDEF project launched in early 2018 will work in the Guinea-Bissau regions of Bafata and Gabu to decrease gender-based violence, focusing on female genital mutilation. It will also champion freedom of speech for human rights defenders, and young people's participation in public decision-making processes.

The project, implemented by **Plan International Guinea-Bissau**, will engage with local NGOs, communities, human right defenders, youth associations and rights holders to raise community awareness of gender-based violence and reduce the practice of female genital mutilation. The project will also equip human rights defenders and young people with skills and knowledge to engage with local and national institutions, question political decisions, and influence policies.







## Getting out rural women's vote in the Democratic Republic of Congo



An UNDEF project in the Democratic Republic of Congo, has been working with illiterate rural women and young people to educate them about their civic responsibilities and to motivate them to participate in political activities.

Over 80% of rural women in the DRC are unable to read and write. While they represent a substantial proportion of the rural electorate, their daily struggle to make a living in the face of long term civil conflict, has led to a lack of interest in civic participation. Many women will not vote or will vote based on the views of their family or clan.



The project, implemented by **Centre d'Actions Sociales pour le Développement Intégré**, took an innovative approach to motivating female voters by running dynamic and interactive training sessions that used simulations and performance to make the political process more directly relevant to their lives. The methods employed had a very positive impact on the confidence of the participants and has motivated them to get more involved in local democratic processes.

The project is now in its final stages and has already had an impact, by raising awareness and mobilizing women, the wider community has also become more informed about human rights and good governance.



## Giving women access to land in Sierra Leone

An UNDEF Sierra Leone project has just completed its work with traditional leaders to build support for changes to a land tenure system based on customary inheritance that prevented women accessing land.

Implemented by **Humanist Watch Salone**, the project targeted influential community leaders to advocate for gender justice in the land tenure system including through round table meetings and radio discussions. It also trained women community leaders on advocacy and communication skills as well as on the applicable national laws and international human rights instruments regarding equal and land ownership rights.

As a result of the project several women participants were able to gain access to land and property. The traditional leaders involved also gained a better understanding of women's rights. As one Chief explained, *"With these project activities there has been a decrease in women's rights abuse especially regarding property inheritance. ... land matters involving women that were boiling are now resolved due to awareness raised from meeting sessions and radio discussions"*.

