THE
POST-REVOLUTION
PIONEERS

Emerging Opportunities and Implications for Libyan Women and Civil Society

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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"EVEN TODAY A LARGE NUMBER OF WOMEN ARE STILL SATISFIED WITH THEIR SITUATION IN SOCIETY, WOMEN WHO ARE CONVINCED THEY SHOULD STAY HOME, OR WORK AS SCHOOL TEACHERS. THEY BELIEVE THAT IT IS NOT THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO FACE DIFFICULTIES AND CIRCUMSTANCES AND LEAVE THESE THINGS TO MEN. HOWEVER, THERE ARE WOMEN WHO SEE THEMSELVES NO LESS THAN MEN IN ANYTHING BUT EVEN MORE CAPABLE THAN MEN. THEY ARE WILLING TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY AND WORK FOR CONDITIONS ON AN EQUAL FOOTING."

–Female, community member, southern Libya.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Libyan society is experiencing critical challenges in its transition period. However, according to our research, a new model of community development is emerging, with civil society, local councils, business people, and community members working in close collaboration to stabilise cities, towns, and villages. Making this model work is the reality that family, tribe, tradition, custom, and religion are key factors of identity among most Libyans. The rapture of the revolution upended society, introducing new ideas, discourse, and experimentation. The consequences of these are evident in the fracture of Libyan political life, the absence of rule of law, and an economy careening toward collapse.

For all the reasons above and in spite of them, civil society is growing and contributing to the fabric and repair of Libya in significant and important ways. Activists are partnering with local councils, influential business communities, and with one another to fill the vacuum left by a government besieged by political turmoil. In adjusting to their evolving circumstances, organisations have adopted new technologies and acquired new skills in the restoration and sustenance of communities living in conflict.

This report synthesises and analyses data and information collected during interviews with 73 respondents, 52% of whom are women and all of whom are Libyan citizens from different parts of Libya that either exclusively implement women's and gender equality projects or include such projects in their portfolio of programming. Interviews were conducted at the end of 2017 and early 2018.

The purpose of this research is to understand what organisational and programmatic opportunities exist to strengthen CSOs in Libya. The research found that effective implementation of civil society programmes relies not necessarily on the size or structure of organisations, but rather on their creativity, energy, understanding, and a sense of mission of the members and/or volunteer activists. In fact, loose-knit and ad hoc groups of activists can have as much impact as professional organisations with formal structures and paid staff.

This research concentrates on women-focused civil society organisations and activities, however many of the findings and analyses are relevant to the broader community supporting development and civic engagement, demonstrating an unwavering commitment of Libyans to repair their fragile society. For example, while several activists have left Libya, many for their protection, community-based training, charitable and humanitarian works, and advocacy initiatives are being carried out in every corner of the country by dedicated organisations and activists. CSOs implement activities with the support and partnership of volunteers, local governments, private businesses, and the international community. Key findings and recommendations from the research are presented below.

- The research demonstrates that most respondents feel the status of women in Libya is improving over time. Women are, compared to the pre-2011 Libya, able to more freely participate in economic, political, and social spheres. Respondents also acknowledge, however, that recent political conflicts have created a toxic environment in which women are either marginalised or choose not to participate, and conservative social values impact the extent to which women can claim those rights. While violence and ongoing security threats diminish the rights of all Libyans, they affect women disproportionately.

- Many respondents express concern that emerging, often imported, ultra-conservative religious perspectives threaten the accepted and legal rights of women, and seek to minimise their opportunities to give those concerns fair voice.

- Access to online resources is an essential avenue for providing training as well as safe spaces for discussions on sensitive topics. The economic crisis has its apparent challenges but has also presented an opportunity for Libyans to explore private sector businesses, including women who are supporting families stricken by the liquidity crisis. The economic empowerment of women will provide an opportunity for their continued influence on economic policy, and lead to social and political empowerment.

- Crisis and conflict have also opened space for women to become engaged in conflict resolution and peace negotiation at local levels, where previously it was a domain exclusively reserved for men.

- Despite evident success, even in trying times, Libya's current environment can be dangerous particularly for those working in the fields of human rights. Moreover, because of this fragility, discourse is self- and community-censored. Nonetheless, delicate discussions are taking place among Libyans at local levels and through internet-based platforms.

- Charitable and humanitarian organisations are delivering crucial services, representative groups are advocating for communities, and civil society activists are supporting local development. Civil Society as a whole, however, suffers from the perceptions of those who genuinely do not understand the nature of its work, or those who purposefully misrepresent the intent of these organisations. Similarly, suspicion of the international community in some quarters has perpetuated presumptions.

- In spite of mixed perceptions of international involvement in Libya, CSOs interviewed highlighted their belief that the international community provides essential support to Libya as a whole, facilitating peace initiatives, providing needed humanitarian assistance, and supporting the work of civil society in all corners of the country. While many citizens do not understand the motivation behind foreign support, it is clear that civil society actors value the contribution of international donors who support community development and stability.

- Ultimately, the development of Libya is the domain of Libyans. As the research shows, in the current climate of insecurity, political division, and economic turmoil Libyans are developing, sustaining, protecting, and advocating for their communities. They demonstrate resilience and ingenuity in supporting critical community-based initiatives. In adversity, Libyan activists have fashioned partnerships and community collaborations that serve as models for future development.

"MEN THROUGHOUT THIS PERIOD OF WARS, CONFLICT AND DIVISIONS, FAILED IN ACHIEVING THIS [LASTING PEACE], PERHAPS IT IS TIME FOR WOMEN TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS THE RIGHT PATH TO GET US OUT OF THESE CRISES."

—Female, community member, southern Libya.

PROJECT TEAM

Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR)

IWPR is a non-governmental organisation that gives voice to people at the frontlines of conflict and transition to help them drive change. Founded in 1992, IWPR now works in more than two dozen countries and territories in Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. IWPR supports activists, human and women's rights defenders, reporters, and citizen journalists in many countries in conflict, crisis, and transition around the world. We contribute to peace and good governance by strengthening the ability of media and civil society to speak out. This is accomplished by training, mentoring and providing platforms, building up the institutional capacity of media and civic groups, and working with independent and official partners to remove barriers to free expression, robust public debate, and citizen engagement.

IWPR Champions Women's Rights: IWPR works to champion issues of women's rights around the globe while supporting female civic activists and reporters in challenging environments. IWPR's work around the world supports and strengthens emerging women's organisations and promotes women's active participation. Our civil society and media partners not only highlight inequalities and abuses, but also celebrate the achievements of women driving change in their own societies. Much of IWPR's work focuses on giving voice to those who might not otherwise be heard. Targeted programming promotes the voices of women in conflict zones by training female journalists and providing them with effective media platforms and fora for women in conflict-divided regions providing a vital space for women participation in peace-building, political, and economic processes. Furthermore, women human rights defenders stay safe in often hostile environments thanks to IWPR programming on physical and digital safety awareness.

