



**Background Note  
Briefing to the Executive Board  
First Regular Session 2016**

**“Operational Response at Country Level: Egypt”**

**Summary:** Briefing on UN Women’s operational response in Egypt may be of interest to the Board, not only because of its scale (being the second largest country-level operation of UN Women globally after Afghanistan), but also for the scope and complexity of its work, supporting Egypt take key steps in promoting women’s empowerment at a critical juncture of its history, as well as the impact we have achieved. UN Women’s engagement in Egypt today is a story of exciting partnership with the Government, as well as with the wider society, where the women’s empowerment agenda is to be placed firmly at the center of the national priority to attain inclusive growth and social justice. It also provides a recent and relevant example of how implementation challenges in field operations can be tackled and be taken as an opportunity to enhance UN Women’s unique role as a convener and doer on the ground. The presentation will be structured to (i) share key contents of UN Women’s country level operational response in Egypt, (ii) explain the new approaches and methods used to maximize UN Women’s relevance and contribution in a country context, and (iii) highlight the upcoming opportunities for support to women’s empowerment in Egypt.

**UN Women’s country level operational response in Egypt**

In the years following the 2011 revolution, UN Women has been steadily attracting new partners and donor funding for Egypt. But it faced a challenge in establishing a functioning Country Office (CO) able to maximize its contribution to gender equality and women’s empowerment, especially amidst instability in the initial years following the revolution and uprising. A period of consolidation and strategic reorientation of the programme portfolio in 2015 has led to expansion of partnerships and donor relations, and greatly boosted implementation capacity.

UN Women’s programmatic implementation in Egypt today focuses on bringing about concrete change in the following three key impact areas. The activities and results are designed to correspond to the resulting changes pursued by the relevant corporate Flagship Programmes articulated in 2015.

**1. Ending Violence Against Women**

One key focus area of UN Women’s work in Egypt is Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW), as it was the public rejection of VAW strongly expressed in the years following the revolution that brought UN Women to center stage of national debate. Priority attention is given to supporting Government authorities and their CSO partners to implement the National Strategy on Ending Violence against Women (adopted in 2015), also to further

strengthen legislative framework and increase capacity for actual adjudication. Integrated and seamless services for support to victims and prevention based on better coordination is being strongly advocated.

Assistance provided to three impoverished informal settlements in Greater Cairo, originally based on the Safe Cities approach, have brought us closer to the communities where VAW takes place. Whole of community engagement to awareness raising, some modest infrastructure improvement and newly set up women's shelters are changing the lives of many women in these neighborhoods. Innovative partnership of embedding the national women's machinery's legal experts in the community outreach unit brought important linkages between policy and implementation of the VAW strategy. We will now enter a new phase of transforming urban areas, expanding also into the governorates beyond Cairo and pursuing a comprehensive victim-centered approach with the significant additional funding mobilized in 2015.

Strong connection will be made in implementing EVAW assistance at the legislative level with the wider assistance to increase women's access to justice. Encouraging signals in the Ministry of Justice were seen in 2015, with the appointment of 26 female judges as well as the first-ever female Assistant Minister of Justice, and the Justice Minister's announcement during the 16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women to establish new expedited procedures to deal with cases of VAW. These provide excellent openings to advance women's legal rights and to strengthening the role of the judiciary and law enforcement in advancing women's rights. This will be done through holistically connecting UN Women's assistance provided under all thematic areas, bringing concrete changes by removing obstacles and also raising policy relevance of UN Women in the country.

## **2. Women's Political Participation and Leadership**

Women played a significant role in the revolutionary change of regimes and in shaping the political realities in Egypt today. It is important to build on this momentum to ensure women's political participation and leadership positions are secured. UN Women provides various types of support to realize these objectives. First, through on-ground assistance at the governorates-level to raise women's awareness and actual access to citizenship rights, including through the provision of civil registration and ID cards to 500,000+ women across Egypt.

Furthermore, with the announcement of the long-awaited parliamentary election that took place during October-December 2015, UN Women provided assistance to female candidates, raised awareness on election to female voters, monitored polling stations to conduct exit surveys, and provided immediate capacity building and networking opportunities to the elected female parliamentarians during November and December 2015 before the convening of the Parliament. With the Parliament in place since 10 January 2016, completing the third and final stage of political transition, Egypt entered 2016 with new hopes with the first post-2013 Parliament with record number of female parliamentarians. This provides an opportunity for priority support, not only for legislative progress but to promote greater accountability for the national and international commitments on gender equality. Focused support to develop and implement gender responsive legislations and policies, such as government procurement may be discussed in 2016 with the new parliamentarians.

### **3. Women's Economic Empowerment**

Another important variable in bringing about transformational change for women and girls in Egypt is to ensure their economic empowerment. This is also a key area that requires much greater attention. In addition to the assistance provided to the poorest of the poor women through livelihood assistance, priority will be given to increase employment opportunities for women and to create an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs through better access to financial and non-financial services. This will be done, for instance by building on successful community-level assistance models by bringing in partners from banking and telecommunications sector.

The partnership base needs to be expanded with the private sector to have women's empowerment considerations reflected in business decisions, encouraging concrete actions affecting their full supply chain. Furthermore, in order to create a policy dialogue about the role of women as a key agent of economic and societal advancement, roundtable events will be held, bringing together a cross-section of policy-makers and opinion-leaders. It will build on the findings of UN Women's flagship knowledge product *Progress of World's Women Report: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights* (published in April 2015) as well as international experiences, resulting in identification of concrete measures that are required in Egypt that could guide national counterparts and UN Women's programmatic response for the coming years.

#### **Partnership**

UN Women's programmatic activities in the above areas capitalize on our role as broker of strong partnerships. At one level, UN Women in Egypt provides an important bridge between civil society and government institutions engaged with women's rights issues, creating a framework for their concrete partnership. At another level, intensive efforts are being made to expand partnership with actors that are not necessarily advocates of women's rights per se, but with great influence on the lives of women and girls. Reframing the challenge and opportunities, we are broadening the support base for action to bring transformational change. Special focus is made to mobilize youth and media throughout our programme.

Such tangible partnership on the ground is made possible by a wider international partnership through generous contribution from donors to our work in Egypt: Belgium, Japan, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, USA and the European Commission.

Special appreciation is expressed to USAID and Japan who have contributed significant new resources, enabling scale up of EAW work in 2016 and beyond (USAID), and in expanding our operational response to support much needed work in the area of education (Japan) matching government priority and needs identified on the ground. Additional support is being sought to continue and expand our critical work in political and economic participation. As we hope to highlight through the presentation, UN Women's operational response in Egypt will not only bring direct improvements to the lives of women and girls in Egypt but also help shape a just and prosperous future of this vibrant country.