



Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts

gender, poverty and democratisation from the inside out

Final Report

1 July 2006 – 30 June 2010



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Women's empowerment in Muslim Contexts: gender poverty and democratisation from the inside out

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1. Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts: gender, poverty and democratisation from the inside out (WEMC)

Title of research programme	Women's empowerment in Muslim contexts: gender, poverty and democratisation from the inside out (WEMC)	
Reference no.	Contract no. R8518	
Period covered	1 July 2006 - 30 June 2010	
Name of lead institution	Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC), City University of Hong Kong	
Director:	Dr. Vivienne Wee (1 July 2006-May 10, 2009) Farida Shaheed, (Deputy Director confirmed Acting Director w.e.f. June 2009)	
Key Partners¹	Associate Partners	
1. SEARC [<i>Lead Institution</i>]	Fatayat Nadlatul Ulama	
2. Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre (SG), Pakistan	SG's WESJP ²	
3. Department of Community Health Sciences, Aga Khan University (AKU), Pakistan	Other departments in AKU	
4. Centre for Environment, Gender and Development (ENGENDER), Hong Kong ³	ATKI, APMM, MFMW, INDIES ⁴	
5. International Gender Studies Centre (IGS), Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford University, UK	Henan Academy of Social Sciences, Lanzhou University, Gansu Academy of Social Sciences	
6. Semarak Cerlang Nusa Consultancy, Research and Education for Social Transformation (SCN-CREST), Indonesia	KPI, LSPPA, Rahima ⁵	
7. Solidaritas Perempuan (SP), Indonesia	Dian Mutiara, SBMC ⁶	
8. Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), Regional Coordination Office – Asia/Concordia University		
Countries covered by research	1. Nodal countries: China, Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan 2. Cross-border component: (i) Indonesian migrant workers in Indonesia, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan; (ii) Afghan refugees in Iran and returnees in Afghanistan	
	Planned	Actual
Start date	1 July 2006	1 July 2006
End date	30 June 2011	30 June 2010
Total amount	3.75 million pounds	2.95 million pounds

Partners are referred to by the acronyms above. Where it is necessary to differentiate the WEMC component from the main, non-WEMC, organisation, they are referred to as WEMC-SEARC, WEMC-SG, WEMC-AKU, etc.



¹ For more information, see <<http://www.cityu.edu.hk/searc>>

² Women's Empowerment & Social Justice Programme

³ ENGENDER left the WEMC RPC on 1 Oct 2009.

⁴ Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia, Asia Pacific Mission for Migrant Workers, Mission for Migrant Workers Society, Institute for National and Democracy Studies

⁵ Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia, Lembaga Studi dan Pengembangan Perempuan dan Anak

⁶ Solidaritas Buruh Migran Cianjur

'I didn't think I have power, but now I know that it is possible to become powerful.'

Indonesian woman research participant
WEMC – SCN

2. Summary

Despite early closure (30 June 2010), the Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts RPC (WEMC), launched on 1 July 2006 to conduct research in Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran and China as well as on Indonesian migrant women workers and Afghan refugees, **exceeded all quantified OVIs and more than met all others to attain its purpose in nodal countries of research viz:**

A sustained, growing critical mass of civil society expertise engaged in policy debates for long-term changes in policies and practices that promote women's empowerment in Muslim contexts.

Anchored in a research methodology combining research, capacity building and communication and designed to be transformative, WEMC has:

1. Built analytical capacity and strategic alliances bolstering both research and transformative actions.
2. Documented, multiplied and (provisionally) analysed women's successful empowerment initiatives.
3. Made visible, validated and strengthened women's agency as insiders⁷ challenging disempowering structures and promoting democratisation.
4. Pinpointed ways whereby good governance, democratisation, and appropriate development can strengthen and support women's agency at the meso and national levels.

Policy focus

The Asia-based RPC focused on UNESCAP (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) as the pivotal regional policy forum for influencing the global agenda, but insights feed into UN and international development and rights agendas beyond UNESCAP's Gender Equality and Empowerment Section that is based on the Beijing Platform for Action, the UN CEDAW convention and the Millennium Development Goals. WEMC findings are of immediate relevance to the UNDP development plank of governance and citizenship, UNFPA's 'cultural negotiations'⁸ and UNESCAP's focus on non-nationals and migrant women workers. A WEMC policy brief helped UNESCAP prepare for the High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting (Nov 2009); a panel presentation is cited in the outcome document for the UN Secretary General's UNiTe campaign.