IWPR in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA): IWPR has been working in the MENA region for over a decade. IWPR's work helps build a vibrant and independent media, active civic and community groups, and democratic institutions across the MENA region. Initiatives in the region have strengthened journalist and civil society institutions in a variety of ways, from supporting legal and structural reform around policies, including freedom of information and women's rights, and political participation to real time management and programme implementation support to build sustainable organisations. IWPR has offices and maintains presence in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey in addition to running regional programmes across the entire Middle East and North Africa region.

Alumni of IWPR's programming have assumed leading roles in government, civil society, academia, the media, and (in some cases) in the non-violent opposition. Others, forced to flee their countries, are advocating and working in other ways in support of their principles and objectives, helping to plan transitions, and organising support for refugees.

Binda Consulting International (BCI)

Binda Consulting International (BCI) is a European-based political and international development consultancy providing analysis, training, and research with expertise in programme design, public opinion research, women's political participation, political strategy, crisis communications, and organisational training.

Established in 2014, its senior consultants have deep experience in the field of international democracy and development. Combining decades of work in some of the most challenging political environments, BCI has the right mix of talent and understanding to deliver expert advice and action. BCI is a company that is nimble enough to respond quickly to the needs of clients. Its global network of consultants provides bespoke talent and expertise to projects and programmes.

Its senior consultants have worked to develop the capacity of political actors in emerging democracies and traditional societies in order to better respond to the challenges inherent in dramatic change. Having lived and worked in conflict and post-conflict environments, BCI consultants understand the obstacles to reconciliation within and among communities.

Reboot

Reboot is a social impact firm dedicated to inclusive development and accountable governance. We work with governments, foundations, and civil society to achieve their missions. We think of this as working toward a 21st century social contract.

The foundation of governing legitimacy and collective prosperity, a social contract is inclusive by definition. While the ability to access information, organise, and input has reshaped the scope of inclusivity in governance, few institutions have kept pace with these changes. Our social contract is due for renegotiation.

Reboot is working at the forefront of these transitions. We work with our clients to explore the origins of complex issues, design contextually appropriate interventions, bring these ideas to reality, and evaluate the results along the way. We approach the task with a set of underlying principles that cut across each engagement: immersion, collaboration, and iteration.

The possibilities for inclusive development and accountable governance—for a 21st century social contract—are growing. From supporting good governance in Nigeria to human development in Nicaragua to civic innovation in the United States and beyond, we are working to realise them.

Ante Raeda: Pioneering work in civic engagement

Through the U.K. Government-funded Ante Raeda ("You are a Pioneer") project, IWPR is equipping women's civil society organisations to improve the status of women in Libya through organisational strengthening and effective policy advocacy. Based on lessons learned from IWPR's current and previous programming in Libya, the MENA region and beyond, the Ante Raeda project is partnering with CSOs throughout Libya that are working on women's empowerment and gender equality. Ante Raeda aims to enhance the operational capacity, sustainability, and impact of these CSOs—strengthening them organisationally, improving capacity and lobbying, and empowering them to improve the lives and visibility of Libyan women.

IWPR partnered with Binda Consulting International and Reboot, to undertake a scoping exercise, which allowed its team to analyse the state of CSOs representing women's interests in Libya. Through more than 70 interviews across Libya with CSO leaders and community members the team assessed women's CSOs on their organisational strength and health; their strategic planning and operational ability; and their networks, coalition, and advocacy capacity to advance women's rights and government accountability to women. IWPR's Libyan partners include both established and emerging women's groups and women-led CSOs, as well as other CSOs working on a range of gender-related issues, operating throughout Libya. These assessments, based on information provided directly from the CSOs, identify where support should be targeted to help them increase their impact regarding women's rights in Libya.

All capacity building efforts taking place throughout the life of this project will utilise the data collected during the scoping exercise enabling IWPR to tailor its support to meet the specific needs of individual CSOs.

INTRODUCTION

LIBYA CONTEXT OVERVIEW

Contemporary Libyan community-based or civil society organisations (CSOs) were born out of the 2011 Revolution. Women, men, and youth organised groups to support the revolutionaries, protect neighbourhoods, provide humanitarian assistance, as well to heal and feed communities. These ad hoc, nascent groups, however, struggled with identity and attrition in the post-revolutionary period.

For the first time in two generations, groups of Libyans could openly coalesce and bring voice to issues that were previously suppressed. They had no experience with community-based organisation, advocacy, or capacity building, but many sought out information on the internet, from the international community, or prevailed through trial and error.

Gradually, as universities and workplaces reopened and institutions were established, many activists reduced their participation in groups or abandoned them altogether. Several organisations that initially punctuated the landscape eventually disappeared or became inactive. Those CSOs that endured variously struggled with identifying core missions or securing steady resources to continue at pace. As many of the participants in the research point out, the period also saw the emergence of mercenary groups interested in accessing public and international funding. However, within this kaleidoscope of motive and mission, an impressive number of or-

ganisations have prevailed, building a profound body of development and charity work, developing durable and trusted partnerships, and advocating for their various communities.

Not all Libyans understand the vital role of a vibrant civil society in democracies. As a result, and over the years, many activists have experienced harassment, violence, and even assassination. The political and regional divisions that led to conflict in 2014 further cast a pall on the work of these organisations, several of which have left Libya or, by limiting their activism, reduced their exposure to risk. That said, there is a significant number of organisations still operating in communities around Libya; conducting charitable, humanitarian, and advocacy work.

An unpredictable and volatile security situation in Libya has introduced considerable challenges and opportunities for committed civil society activists. Political divisions and lack of institutional consistency and continuity have prevented policy and legal processes from advancing the rule of law and responding to community needs effectively. The spread of weapons, violent conflict, a cash liquidity crisis, and the absence of basic goods permeate Libyans' daily lives. While a society spiraling out of control has substantial programmatic and civil society implications it has also provided space for activists to engage with influential partners in the community to fill the vacuum of coherent central governance.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS

BY REGION

Tripoli and westren Libya
52%

Misrata
4%

Benghazi
21%

Sabha and southern Libya
23%
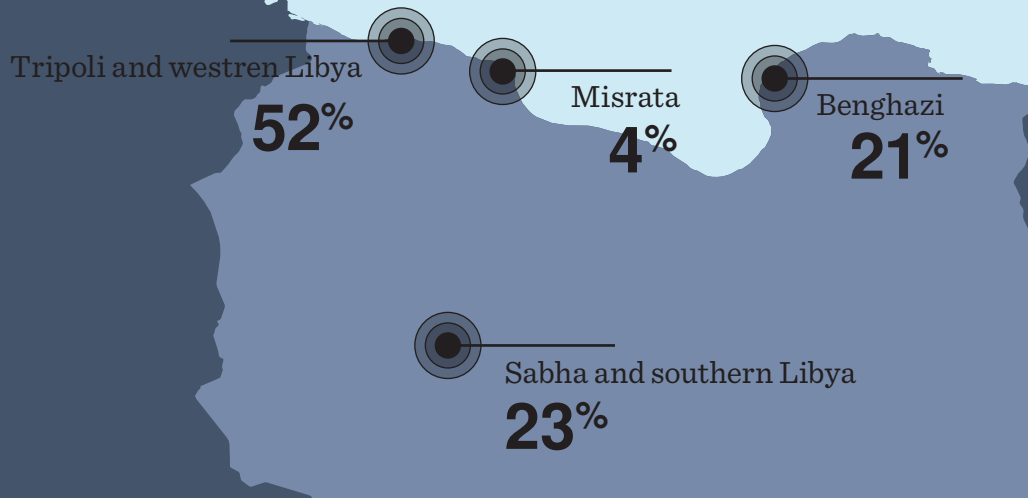
BY ROLE

47%

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society organisation founders, directors, and programme staff, who are at the forefront of promoting women's rights

42%

INFLUENCERS

Influencers, who have the ability to impact the beliefs and behaviours of their communities. This includes academics, prominent business people, religious leaders, and public media personalities

11%

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Community members, who live in the communities in which civil society operates and either support or have the potential to support the work of CSOs

BY GENDER

52%
WOMEN

48%
MEN

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This report synthesises and analyses data and information collected during interviews with 73 respondents, 52.1% of whom are women and all of whom are Libyan citizens from different parts of Libya that either exclusively implement women's and gender equality projects or include such projects in their portfolio of programming. Interviews were conducted at the end of 2017 and early 2018.

Respondents were divided into three broad groups:
1. **Representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs)**, who are at the forefront of promoting women's rights.
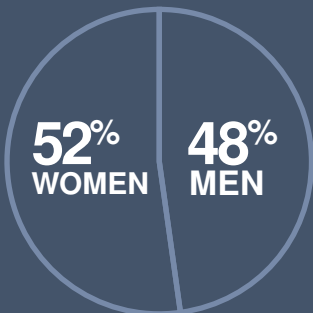2. **Influencers**, who have the ability to impact the beliefs and behaviours of their communities. This includes academics, prominent business people, religious leaders, and public media personalities.
3. **Community members**, who live in the communities in which civil society operates and either support or have the potential to support the work of CSOs.

53.4% of the respondents are community members or influencers selected randomly by the field researchers based on their profile, and 46.6% of the respondents are representatives of CSOs working on gender issues (directly or indirectly).

Binda Consulting International (BCI) and Reboot designed the research instruments, in partnership with IWPR, as part of a larger project, to assess organisational capacities and examine the environ-ment in which civil society organisations work. The majority of the interviews with influencers and community members lasted over one hour, and those with civil society organisations lasted between two and three hours. Interviews took place in the offices of civil society organisations, in cafes, in hotels, in people's homes, and via Skype.

The purpose of this research is to understand what organisational and programmatic opportunities exist to strengthen CSOs in Libya. The research found that effective implementation of civil society programmes relies not necessarily on the size or structure of organisations, but rather on their creativity, energy, understanding, and a sense of mission of the members and/or volunteer activists. In fact, loose-knit and ad hoc groups of activists can have as much impact as professional organisations with formal structures and paid staff.

In addition, researchers and respondents engaged in in-depth discussions about issues that are important to women in Libya, many of which are sensitive in Libya's largely conservative society. The lines of inquiry included the status of women—what are the prevailing attitudes about women, and what factors are driving progress on women's issues? Researchers also explored the social, political, and economic contexts, looking at the specific considerations in each of these themes that affect the status of women, as well as the political actors and influencers who are (or could soon) impact the status of women.

Landscape

ACTIVISM IN LIBYA

The research shows that many Libyan CSOs are doing a lot with a little, and overcoming significant challenges. Several organisations with creativity, energy, and a sense of mission find innovative ways to accomplish critical tasks. Libyan organisations are increasingly, and deliberately, turning to technology to engage women and to implement activities. In the absence of national and local government service providers, CSOs are providing crucial support to vulnerable communities and finding new ways to address sensitive and "taboo" issues.

Volunteerism is thriving in Libya

The research reveals that volunteerism is alive and well in Libya. CSO teams, comprised entirely of volunteers, drive successful programmes and deliver vital assistance under challenging circumstances. Apart from the virtues of giving to the community, volunteering with a CSO or a charitable organisation provides a safe and acceptable space—particularly for women—to socialise and participate in activities outside the home. Volunteers who donate time and energy to CSOs often acquire skills and experience, which are helpful for future employment.

CSOs report, however, a noticeable decrease in volunteer stamina. Increasingly, Libyan organisations are competing for the time and attention of potential volunteers who must devote more of their day to accomplishing routine tasks to survive. The cash liquidity crisis, the varying availability of basic consumer goods, and crumbling infrastructure mean citizens are preoccupied with standing in lines or chasing elusive commodities and have less time to donate to CSOs. Additionally, the unpredictability of the security environment makes people more cautious and reluctant to travel, participate, and engage.

Online activism

Many civil society organisations, to compensate for limited access to safe physical spaces, are taking advantage of online spaces, where women can connect to share experiences, opinions, and develop strategies for action. For example, one community influencer uses a private Facebook group to connect with women in southern Libya. The group discusses topics like the lack of medical services and security issues, and sometimes exchanges opinions about women's political participation. Another organisation uses closed Facebook groups to engage women in discus-

sions of gender-based violence, providing a platform for shared experiences. Unlike television and radio stations, social media spaces have the benefit of being mostly unadministered (and unobserved). Respondents reported that women are more confident expressing their opinions when they can enjoy a certain level of anonymity.

Additionally, technology and social media help civil society organisations deliver programmes to remote communities, to people with limited physical or social mobility, and in cases where the security situation prevents travel. One CSO reports resorting to the production of a video for a training it was unable to deliver in person. Several organisations mention using the internet to fill information gaps to increase knowledge and understanding on a broad range of issues from health to women's legal rights.

There are, of course, limitations to the power of social media as well as implications for an over-reliance on its use by CSOs. Although there are no reliable data for Libya, digital literacy in traditional communities and older populations tends to be low, and many citizens continue to receive information from more traditional outlets. The research shows that CSO activists and members of the community believe traditional media—particularly radio—continue to play an important role in the empowerment of women.

Traditional media

CSO respondents note that building positive relationships with local media can help build the trust and support of the communities in which they work. Radio is a trusted medium, in part because of the widespread perception that it is politically neutral, a reputation established during the revolution. A media professional from southern Libya explained: "Radio is not involved in politics and that is what made its impact deeper and made it build good relations with people and other media outlets." (Male, influencer, southern Libya) In some cases, CSOs have successfully used radio to broach sensitive topics. For example, one popular radio show in the south features two women discussing a range of issues, including violence against women and divorce.

