

(Extracted from WEMC Final report pages 43-45)

6. Long-term Sustainability of the Research

The integration of WEMC's work into existing programmes of partners and collaborating groups through capacity-building in research as well as advocacy helps to ensure continued influence of WEMC concepts, findings and analyses to date. The fact that WEMC research findings and outputs are being used by a diverse set of government authorities in every component ensures sustained impact in official circles. Possibly, most importantly, the 27 new groups catalysed by WEMC and the reorientation of numerous other civil society groups and initiatives ensure a sustainable impact well beyond the RPC Key Partners.

6.1. Promoting WEMC research products after programme funding ends

WEMC Key Partners and their local associated partners have been promoting diverse products in various languages and will continue to do so. The WEMC website will be maintained and managed by Shirkat Gah – Women's Resource Centre that served as the Deputy/Acting Director's base and Secretariat. A number of WEMC products, papers, policy briefs, video documentaries and webcasts as well as draft papers are already uploaded; others will be made available as analyses and writing based on WEMC's ethnographic data continues through other funding.

The internet provides vitally important platforms for dissemination; this includes YouTube and the WLUML English and Farsi websites (The WLUML website receives around 500,000 hits per month). In Iran, WLUML will continue to publish WEMC research as e-publications on its Farsi webpage. The website of *Towards Alternative Family Law* (<http://fairfamilylaw.net>) will continue to carry WEMC-WLUML materials. See for example, journal articles, books, and films uploaded to the internet, in particular, www.jensedigar.com, www.youtube.com/user/jensedigar, www.farsidari-wluml.org. The site www.jensedigar.com website will continue to be used in advocacy work beyond WEMC, as a platform for distributing advocacy videos and publications, and for networking. Some eight WEMC articles under finalisation will be published in the newly launched WLUML Farsi journal "WLUML Journal of Feminist Studies".

6.2. Follow-on research programmes building on WEMC outputs

Note: Research partners, increasingly aware of the value of the work accomplished in past years, and the effectiveness of the generic research framework, realised the need to capture the subtleties and meanings of the thinking, knowledge and action catalysed in the field. They were looking forward to having the time, space and opportunity to undertake a more thorough and deeper reflection on their experiences in the various sites and specific contexts, exactly in the last (unfortunately abruptly aborted) year (2010-2011) of the WEMC programme. The rigorous exercise of reflexivity would have resulted in valuable insight into the qualitative 'indicators of empowerment' - the processes, influencing factors and conditions for sustainability of the newly initiated collectives and strategies has been left incomplete.

WEMC Partners have planned a number of initiatives and are exploring others for continuing to analyse the extremely rich ethnographic data collected for lessons beyond national and component contexts.

Findings suggested that control over women's sexuality is a critical control mechanism at the centre of cultural notions and practices that keep women disempowered and disconnected from resources and opportunities for change. To further explore the issues of sexuality – an essential but usually overlooked subject in the context of women's empowerment – funding has been secured for analytical writing that will be published as an edited book.

The limited timeframe of four years given for in-depth work on women's empowerment is actually very short to ensure sustainability of this kind of research. Nevertheless, in Pakistan, women's empowerment is now one of the themes of the Community Health Sciences Department (CHS) at AKU and will be presented to the AKU Board of Trustees meeting. Research on women's empowerment issues will be undertaken by CHS faculty and affiliated staff. Students have expressed interest but engagement cannot be guaranteed. An

international student from the Emory University wants to focus on women's empowerment in relation to reproductive health issues using AKU-WEMC's field findings for her master's thesis. Empowerment was adopted as a central plank for Shirkat Gah's work and WEMC research methods fed into its research programmes on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Research on sexuality continues under separate funding, the outcome of which will be an edited volume, *Intersection of Women's Empowerment and Sexual and bodily rights in Muslim Asia and the Middle-East*.

An important component of WEMC work in China is to lay foundations for fighting poverty. The impact is expected to work itself slowly into the system, the signs of which are promising: after the successful embroidery project exhibition conversations with Cultural Museum (Lanzhou/Gansu) officials and representatives from the local women's federation branches, have discussed possible income generation cooperatives for economically-challenged, home-bound Dongxiang Muslim women. Funding applications to small donors have been prepared to inject required resources for such plans to take off. Research findings from WEMC investigation in China are being shared with interested publics abroad through e.g. five publishable articles recently submitted for peer-review for inclusion in *Geografia – Malaysian Journal of Society and Space* (an academic journal).

In Indonesia, SP aims to build up an advocacy network of women activists and women's organisations from the village level to the international level by synergising of efforts at macro and meso levels. Towards this, SP has started building alliances with community women, women village officials, and women activists to formulate shared strategies for advocacy, based on WEMC findings and experiences.

In Iran, WLUML will complete research analyses to publish findings as e-publications on its Farsi webpage. The website of *Towards Alternative Family Law* will use WEMC materials to prepare an alternative family law with the help of experts and further consultation with various women's groups across the country, since gender equitable legal reforms in the family is the most widespread demand of women in Iran.

More broadly, WEMC researchers are exploring how findings can contribute to various UN initiatives such as the UNDP's governance and citizenship development plank and revision of the indicators for its Human Development Indices as well as UNPFA's 'cultural negotiation' initiatives across the globe. Researchers are interested in exploring how to contribute to the new discourse at the UN on 'development with culture' which has much resonance with WEMC findings across sites, life domains and contexts. Such contributions would require additional cross-comparative analysis of existing data and policy change experiences to cull and refine important lessons that can contribute to the regional and international processes in three major areas:

1. Of particular relevance in the present context are contested constructions of social identities, (including Muslim-ness), how women position themselves when negotiating which rights in which circumstances, i.e. as members of their ethnic, religious, or professional identities, for example, or as citizens demanding states to fulfill their roles as opportunity-provider and guarantor of rights and non-discrimination.
2. Women's own notions of power and empowerment and their successful indigenous strategies need to be reviewed to surface key learning that can guide effective policy formulation and implementation.
3. The implications of the above two for citizenship and governance.

One proposed follow-up activity is to collate findings on the above listed issues in two edited volumes to anchor evidence-based recommendations for changes in policy and planning.

Separately, the transformative research adopted by WEMC vividly illustrates the value of research for evidence-based engagement with policy-makers, implementers and development practitioners to introduce measures supportive of women's empowerment. To facilitate replication, further documentation and sharing of the transformative research approach adopted by WEMC as recommended by the reviewers in the Midterm Review, would be invaluable.

Other activities include an IGS contribution to a DFID tender for RPC investigation impact of *'fragile states'* (submitted by Oxford and Harvard) – IGS was invited because of interest in the WEMC notion of 'indigenous knowledge' as contributing to new knowledge and providing a gender perspective; the Economic and Social Science Research Council's (UK) research application on *the role of translation in development knowledge*; and *Reflexivity and women's voices* – constructing multi-voice narratives, with the participation of WEMC Partners (application to Misereor funding organisation).