WEMC has influenced a number of specific national policies and service delivery in concrete measurable ways: health policies/systems (esp. Iran), legal provisions/entitlements in all sites (esp. migrant workers), women's empowerment policies and CEDAW obligations (Indonesia, Pakistan), ethnic minority policies (China), Afghan refugee policy (Iran) and new training in social service delivery (Pakistan, Indonesia, Iran).

Highlights of research, capacity building and communication

Research: more than 145 research products⁹ contributing new insights on women's empowerment have started to reorient understanding of women's empowerment in all research contexts, with particular relevance for the MDGs, especially Goal 3 (Promote gender equality and empower women), as well as the Beijing Platform for Action. WEMC's 2008 research framework *Women Empowering Themselves: A framework that interrogates and transforms* has been widely acclaimed by academics, activists and planners.

Capacity Building bolstered research capabilities of 228 people from community women to senior academics and enhanced the capacity of 100 civil society groups to support women's empowerment. WEMC **training in documentary film-making had tremendous impact**: Films were used for research, and in successful policy dialogues, government and civil society training programmes. They were broadcast by private media and shown nationally and internationally to diverse audiences, amplifying women's voices and showcasing their concerns and priorities to help make visible, validate and strengthen women's agency as 'insiders' challenging disempowering structures that promote 'democratisation from the inside out'.

⁷ 'Insider' and 'outsider' are relative concepts. 'Insiders' include all women living in Muslim contexts that the RPC is studying, including non-Muslim women. 'Outsiders' are those outside these contexts.

⁸ United Nations Population Fund; See www.unfpa.org/culture/culture.htm

⁹ These include 15 WEMC documentary films, theatre scripts, journal articles, book chapters and numerous conference papers.

An effective Communication Strategy contributed to women-centred transformations in policy and practice. Tailored to specific audiences and socio-political contexts at micro, meso and macro levels, using highly diverse modalities communication **effectuated local change** (catalysing and supporting women's empowerment initiatives), **reoriented local environments** to be more supportive (communicating with meso-level policy implementers, opinion-makers, and civil society associations); and **helped to bring about policy revisions**. **Success is visible in accepted recommendations, authorities' usage of outputs, the amplification of voices** for women's empowerment through new groups/initiatives; requests and usage of WEMC products (over 60 websites excerpt/are linked to WEMC materials).

Key Insights

WEMC research shows that transformative research can be an important driver for change in developing countries, catalysing research participants to become agents of self-directed change. Endorsing the value of democratisation from the inside out, research that builds on indigenous knowledge and enables local communities to critically examine the customary and legal practices that control women and other vulnerable groups helps prepare women to collectively challenge the actors and factors that keep them disempowered. Interweaving research, capacity building, and communication into an integral transformative process and combining academic and activist organisations with different strengths and perspectives enabled WEMC to engender immediate and sustainable impact in many communities.

Findings support a rights-based development approach and resonate deeply with the new 'development with culture' paradigm proposed by the UN Indigenous Peoples Forum. Work suggests there is merit in developing such an approach for women's empowerment - especially when women suffer from severe exclusion. Similar concerns arise: not merely making services more accessible but strengthening women's own institutions; not development on behalf of but with; an understanding that success can "depend critically on how one goes about development rather than simply on the choice of the subject matter of a specific intervention."¹⁰ This last applies equally to research processes and interventions.

To be effective, policies need to bear in mind the following: There is a 'cost of empowerment' identified by women who prioritise public discursive spaces over direct linkages with policy-makers/implementers and facilitated negotiations. Empowerment initiatives result, not from individual women accessing better services but from collectivised actions. Empowerment cannot be achieved without addressing meso-level dynamics where access to information, resources and decision-making forums is most obstructed and justified through misogynistic interpretations of culture and religion. In negotiating rights collectively, women position themselves variously in terms of social identity. This makes it essential to analyse further the contested changing constructions of 'Muslim-ness' but also other social identities; the interplay of these multiple identities and the implications this has for citizenship and governance/development planning.