Filling gaps

CSOs are stepping up to fill other gaps in Libya—particularly in the service sector. Many organisations provide front-line assistance to displaced people, women, and children traumatised by conflict, and those requiring medical support or treatment. Several respondents in the research note that the lack of functioning institutions, as well as the unwillingness (or inability) of government officials to engage in controversial issues, have created a vacuum into which CSOs have filled. Organisations providing direct support to vulnerable communities rely on the expertise of doctors and teachers who volunteer their time in schools and medical centres.

Tackling sensitive issues

The research reveals differences of opinion on how, if at all, issues considered as sensitive or "taboo" can be addressed in a conservative society like Libya. Community members suggest—almost in the same breath—that public discussion of taboo topics is not possible, but when confronted by these issues, people do engage. One respondent, for example, cited the 2016 outrage over a video showing the gang rape of a woman by members of a militia that circulated widely on social media. Public demonstrations and coffee shop discussions prove that Libyans will address "sensitive" issues when challenged to do so. While it is certainly difficult to discuss issues such as sexuality and gender-based violence in conservative communities, some resistance appears to be related to self-censorship, a hold-over of habits developed during decades of restrictions on free speech and access to reliable information.

The organisations surveyed for this research are, however, in no doubt that sensitive issues are being discussed and addressed in their programmes and in Libyan communities. Civil society respondents note that sensitive issues are often raised, and discussed, under an umbrella of less sensitive activities. For instance, CSOs that provide psycho-social assistance to traumatised children and women—an acceptable and welcome service—find themselves addressing the consequences of gender-based violence, sexual abuse of children, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Perceptions of CSOs

The research uncovered various and contradictory perceptions of civil society organisations and the impact of their work in Libya. The phenomenon of non-governmental civil society organisations is a recent, post-revolution development. Before 2011 only charitable projects sponsored by the government or the Gaddafi family and the Scouts were sanctioned; all other activities were deemed subversive. It is understandable, therefore, that citizens misunderstand the role of CSOs in the community and are suspicious of their activities.

Influencers within communities are able to distinguish between and among different organisations with varying opinions on the effectiveness of activities. Respondents suggest that many Libyan CSOs are one woman/man "talking shops" with an undefined vision that fail to achieve meaningful change. One respondent from Benghazi notes: "Most CSOs are good but have difficulty defining appropriate goals suitable for the society." (Female, community member, eastern Libya). Another respondent from the south questions the impact of training programmes or awareness campaigns which, he claimed, are often based on incomplete or inaccurate information. The implications of the lack of goals and vision, suggests one person, is that CSOs fail to attract the attention of influential people or decision makers to implement recommendations or affect real change.

Interviews with civil society activists indicate that confused or negative perceptions are not entirely unfounded. For some organisations, the measure of their success is the number of workshops held, not the impact. Within other organisations, activists believe that raising awareness, is itself, impactful, without analysing or articulating how newfound "awareness" is used to achieve concrete objectives. Several CSO respondents understand that the perception gap means they are doing a poor job communicating with citizens in general and influential decision makers in particular.

OPPORTUNITIES

Just as revolutionaries were the heroes of Post-Gaddafi Libya, volunteers are the heroes of communities mired in conflict and chaos. Libyan activists, influencers, and members of the community should nurture the culture of volunteerism, by recognising and celebrating the dedication and commitment of volunteers' efforts.

CSOs can expand digital safe spaces for women and explore online activism as a tool to reach rural, remote, and vulnerable communities. As more citizens become connected and infrastructure improves, CSOs can develop and deliver online trainings that go beyond arranging spaces for discussion to provide meaningful distance learning opportunities.

Activists who understand that many Libyan citizens are suspicious of the work of CSOs and do not understand the role of civil society in a democracy can work together in telling their story. In developing systematic strategies, to deliberately communicate who they are and who they are not, CSOs can cultivate a community of champions among influencers to help tell their story.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CSOS

As, and when, the economic and security situations improve in Libya, CSOs will struggle to keep the attention of volunteers. CSOs will need to prepare for, and adapt to, stability where citizens spend more time rebuilding their lives and careers and have less time to devote to helping their communities.

The expanded use of digital and social media presents CSOs with new challenges. Activists report increasing incidents of cyberbullying, harassment, and intimidation towards women and those working on issues of gender equality. Further, unstable electricity and variable access to the internet are challenges that limit the potential and impact of online initiatives.

Landscape

STATUS OF WOMEN

There are divergent opinions about how far Libyan women have advanced

The research demonstrates that most people believe the status of women in Libya has improved since the revolution, and importantly, even in the last year. The impact of the security situation heavily influences women's perceptions, and they consistently point to insecurity as a major, if not the most significant, concern facing women. Community members cite examples of women who are active in elected politics, drive, are occupied in employment and business, and engage in community activism as evidence of the greater participation of women in Libyan life, and advancement in the status of women.

While activists working on the empowerment of women recognise that permissive space for activism in community-based initiatives has increased in the last year, they worry this space is fragile and vulnerable. Growing conservative attitudes towards women, security restrictions on mobility and activism, and—most importantly—a collapsing political system that fails to prioritise reforms, all impact and threaten this frail space.

Growing ultra-conservative attitudes impact the status of women

Most respondents frame their perspectives of the status of women in a patriarchal, culturally conservative paradigm that limits female participation in political and social realms. The socially conservative norms of Libya are perceived to be significant factors in defining the roles of men and women within the family and community. Despite these norms, many organisations are advocating for access to rights even within this dynamic. Ultimately, even within conservative societies citizens' rights are protected and promoted and, within acceptable boundaries, governments permit advocacy activity for the protection of rights.

Because of current political divisions, as well as ultra-conservative perspectives of the rights of women, Libyan institutions do not often respect the current legal framework. Regardless of one's view on the fairness of inheritance laws, for example, the law provides surviving women and girls one-third of an estate. However, in the current environment, women survivors are being denied any inheritance, and have little recourse.

A businesswoman in Benghazi recounts how her male family members charge her rent for her shop in a building inherited from her father.

Similarly, many activists suggest that, combined with the collapse of rule of law, social attitudes toward sexual violence prevent women from reporting cases of gender-based violence to the authorities for fear of shaming families or victim shaming.

Citizenship laws that prevent the children of non-Libyan fathers from enjoying full privileges of citizenship disproportionately affect families in Southern Libya but are of concern to many activists around Libya. Several organisations advocate on behalf of families seeking assistance and access to governmental services.

Divorced and widowed women are particularly vulnerable to the dictates of their families influenced by growing conservative norms. In some communities, CSOs report that families prohibit divorced and widowed women from using mobile phones, Facebook, or driving cars. Women in rural and remote communities are subjected to these social dynamics much more acutely than in larger urban centres.