Further study is needed to (1) extract lessons for international development by deepening cross-comparative analysis, (2) further surface women's own conceptualisation of 'empowerment' and power as underpinnings of appropriate plans and policies, and (3) develop a fuller documentation and analysis of WEMC's research approach for replication.

Attaining the WEMC Purpose: Key Achievements

Exceeding or meeting all Purpose-level OVIs, WEMC has met its purpose by equipping enough civil society actors and women in research components with sufficient expertise and capacity on women's empowerment to enable long-term advocacy for appropriate policies and practices beyond its life-span. Achievements stem from changing local configurations and understanding and building cognitive ability to analyse power dynamics and identified, catalysed and nurtured local indigenous initiatives.

¹⁰ *Indigenous peoples: development with culture and identity in the light of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, E./c.19/2010/17, para 45

- **Eighteen** (not 10) **WEMC recommendations accepted by authorities have introduced or amended policy** (OVI 1 Purpose), many others are in the pipeline
- **Across all components, government authorities are using WEMC's new knowledge in policy-formulation or implementation; products and findings are being used by change agents for gender equality and women's empowerment** (OVI 3 Purpose)

Legal amendments improved rights for women migrant workers, abolished whipping as punishment and banned gender-discriminatory laws in the name of 'religion' (Indonesia). **Programmes** for women were extended to research sites (Indonesia), revision of national policies/plans for women started (Pakistan), services improved in 34 government shelters for women (Pakistan), new civil service training on rights was introduced (Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan); and a **research centre** on minority women/gender was established (China). **Research products/findings are used** by the Ministries of Justice, Health, Social Affairs and Population (Iran), Legal Bureaus, District Parliament Heads (Indonesia), Planning Commission (Pakistan), women's ministries (Pakistan, Indonesia), Department of Social Welfare (Pakistan).

At least 27 new groups catalysed & many more reoriented by WEMC activities/transformational new knowledge have launched a plethora of initiatives - none depend on DFID support.(OVI 2 Purpose)

As a venue for women's collective analysis of factors and actors operative in their lives, groups amplify voices for women's empowerment in public spaces, challenging disempowering discourses.

New groups include the Institute for Women's Empowerment; 6 newly registered and 4 informal women's groups (Pakistan); 2 livelihood-focused cooperatives, 10 village groups, 2 'women's schools', a migrant workers' centre (Indonesia); 2 institutions, 3 women's groups across religious lines (China), 3 legal rights-focused groups, a youth media group, 3 self-help Afghan teachers' groups (Iran); 3 migrant workers' alliances.

WEMC seeded multiplication: strengthening/reorienting many groups towards women's empowerment, e.g. feminist writers and activists in Pakistan, Iran's 100,000 women Volunteer Health Workers, religious scholars and spaces (Indonesia, China). Multiple spin-off collaborative projects include initiatives with State institutions: e.g. women's commissions and ministries (Indonesia, Pakistan), Iran's Health and Social Service Ministries, provincial government departments/authorities (all components), National Assembly (Pakistan).

All the initiatives established, inspired and strengthened by the WEMC RPC challenge religion and culture referenced disempowering discourses and practices. (OVI 3 Purpose)

A WEMC handbook promoting women's rights/empowerment from an Islamic perspective is changing views in Indonesian society and state institutions; women in research sites broke the silence on gender-based violence (GBV), overturned women's exclusion from local development processes and reoriented religious instruction towards women's empowerment. Sharing findings in a highly conservative and violence-prone area (Pakistan) propelled efforts led by young women and men to redefine local cultural identity, divorcing it from GBV and other detrimental practices. In Iran, campaigns challenging the use of religion and cultural ideologies to restrict women's bodily autonomy and public participation were bolstered by WEMC research and catalysed groups. In China, new concepts in newly created 'safe spaces' led to advocacy promoting girls' education, religious institutions and secular rights.

At least 50 groups, mostly women's associations (instead of targeted 20) **continue to use linkages forged with policy-makers to further empowerment agendas** (OVI 4 Purpose)

Linkages enabled 24 migrant workers groups, 10 women's groups in Indonesia, 8 in Pakistan, 5 in China; 3 in Iran to advocate women's rights in a variety of arenas: from government extension schemes, embassies and provincial authorities to regional/provincial and national institutions as well as international arenas and institutions. The issues taken up range from national and regional laws to improved salaries; from a community water scheme to school provision for special children. Linkages and products amplified women's voices, concerns and demands in mainstream print and broadcast media and shifted the discourse towards women's rights and empowerment. (The total excludes groups that previously using linkages.)

3. Highlights of the research

OVI 1. Factors that support or hinder women's empowerment are identified, including sources of support or obstruction
OVI 2. Comparative synthesised analyses of data from diverse research sites/'Muslim' contexts provide fresh insights on women's empowerment.
OVI 3. A transformative theoretical framework catalyses a growing body of critical, well-founded new knowledge that is tested empirically through participatory RPC activities.

3.1. Concepts of empowerment

With a focus on power, WEMC's working definition of women's empowerment was 'an increased ability to question, challenge and eventually transform unfavourable gendered power relations.'¹¹ Resonating with this, women in the research commonly viewed empowerment as an ability 'to exercise free will' or 'make decisions without any limitations.' Research participants confirmed that empowerment is an all-encompassing process not limited to any specific aspect of their lives. Hence, with respect to health, especially mental well-being, some women believe that disempowered women can never be completely healthy.¹²

Counter-intuitively, 'empowerment' is not necessarily perceived positively. This holds true for a variety of reasons, starting with the absence of an exact equivalent in any research language other than Farsi of the word and the concept of empowerment. Used terminology may suffer from being associated with ineffective plans and policies, or actually convey a quite different meaning divorced from the root word 'power' (e.g. 'energising' in Indonesia). A negative perception can also stem from people's personal negative experiences of those who do wield power. Importantly, women spoke of the costs to becoming empowered that can result from disrupting existing structures and systems. Supporting or catalysing women's empowerment is not a simple process. It needs careful planning and nurturing in a process involving women who are best placed to both assess the potential risk of action and to devise appropriate indigenous strategies to deal with these. WEMC findings suggest that women's empowerment would benefit from the new proposed approach of 'development with culture' being discussed in UN circles. An approach that not only focuses on making services more accessible, but strengthening women's own institutions; a development 'with' rather than 'on behalf of', and an understanding that success can 'depend critically on **how one goes about development rather than simply on the choice of the subject matter of a specific intervention.**'¹³ This last applies equally to research processes and interventions.

'I did not think that women were so capable.' Local lead researcher (Gansu, China) learning that she had been giving *resources*, not bestowing *agency*, the latter released by providing a safe space to local women, widening their space and collective learning.

3.2. Key findings

Research **confirmed some basic WEMC hypotheses and suggested new areas** for further investigation and cross-comparisons. A particular insight relates to the complex – and critical – dynamics of insider/outsider relations, as well as to changes arising from dialectical interactions between 'outside-in' and 'inside-out' processes.

The pivotal role of meso level dynamics was confirmed across all components and highlighted in the Policy Brief to the UNESCAP¹⁴. **Obstructed access to information, resources and decision-making forums concentrated at the meso level is justified and maintained through misogynistic interpretations of culture and religion. Ignoring such dynamics in policy planning can lead to failure** of otherwise well designed policies to bring about desired results. WEMC's multi-contextual research

¹¹ http://www.wemc.com.hk/web/rf/3_WEMC_Research_Framework.pdf, page 16

¹² WEMC-AKU research reports of field findings.

¹³ *Indigenous peoples: development with culture and identity in the light of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, E./c.19/2010/17, para 45

¹⁴ F. Shaheed, *Structural Barriers, Cultural Constraints, Meso Traps & Other Challenges Women's Empowerment in Institutional Mechanisms and Power & Decision-Making: The Beijing Platform for Action 15 Years On*

provides ample evidence of supportive government laws and policies being circumvented at meso levels by local administrators, who interpret, adjust, localise and implement national policies. Other factors include (i) women's lack of knowledge of existing schemes/laws, (ii) village/community leaders' ignorance or opposition to such schemes/laws, and (iii) cultural notions legitimising women's disempowered status that are promoted by local gatekeepers and too often internalised by women themselves. Usually, these factors all work in tandem.