"THE SOCIETY ALSO REQUIRES WOMEN NOT TO HOLD SOVEREIGN POSITIONS IN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS, EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE LEGALLY ENTITLED TO DO SO. SIMILARLY, WOMEN CANNOT TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY WITHOUT A MAHRAM (FIRST DEGREE MALE RELATIVE SUCH AS A FATHER, OR A BROTHER), EVEN FOR HEALTH REASONS."

—Female, CSO leader, southern Libya.

OPPORTUNITIES

A number of issues respecting the rule of law provide the opportunity for organisations to conduct advocacy at the national and regional levels. Libyans are broadly sympathetic to calls to respect legal rights and the fair application of laws and regulations. With elections and constitutional developments emerging, organisations have a window to affect legal frameworks that impact political and economic rights and, ultimately, the systems that determine the quality of status of women.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CSOS

Those who address equality and gender-based issues must account for the acceptable norms of the broader community. However, this becomes more difficult as ultra-conservative perspectives are given voice and legitimised in Libya.

As long as the security situation remains uncertain, families will continue to extend protective restrictions on female members' travel and engagement in the community.

Landscape

SECURITY

Violence and conflict impact mobility and programming activities, most significantly in rural and remote areas

Most of those interviewed acknowledge the security situation has a universal impact in Libya but affects women, organisations with women members, and programmes catering to women disproportionately. Heightened tensions, ad hoc armed checkpoints, uncertain sensitivities, and crime all have restrictive impacts on how and when women can travel. Planning events, such as charitable works or workshops, becomes more difficult when participation requires road travel over great distances. These restrictions are most pronounced in rural and remote areas.

Key potential allies risk violence if they publicly support human rights issues

Community members and CSO leaders indicate that potential allies of civil society initiatives are less likely to be publically supportive of human rights-focused initiatives because they fear being denounced and targeted as politically aligned with one camp or the other. A few interviewees even believe that many Imams remain silent and do not engage for fear of retribution.

Human rights defenders are at greatest risk in the current environment

Organisations that focus their advocacy on human rights are at risk of reprisal or violence by the array of armed or militant groups. While many well-known human rights defenders have left Libya for their safety during this period, those that remain are cautious in noting perceived violations of human rights. Many of the respondents who contributed to the research discuss the dangers of highlighting violations in the absence of the rule of law to protect activists from reprisal. Consequently, human rights defenders mute legitimate and urgent human rights issues for fear of safety to self, family, or community.

"IMAMS HAVE BEEN KILLED FOR MERELY PROMOTING PEACE."

—Male, community member, western Libya.

OPPORTUNITIES

Civil society organisations are mitigating certain risks with the use of social media, and creative contingency planning. One organisation recounts planning a workshop on small business skills which it cancelled because of localised conflict. Organisers video-recorded and uploaded the training to the internet. Initially, the CSO expected to deliver the training to approximately 20 women in person. However, several hundred subsequently accessed the online training.

A few organisations indicate that they have successfully engaged with local armed groups, opening channels of communication and allowing for greater understanding of community-based

work. While some people with criminal or political motivation attempt to paint "civil society" in a bad light, CSOs have the opportunity to engage citizens in discussions about the diversity of community-based organisations and initiatives; advocacy, charitable, humanitarian, educational, empowerment, skills building, as well as defending human rights.

The Libyan diaspora and international community face less risk in drawing attention to human rights violations than those living in Libya. Therefore their continued vigilance in highlighting risks and incidents extends some measure of protection to vulnerable groups and victims.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CSOS

Armed and politically motivated groups portray civil society and advocacy organisations as "spies" or as personally motivated by constant travel and attendance at workshops. This characterisation creates a climate that accepts or heightens expectations of violence against activists.

COLLABORATION & PARTNERSHIPS

Local and national partnerships are enabling programme delivery

Most of the CSOs interviewed discuss formal and informal partnerships at, mainly, the grassroots. Given the vacuum in governance, economic, and security crises, communities are filling in where the state would ordinarily be leading. Additionally, given the difficulties in mobility and tensions from one region to another, CSOs have begun networking collaborations. For example, implementing a national programme would be difficult for single organisation, whose members may be strangers in remote communities, or viewed as on the "other side" politically. Increasingly CSOs are reaching out across the country, identifying like-minded partners to engage in more extensive programme delivery.

Not only do these partnerships allow for shared risk and increased security protections, but they allow the sharing of resources, skills, knowledge, and experiences. Some organisations struggling with access to resources have started exchanging skill sets within various programmes. One CSO leader from western Libya describes collaboration with organisations in both south and eastern Libya whereby they share access to one another's communications and training platforms. The research further demonstrates that organisations most likely to partner or join networks are those that focus on women's empowerment, whereas youth or charitable-focused organisations are more likely to rely on local community actors as opposed to dispersed networks.

Community Partnerships are thriving

As volunteerism is thriving, local councils and the business community are similarly demonstrating a commitment to social and economic development. Partnerships for development are filling the governance void caused by the current political crisis. In Libya, religious associations have always played a part in charitable giving. While central governments struggle with addressing local concerns and issues, community-based partnerships are critically stepping in to provide material and moral support to charitable, humanitarian, and community-based programmes.

Partnerships with local councils and private businesses give community-based organisations both authority and sanction to implement programmes. Influential community and business members lend importance to discussions and

initiatives, while local councils provide official-dom, albeit at the very local level, sharing and spreading risk across a broad spectrum. Additionally, these partnerships bring an informed diversity of experience and influence that help shape discourse in community-acceptable ways.

The research demonstrates that most respondents view local councils as important partners in community development. Though councils lack significant formal authority, they do enjoy the confidence and support of citizens. Most organisations, which have dealt with local government, report positive experiences as local councils often facilitate initiatives through provision of venues and other material resources.

Branch-level of ministries are stepping up

While most of those interviewed believe the national government has become dysfunctional because of the political crises, many acknowledge branch offices of ministries are engaged in community development. Not surprisingly, and particularly in rural and remote regions, branch-level workers are also community members—often influential—who themselves volunteer or are active in local development initiatives. Often, resources that support community-based initiatives accompany the engagement of branch-level ministry officials; venues, access to materials, and expertise to inform programmes.

"COMMUNICATION IS EXCELLENT WITH THE PEOPLE, MUNICIPALITIES, AND SUPPORTERS. THERE IS MUTUAL TRUST BETWEEN THE ORGANISATION AND THOSE GROUPS."

–Female, CSO member, western Libya.

OPPORTUNITIES

Collaboration and partnerships among CSOs and with influential members of the community enable deeper and wider programme impact.