Vital role of the State as an important source of legitimisation and opportunity provider: The dominant values and discourses of the State can be supportive, e.g. promoting women's equal rights as well as providing spaces and opportunities for empowerment initiatives, or obstructive e.g. by propagating patriarchal values that promote the domestication of women. Hence, because the State is an important source of legitimisation, the existence of some policies can unintentionally support women's empowerment by providing them with an 'approved' expanded arena of action. For example, Iran's Volunteer Health Workers Programme, created to control population through women extension workers, actually enabled volunteers to enhance their agency and community influence.¹⁵

Women need to know about existing provisions/laws; such knowledge is most effective when coupled with discussions around empowerment and power: Awareness about legal entitlements and/or supportive policies and programmes can lever open empowerment opportunities. For example, the socio-legal context of migrant workers' destination may provide empowerment opportunities even though the environment may also cause secondary gender-'race'-class oppressions¹⁶. Learning about entitlements under family law matters encouraged women in Pakistan to organise themselves to challenge factors obstructing their rights. In China, newly gained knowledge about entitlements under secular law, lent a new perspective to women religious leaders, encouraging initiatives to address patriarchal dynamics within the religious community. Amongst migrant workers, discussions around women's empowerment and legal knowledge gave new impetus for sharing knowledge, mobilising support and undertaking public activism for change/or implementation of existing legal provisions. In all locations, it was the combination of discussions around power/empowerment and new information that catalysed new actions. Outcomes include women in Indonesia now participating in the bottom-up development planning process,¹⁷ thereby ensuring that women's perspectives are included and that women become beneficiaries, and two WEMC-catalysed peasant women's associations in Pakistan demanding that the government replicate the land distribution scheme for women of another province.¹⁸

I would not be alive had they [WEMC-SG] not told us about the [government] shelter... He was so angry that night ...and went to fetch an axe...I remembered, and ran.
Woman FGD participant, Mailsi, Pakistan

Confirmed: access to resources alone does not necessarily lead to women's empowerment initiatives. This is evident in research among successful women leaders of the Muslim Hui minority (Guangzhou, China); the SEARC study also challenges the suggestion that China's ethnic minority policy provides a path to empowerment. Successful Hui women, for instance, lacked the sensitivity to acknowledge the presence of disempowering forces and the consciousness to challenge unfavourable gender power relations. Because ethnicity is their main source of privilege, Muslim identity is not prioritised and gender inequalities, seen as irrelevant, remain virtually uncontested. This illustrates that empowerment does not emerge from an incremental addition of resources, but from the strategic use of these resources to challenge and transform

¹⁵ H. Hoodfar. 2009. 'Activism Under the Radar: Volunteer Women Health Workers in Iran'. *MERIP*, No.250, Vol. 39 (1): 56-61 & H. Hoodfar. 2010. 'Health as Context for Social and Gender Activism: Female Volunteer Health Workers in Iran'. *Population and Development Review*, September 2010.

¹⁶ A. Sim. 2009. 'Women versus the State: Organizing Resistance and Contesting Exploitation in Indonesian Labor Migration to Hong Kong'. *Asian Pacific Migration Journal Special Issue 'Maids, Mates and Seasonal Migrants: Women and Migration in East and Southeast Asia*, Vol 18 (1): 47-76; Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM). 2009. *Triple Whammy: A Study on the Contemporary Situation and Problems of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Taiwan*. Supported by WEMC in cooperation with Graduate Institute for Social Transformation Studies, Shih Hsin University in Taiwan.

¹⁷ See: Solidaritas Perempuan (SP) 2010. *Transformative Research: Women's School as Empowerment Vehicle*, SP, 2008. *Women's Empowerment through obtaining rights and access to and the control of economic resources: A Case Study on Returned Migrant Workers in Cianjur*.

¹⁸ F. Arshed. 2009. "Women's Self-Understanding of Empowerment" presented at the *University-Conference Engagement Conference* (23-25 Nov. 2009) Penang, Malaysia.

power relations. **'Agency without contestation' serves to reinforce individual women's submission to authority at the meso level.**¹⁹ Similarly, accessing legal forums – even when they provide relief to individual women – does not lead to women's empowerment (Pakistan). Empowerment processes require more than improving the lives of individual women; they require a collective process of conscientisation and action²⁰.

Discursive spaces for women in the public sphere emerge as the most important single ingredient for catalysing empowerment initiatives and supporting women's indigenous strategies for empowerment across sites, components and life domains.