Familial and tribal affiliations provide levels of communal security, particularly during times of state collapse and the absence of rule of law.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CSOS

Communities can be small and tight-knit. Support of tribal leadership or family members for programmatic initiatives is dependent on their perspective of acceptability. Advocacy initiatives that touch on the actions of either would unlikely win support if they contradict family priorities or tribal norms.

International Community, appreciated but not fully understood

The research suggests that most Libyans do not understand the motivations and mechanisms for international support to their country. Many interviewed for this research point out that armed or political groups cast suspicion on Libyans who work with international community support. To some degree, this suspicion has roots in Gaddafi-inspired psychological conditioning of Libyans to view all foreigners as spies in part, because of perceived interference in domestic politics by various nation states.

Several respondents suggest that armed groups, who benefit from the current absence of state law, paint CSOs as colluding with foreign agents to discredit any possible criticism. Finally, some measure of misunderstanding is due to the absence of the international community in Libya, preventing them from conducting public diplomacy and bridging understanding.

Clearly, a majority of community-based organisations value their working relationships with the international community and appreciate the support provided. Many organisations, located in the far South or other rural or remote areas, feel the international assistance community is inaccessible, with support provided almost exclusively to major urban centres.

Very few of the organisations interviewed for this research appreciate the complexities of international assistance, priority setting, and decision making. Several feel that actual community needs do not inform some international assistance, and donors merely seek to check procedural boxes. Also, a few still express concern with the sustainability of programmes implemented in communities; concern that when a programme is over, the 'internationals' leave and there is no follow-up.

Many CSOs offered recommendations for the international community related to cooperation and support.

CSO recommendations for the international community related to cooperation and support

- Pay attention to remote and rural areas. Women in remote communities face greater insecurity brought on by tribal conflicts as well as infrastructure deficiencies.
- Increase support to organisations working in the healthcare sector.
- Focus support on young people and invest in cultural exchanges.
- Support the sustainability of projects implemented by CSOs. The international community should track and follow-up with women or organisations after providing them with training in order to help them achieve the goals they seek.
- Support building the capacities of civil society organisations and, in addition to financial support, provide expertise.
- Increase trainings inside Libya to reach women who are unable to travel.
- Expand the scope of work to include marginalised groups.
- Appreciate that international priorities are not always the same as local priorities.
- Support projects that are built on understanding real needs of Libyan women and the challenges they face to avoid "parachute projects" (unsustainable projects) that have been implemented in other countries and simply imported to Libya.
- Broaden the selection process of organisations and institutions focusing on women's issues. Target women who need development programmes, and not the same activists who are always invited to participate in events and activities.
- Work with people who have experience and influence to effect change.

OPPORTUNITIES

The extent of goodwill to the international community is reasonably significant, though the motivation and mechanics of assistance are not well-understood. There is substantial opportunity for outreach and public diplomacy. The international donors and diplomatic missions should engage communities in deliberate discussions about support and assistance based on respect for customs, traditions, and actual community need.

Support of local councils and the business community is essential in delivering programmes touching on potentially sensitive topics related to, for example, gender-based violence and health-related impacts.

Beyond the current political crises, businesses and local councils may become disengaged.

However, community groups have the opportunity to recognise and regularise the partnership approach with influential community members and institutions.

Overall, these local collaborations are effective in identifying required skills and available resources as well as responding to citizens' needs. Local collaborative development models should endure beyond the current crisis and inspire national community development; local priority-setting by community members, and addressed through citizen support. Decades of centralised decision making have neglected citizens in community priority-setting. The crises of the past few years and possible devolution of power, however, have the potential of allowing for more community-based development.

IMPLICATION FOR CSOS

Community initiatives filling the void created by governance in crisis should not become the expectation. National institutions will need to engage communities in establishing priorities and be responsive to local needs, or they will continue to flounder in public opinion. Additionally, they should recognise the critical role branch-level employees have played during the crises of recent years.

As future legislation devolves increased authority to local councils, they may distance themselves from community-based groups, feeling they do not need assistance in delivering programmes they become authorised to implement.

Malicious or misinformed forces will be critical of Libyans engaging with the international community, potentially endangering those that do.

PROGRAMMATIC PRIORITIES

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

The current state of Libya's economy is dire; inflation, scarcity, and a liquidity crisis are building pressures within families and particularly among vulnerable communities. Liquidity issues and the inability to access regular banking services have, as many respondents point out, created the opportunity for people to engage in private market, cash businesses. Beyond this, the effects of the liquidity crisis have diverted the attention of charitable givers, and volunteers who are coping with daily challenges.

Increasingly, with wages unpaid or inaccessible, public sector workers are engaged in cash businesses. The urgency of the economic crisis has opened space for women to participate in the economy taking non-traditional employment or becoming entrepreneurs. In response to the shifting reality, many organisations are now focusing programmatic activities on the economic empowerment of women, equipping them with the skills to start, manage, and profit from small and medium businesses. However, as several community members and CSO representatives point out, economic empowerment does not mean financial independence as long as families claim the industry of women, or institutional bias prevents them from claiming true ownership.

Economic empowerment as a pathway

The research demonstrates that most interviewees believe empowerment programmes aimed at entrepreneurship are acceptable activities for women. Many enter into businesses considered to be in "women-focused" sectors; beauty services and products, catering and food services, crafts, as well as garment production and retail. While most interviewed for this research believe women will struggle to achieve high positions within the mostly male-dominated sovereign institutions, the private sector is more open to their entrepreneurial talents.

Many organisations are providing programmes designed to provide entrepreneurial training to broad audiences. Some are making use of internet platforms to reach rural and remote communities of Libyans.

Most respondents in this study believe that economic empowerment is also a pathway to political empowerment. Women who engage in economic activities gain experience and demonstrate capacity and competence they can transfer to the governmental and political sector. Additionally, the increased political and social power of businesswomen will enable them to exercise influence over policy.

Although economic participation by women is considered more acceptable than other activities in society, women still face significant challenges emanating from social as well as religious attitudes. Aside from the conservative view of women's place in the home (something most interviewees cite as a prominent attitude), as one

community member from Tripoli points out, women are sometimes confronted by bureaucrats with ultra-conservative perspectives who refuse to register businesses in their name. To avoid harassment or further difficulties they end up registering through a male member of the family and, or under the family name.

Crisis creates entrepreneurial opportunities

While women were previously active in the labour force, they were most often limited to the fields of education and healthcare. Following the revolution, new educational opportunities emerged as well as greater exposure to the internet and all the possibilities it offered. Additionally, mass media, with global content, are exposing Libyans to new and compelling economic prospects. Most recently, and not insignificantly, the ongoing economic crisis in Libya has propelled people toward private enterprise affording women, in particular, new opportunities.

Because of the liquidity and banking crisis, more women are starting cash friendly businesses; selling products online, from their homes, or through storefronts. Anecdotally, respondents told researchers that restaurants are increasingly employing female staff, something that was not common in the past. While the private sector was slowly opening more space for Libyans, particularly in the aftermath of the revolution, the economic crisis of the past several years has accelerated entry into the private sector and provides women, in particular, with new economic opportunities.