Women often prioritise such spaces over and above direct linkages with and facilitation of interactions with authorities. Providing a location in which women sit together and share experiences, facilitated discussions in these spaces make visible patterns of power dynamics and gender imbalances. Analyses displace the common perception that it is each woman's personal misfortune to have an abusive husband, exploitative conditions of work, no access to resources, etc. Discussions initiated by researchers and the sharing of new ideas and information, create an unprecedented opportunity for most women to analyse the structures and systems of power (actors and factors) keeping them disempowered. They help to identify problems, prioritise issues, gauge potential risks and devise strategies in the light of new understanding. Relative permanency of discursive spaces permits long-term strategising and readjustments in the light of changing circumstances and needs. Some situations call for the creation of safe spaces (e.g. as a 'commercial' venture or 'women's schools') where women can express themselves comfortably, providing safe entry points to engage in the public domain²¹.

Women prioritise having public discursive spaces over and above direct linkages with and facilitation of interactions with authorities, important as these are.

Women need to believe they are entitled to rights and supported to become rights claimants. Women are socialised to believe that their disempowered status, subservient to men, is the correct order of things: *'If we're not happy at home, well that is our destiny. No matter how hard we tried, God's will always reigns,'* or *'It's my destiny... it is my fate. Lucky I realise it. My husband also says so. If I do not accept this condition, I feel it's like a sin.'* (Indonesian respondents)²² Echoing such sentiments, women in Punjab, Pakistan said that voting against their husband's wishes is a sin, for which they would be accountable to God.²³ A pre-requisite for challenging and eventually changing the existing gendered power relations is a rejection of the existing order and its justifications, as confirmed across sites. Women must be facilitated to discuss the disempowering factors in their lives collectively to enhance cognitive ability to understand the structural systemic nature of disempowering factors and actors that play out in their lives. WEMC research facilitated cognitive ability that encouraged individual women to take collective actions to challenge disempowering structures across diverse life domains.

3.3. Poverty and economic resources and dis/empowerment:

Confirming the results of earlier participatory poverty assessment exercises, Pakistan research shows that women (and men) rarely define poverty exclusively, sometimes not even primarily, in financial terms. Poverty

¹⁹ C. Chiu. and N. Lo. 2007, "Agency without Contestation: Case Studies of Successful Muslim Women in the Hui Community in Guangzhou, China," presented at the 9th Annual Meeting of the Hong Kong Sociological Association, Dec 8, 2007, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong; C.H. Chiu. *Agency without Contestation: Barriers to Empowerment of Women Leaders in the Hui Community in Guangzhou, China*, under review by *Women's Studies International Forum*.

²⁰ Z. Chaudhry. *Women Accessing Rights: constraints and benefits of formal, semi-formal and non-formal forums* (working title), presented at the SG-WEMC National Conference December 2009, under continuing development.

²¹ M. Jaschok & H.M.V. Chan, 'Education, gender and Islam in China: The place of religious education in challenging and sustaining "undisputed traditions" among Chinese Muslim women', *International Journal of Educational Development* 29 (2009) 487–494; L. Xu: 'Public and Safe Space - The Hub for Muslim Women's Empowerment in China's north-west Region' being finalised; Shui Jingjun: 'Reflexivity, Empowerment and Transformation - organising a platform for Muslim women's development' being finalised

²² L. Nurohman (SCN and Rahima). 2008. *Women Empowerment Strategy and the Role of Majelis Taklim in Women's Empowerment Process within Intensifying Politicisation of Islam in Mulyasari, Cianjur Regency*.

²³ A. Samiuddin, 'External and Internal Obstructions to Women's Political Participation', presented at national conference *Women Religion and Politics* co-organised by SG and Heinrich Boell Foundation, 21-22 May 2010, being finalised

is linked to and seen as the outcome of belonging to a particular social group (ethnic, religious, linguistic) as well as urban/rural location and, subsequently, education and opportunities, etc. Participation in any movement for social change overturns a resigned acceptance of being 'born into poverty' by helping to make visible the injustice inherent in existing systems and structures. Appropriately designed research can also be a driver of changed perceptions, as evident in outcomes of the WEMC RPC.