"THE OPPORTUNITY IS PURELY ECONOMIC. THE ECONOMIC SUPPORT FOR WOMEN IS THE KEY THAT CAN BE RELIED ON CURRENTLY. WOMEN MUST BE PROVIDED WITH TECHNICAL EMPOWERMENT (TRAINING, AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS) THAT INCREASES THEIR CHANCES OF SUCCESS, ESPECIALLY IF THEY ARE ENTREPRENEURS/PROJECT OWNERS."

—Female, CSO leader, western Libya.

OPPORTUNITIES

The private sector, under Gaddafi, was woefully underdeveloped. Since the revolution, however, people are increasingly abandoning the public sector or supplementing their incomes through private sector business. Libyans are innately entrepreneurial and can develop a thriving private sector. Support to private sector business development through public policy, governmental incentives, and entrepreneurial skills training would accelerate this potential sector of the economy significantly.

Advocacy promoting the economic rights of women and entrepreneurs, in general, must accompany strategies developing the private sector business environment. Additionally, women should support women in mentoring candidates to assume progressively more senior positions within the public sector, in which there is a dearth of women at senior levels.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CSOS

Enforcement of economic rights should accompany economic empowerment. Denying women the right to register businesses in their own name limits the ability of divorced or widowed women to be full participants in economic life. Being denied economic opportunity has a detrimental impact on single, divorced or widowed women and prevents them from achieving economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their children.

As women enter non-traditional workplaces or enter the labour force, workplace policies will need to be assured. Issues related to maternity leave, discrimination, and harassment will need attention and study.

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

Organisations that promote the political empowerment of Libyan women do so in a variety of ways. Very few CSOs target the direct participation in political processes and institutions, some attempt to increase leadership capacity and involvement in local governance, while others focus on the constitutional and human rights of women as a way to further their participation in political and public life. A few organisations seek multiple entry points to empower women politically. A majority of CSOs, however, tread cautiously on the path of politics. Many organisations are reluctant to become engaged in political activities when shifting alliances mean that picking the wrong side can damage their (and their families') standing in the community.

The bridge between activism and politics has yet to be built

The lack of political blocs or parties that empower and advocate for women further discourages women activists from making the leap from civic engagement to politics. In many societies, political parties provide women with the space to develop skills and capacity to participate in and contribute to public life. Without strong, formal political institutions, many women are unaware of their political rights or feel they lack the capacity to engage in politics. The absence of strong political parties in Libya denies women an important vehicle for political engagement.

The absence of formal political institutions is keenly felt in the south where tribes and militias control local institutions and govern according to their own rules and traditions and not the, albeit weak, legal norms of the state. Community members and influencers from the south have especially negative opinions of women political activists–particularly elected representatives. One member of the community noted: "The elections of the national assembly were manipulated where women were not given serious political roles, but they were used as just numbers in accordance with the law of elections. This led women to lose confidence in other women." (Female, community member, southern Libya) These common unfavourable depictions of female elected officials has created a trust deficit between civil society activists and women politicians who often fail to support each other in promoting women's political participation and empowerment.

Influencers and members of the community recognise that when women civil society activists and politicians work together, they can achieve consequential change to empower women. As noted by one community member from the

"SOMETIMES IN SOME AREAS WOMEN HAVE THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN POLITICS BUT BECAUSE OF SOCIAL CUSTOM AND TRADITION THEY ARE SUPPRESSED."

—Male, CSO member, western Libya.

"WOMEN FEAR PARTICIPATING IN POLITICS AS IT MIGHT JEOPARDISE THEIR SAFETY."

—Female, CSO leader, western Libya.

south, "Amendments and suggestions were included in the constitution due to pressures exerted by some women's campaigns. Some civil society organisations, had an influential role in raising this issue and bringing women around it then transferring their demands to officials." (Female, influencer, southern Libya)

Despite the lack of national, public role models, many women CSO activists are energetically engaged in local, "small p" politics. A few activists, interviewed for the research, suggested their participation in community work has provided them with the confidence and skills to pursue more formal political engagement.

Women are engaged in conflict resolution

Women are largely absent from national level conflict resolution processes in Libya. They are, however, making inroads in local mediation and reconciliation efforts. Several activists are already engaged in local reconciliation and mediation committees; work that influencers and members of the community recognise as valuable contributions. For example, one influencer stated women are "part of the pyramid that consist of young men and the councils of wise, as their role is important in the peace process." (Male, community member, southern Libya)

"THESE LEADING WOMEN ARE HESITANT, AND POLITICISED BEHIND AN AGENDA SET BY SOME POLITICAL BODIES. THIS IS DUE TO THE ABSENCE OF A POLITICAL LAW REGULATING THE WORK OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN LIBYA."

—Female, influencer, southern Libya.

OPPORTUNITIES

The research reveals many Libyan women do not know their political rights, despite Libya being a signatory (with reservations) to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and national legislation giving women equal rights in public life. CEDAW, other international norms and conventions as well as national legislation are powerful tools in promoting the participation of women and protecting their freedoms. They can be used to educate and pressure for implementation of existing rights. Activists can use both the CEDAW Convention and the national Libyan laws as the framework in designing and implementing projects on the rights of women in the public domain.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CSOS

Currently, Libyan politics are toxic and hostile to anyone wishing to make meaningful contributions. Most CSOs deliberately steer clear of becoming involved in politics or the direct political empowerment of women. Not only is the absence of reasonable voices and solutions a hindrance to progress, disengagement risks missing the window of opportunity to shape and influence the path of democracy when Libya stabilises.

CONCLUSION

Civil society organisations currently delivering programmes in Libya are heroic in their efforts and are taking daily risks given the unpredictability of the security situation. They are, in large measure, implementing programmes and developing their communities with few resources and many impediments. They are the true pioneers of Libya, and as such deserve support not just from the international community, but also from one another. While the leadership of many of the organisations interviewed are honest about some of their shortcomings, they also need to collaborate more among themselves to exchange experience, knowledge, and provide protective support when needed. Many have accepted that they need deeper experience and greater capacity.

What is critically important is how CSOs approach projects; they need to focus more attention on impactful programme design. Workshops alone are not going to improve the status of women, awareness is meaningless without an identifiable objective of action or change, and trainings are insignificant if there is no opportunity to apply knowledge gained.

Success takes many different shapes. There is not one model for a successful CSO in Libya and many organisations are bravely challenging the status quo to improve the lives of their fellow citizens. There are many ingredients to efficacious programmes, but thriving CSOs share common traits—they are passionately patriotic and want to be involved in shaping the development and future of Libya; they are fearless in their commitment. They are boundless in their energy and press on despite all the barriers in their way. Their imagination and application of talent is often ingenious and whether they can articulate it or not, they know what they want and what is needed for Libya.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WOMEN'S ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Cultivate future political leaders by identifying and training activists and community members who enjoy influence and can be recruited to run for political office at all levels; national and local. Preparing women for political engagement now will equip them for robust participation when the Libyan political process becomes less toxic and hostile.

Conduct public accountability dialogues and political process monitoring. Many citizens are often unaware of initiatives being considered by legislative or government bodies. CSOs can provide fora and space for debating public policies and disseminating information about issues and initiatives before parliament or local government that affect the interests of different groups, especially women and children. Process monitoring mechanisms allow for periodic reporting and holding political actors accountable for their conduct.

Build capacity for effective communication skills and techniques, using methods of direct and indirect communication to practice speaking to one another about women in politics and sharing success stories. CSOs can organise cyber-gatherings (connecting through Facebook & Viber groups) in regions where on the ground gatherings are difficult.

Demystify issue identification and policy development processes. Women who lack experience in public and political life often believe they are unable to compete because they do not have the requisite knowledge on "weighty" policy issues such as the economy and budgeting or defence and security. CSOs, particularly those that engage in research, advocacy, or government monitoring can help political aspirants understand complex policy issues.

Organise dialogues and debates for marginalised groups or candidates. Organisers of public or televised debates tend only to invite high profile or senior male political leaders from the community to participate in events. CSOs can provide spaces for women, influencers, and other marginalised groups to have their voices heard and represent their interests.

Develop a network and database of women role models. Very often political organisations claim women are not qualified or have no interest in participating in political and public life. Establishing a network of women and maintaining information on their capacities, areas of interest, willingness to be called upon to participate in various fora, will allow CSOs and political activists to rapidly identify women to participate in public events so they can be promoted as candidates for public or elected office.

WOMEN IN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Build capacity on negotiations and conflict resolution to promote the skills of Libyan women, some of whom are already engaged in reconciliation initiatives in their communities, and to enable the participants to engage in mediation to resolve conflict in their regions. Women can share experiences and discuss conflict resolutions practices. Expand participation to include women in government and elected positions, for whom negotiation skills are useful.

Engage religious leaders (as influencers) in dialogue with women to exchange experiences and educate leaders about the impact of conflict on women and their potential role in reconciliation.

CSOs should continue to build confidence and encourage participation of women in dialogue, peace efforts, and conflict prevention at the local level in reconciliation processes. Women can influence people around them, their families, their communities, and their tribes. Social media can also be used to share information that could be useful for activities on reconciliation between tribes.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Provide practical guidance on entrepreneurial and fundamental business development skills. CSOs can provide information and instruction on issues such as entrepreneurship, small business management, leadership, administration, accounting, and marketing. Some women also need training in skills that can be used to find jobs, in female-friendly sectors, such as English language, computer skills, home-based jobs, handicrafts, and beautician skills.

Provide more advanced support to women who have established women-owned or women-managed businesses to enhance their networks and develop market linkages. Advanced trainings can also include developing web-enabled, social media-based, and SMS technologies, e-marketing, sustainable business, financial programmes, and tools for increased access to financial services and markets.

Create and support mentorship programmes for women entrepreneurs. Women, who have already established businesses, can mentor beginners by sharing experiences and providing ongoing practical help and information to navigate the banking system, understand issues such as the demand and supply of goods, and foreign currency. When the security environment improves, CSOs should consider publically celebrating the success of women in business.

Advocate to national and international agencies to develop microfinance opportunities for women entrepreneurs.

LEGAL LITERACY, AID, AND REFORM

Design activities to protect and promote existing rights of Libyan women. CSOs can advocate for increased equality under the law and proper application of international agreements and conventions, which Libya has ratified such as the CEDAW Convention.

Develop legal literacy education activities. Legal aid and literacy can be delivered via workshops, telephone helplines, medical/legal partnerships, online information and chat tools, and downloadable court forms. Such activities and education help people understand their rights and responsibilities, when legal assistance may be needed and where to find it.

Advocate for legal reform in Libya to redress gender discrimination in laws. CSOs can conduct studies and use existing knowledge and information to develop proposals for legal reform. The research shows that several CSOs know that women have asked for reform in the citizenship law, family law, and laws on gender-based violence. CSOs are well placed to organise advocacy campaigns to inform policy makers and legislators on needs and solutions. Expand and strengthen legal assistance to women with special needs. When designing legal assistance programmes, CSOs should particularly target women with disabilities, women prisoners, displaced women, and women married to non-Libyans.

WOMEN'S SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Establish hotlines for women and men at risk of violence. Hotlines can provide victims of violence the ability to speak to volunteer professionals who can advise and direct victims to support services. CSOs should also provide victim support services to men who encounter sexual violence such as rape in prison.

Monitor and document cases of gender-based violence. CSOs can provide authorities with information on all forms of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, abductions, and harassment. Pressure should be brought to bear on government and the justice system to also document gender-based violence to ensure

that perpetrators of gender-based violence are punished.

Establish shelters and centres for victims of violence. Volunteer medical professionals can provide services to women to heal physically and psychologically, as well as provide counselling for families to break the culture of blaming victims.

Expand programmes that address women's health, including reproductive rights, protection of people living with HIV/AIDs as entry points to address other issues, such as gender-based violence.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Cover: Women group working. Shutterstock.com. https://goo.gl/M2sou4.

Activism in Libya: Libyan women wave their new national flag, by PHILIPPE DESMAZES/AFP/Getty Images

Status of Women: A women casting her vote in the elections of Constitutional Drafting Assembly of Libya. Website of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). https://goo.gl/Fdcaxj.

Security: Libyan rebels travel to a battle line where they will fight Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's army. Ajdabiya, Libya, April 7, 2011. Shutterstock.com, https://goo.gl/fKgqYH.

Collaboration & Partnerships: A young art student paints a pro-democracy mural, by LEON NEAL/AFP/Getty Images.

Programmatic Priorities: Tripoli. Libya. 10/10/2016. A street view from the Libyan capital from the time of the rule Gaddafi. Shutterstock.com. https://goo.gl/EiGjZN

Conclusion: Ghadames, ancient Berber city, Libya, UNESCO world heritage site. The pearl of the desert. Shutterstock.com. https://goo.gl/Egdh7M.

Recommendations: Restoring family links, Libya, by International Committee of the Red cross. https://flic.kr/p/e2pGJU. Used with a CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 licence.

This research concentrates on women-focused civil society organisations and activities, however many of the findings and analyses are relevant to the broader community supporting development and civic engagement, demonstrating an unwavering commitment of Libyans to repair their fragile society. Community-based training, charitable and humanitarian works, and advocacy initiatives are being carried out in every corner of the country by dedicated organisations and activists. CSOs implement activities with the support and partnership of volunteers, local governments, private businesses, and the international community.