Economic arrangements and the labour market were a focus of study in Iran. Research found that in contrast to the government's policy which, based on women's domestication, considers marriage and motherhood a priority for all women, urban women, especially young educated women, prioritise economic security and independence over marriage. Research reveals that economically independent educated women manage more equal partnerships in marriages but that the manner of generating income is important. Economically secure women who remain at home feel less empowered vis-a-vis their husbands, have fewer social networks and feel more exploited despite economic independence. Women employed outside their neighbourhoods tend to be more interested in politics, have greater awareness of government policies and engage more in national debates and elections. Different spheres of life are interconnected. The lack of economic independence and unequal family law, are both important contributors to women's disempowerment. Without independent economic security, women remain in abusive marriages and are even less likely to gain child custody. Small income generation projects combined with legal awareness enable negotiating less unequal relationships within the family.

3.4. Challenges for Policy Planning

There are considerable challenges in planning women's empowerment effectively. Findings from all components underscore the importance of empowerment initiatives remaining flexible and open-ended. This is at odds with planning processes that, of necessity, are top-down, results-oriented and fit into macro objectives.²⁴ Nevertheless, the vital need to promote public discursive spaces for women that facilitate cognitive ability and are networked for social capital is undeniable. Supportive measures for such discursive public spaces include (i) State laws and policies supportive of women's rights and gender equality, (ii) enhancing women's access to information about relevant laws and policies, but also concepts of rights (as women and citizens) and of alternatives beyond lived experiences; (iii) women's increased mobility to widen access to opportunities and resources, (iv) initiatives to reorient family and community to support women's rights and gender equality, and (vi) innovative measures that can re-define cultural norms.

The vital need to promote public discursive spaces for women that facilitate cognitive ability and are networked for social capital is undeniable

Crucially, the micro-level family is a primary site of women's disempowerment but equally a critical, often sole, source of support for women seeking to modify their existences. Hence, interventions to support women's empowerment initiatives must consider ways to catalyse modifications in intra-family dynamics and the outlook of male decision-makers. **One policy implication is the need for gender equality projects and women's empowerment processes to involve men, especially youth** (often more invested in a change agenda).

3.5. Cross-context insights

Pre-mature closure prevented the full gamut of WEMC cross-comparative analyses that would have allowed the extraction of important lessons, especially for upscaling recommendations for regional and international action. Comparative analyses so far are reflected in numerous papers/presentations under development on women's concepts of power and empowerment including definitions, the obstacles and sources of support they identify, etc.²⁵ **Women's concepts of empowerment and implications for governance and development could not be finalised**, due to abrupt closure.

²⁴ See F. Shaheed, 2009. 'Empowerment and Development Planning: A forced South Asian marriage?' Accepted chapter for edited book *Women in South Asia* (working title) ed. S. Kottegoda, SAPANA, South Asia Free Media Association.

²⁵ V. Wee, F. Shaheed and F. J. Tadios. 2008. *Towards a lexicon of women's empowerment: usages and discourses.* Presented in a panel on 'Culture, religion and women's empowerment: discourses and practices', 10th Annual Meeting of the Hong Kong Sociological Association, December 6, Lingnan University, Hong Kong; Solidaritas Perempuan. 2009. "WEMC concepts of inside-out and outside-in ---- on the dialectics of change from within the Indonesian context"; 'WEMC as empowerment vehicles from the inside-out', presented at University-

Identifying and positioning the self for negotiating enhanced rights The pivotal role of diverse collective identities (referred to as social identities by UNESCO²⁶) and implications for citizenship needs further exploration.²⁷ Confirming the importance of practices of communities as determinants of women's disempowered/empowered status, WEMC research further reveals that women do not always position themselves within the same social identity for negotiating rights: they may prioritise and locate themselves within their ethnic or religious identity on some occasions but, in other circumstances, they may position themselves as citizens, asking the State to ensure their legal entitlements in the face of actual or potential encroachments by sub-national actors and factors.²⁸ Partly completed analyses indicate the need to elaborate the diverse, changing and contested constructions of Muslim-ness and other social identities and how this relates to concepts and the reality of citizenship in various contexts. Research suggests that development practices, e.g. the UNFPA 'cultural negotiations' initiatives may over-emphasise religious identity as the only lever for instituting ownership of development projects and change. This ignores women's citizenship as a basis for negotiating rights (undertaken by a significant number of women's groups in the study), as well as new ideology, and perceptions of self, e.g. the awareness of being migrant workers. An exclusive perspective on what constitutes the 'pillar' of identity may unhelpfully reinforce the power (and control) of certain groups within the community.

Control over women's sexuality emerged as a fifth mechanism of control that frequently underlies other forms of control, i.e. obstructed access to resources and decision-making forums by, for example, restricting mobility. Some of the critical insights and analyses around this important but too frequently ignored area with respect to women's empowerment will be available in an edited volume, '*Women's Empowerment and Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Asia and the Middle East*', being prepared with separate funding.

Issues surfacing in research needing further reflection and development include: differing notions of power, empowerment and disempowerment; the role of collective identities (e.g. religious, ethnic and others such as migrant workers) in negotiating rights; the interconnection between sexuality and women's empowerment for citizenship rights which researchers only started to explore in the last year; and systematic analysis of the data collected on women of minority communities in Muslim majority countries. Sharing and comparing results with similar studies conducted elsewhere both within and outside Muslim contexts would deepen understanding and help to elucidate essential lessons.

4. Achievements: Research Outputs and Purpose

4.1. Communication, Capacity Building & Research

WEMC success was underpinned by (a) **interweaving research, capacity building and communication** as an integral process and (b) the RPC's **combination of academic institutions and activist organisations** that, contributing diverse strengths and perspectives, invigorated the whole. In Indonesia and in cross-border research on migrant women workers and Afghan refugees, research teams were mobilised and trained from within research communities. Some aspects of research in Indonesia and China also included community

Community Engagement Conference, Penang Malaysia, 25 November 2009; F.J. Tadios & S. Ahmed. 2009. *Women's Conceptions of Empowerment*, paper under continuing development. Lili Xu: '*Public and Safe Space - The Hub for Muslim Women's Empowerment in China's north-west Region*' under finalisation; Shui Jingjun: '*Reflexivity, Empowerment and Transformation - organizing a platform for Muslim women's development*', under finalisation; Wang, Juan: 'The notion of Habermas's "public sphere" and its relevance to interrogations of women's empowerment and leadership in Muslim contexts', submitted for consideration to *Geografia – Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*.

²⁶ United Nations Educational Cultural and Scientific Organisation, 2009. *World Report: Investing in Cultural diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*

²⁷ See for example ppt. F. Shaheed *Sub-state belonging: a key determinant of women's access to state benefits and empowerment strategies* at the RMC Meeting in 15-17 Jan 2010, Hong Kong, and *Citizenship vs. non-state social collectivities as determinants of gender systems and women's empowerment processes* (from CAG meeting, 16-18 July 2009 Istanbul, from HK RMC Meeting

²⁸ K. Man: '*Dongxiang Women as "boundary subjects": reflections on gender and identity in the borderland area of northwest China*'. Submitted for consideration to *Geografia – Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*; J. Shui: '*Pilgrimage, Chinese Muslim Identity and Local Change: A Study of the Impact of Returned Hajj [pilgrims]*'; Submitted for consideration to *Geografia – Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*.

women as researchers. The combination of activist and academic approaches helped to develop truly participatory and transformative activities which, in turn, catalysed processes in numerous locations with the potential to sustain a change agenda for women's empowerment.

Key Research Outputs: Contributing new insights and perspectives that advance the existing thinking on women's empowerment, the WEMC RPC has produced more than **145 publications and products**²⁹ which include 23 analytical pieces published or in press (13 in English); several policy briefs, 5 handbooks, 15 WEMC documentary films as well as theatre scripts, a DVD of songs, and numerous conference draft papers (see Annex 5A). The 2008 published version of the WEMC research framework (RF) *Women Empowering Themselves: A framework that interrogates and transforms* has been widely acclaimed by academics and activists as well as planners. It has been variously appreciated (verbally and via email) as 'such a fine piece of work.'³⁰ by a professor and e.g.: 'refreshingly innovative', 'fantastic feedback across the board', 'very useful', 'exciting work'³¹. The RF is excerpted on AWID and Millennia 2015 websites and has been appreciated and widely circulated by the Women's United Nations Report Network (WUNRN).³²

Successful localisation of the research framework (RF) contributed to both greater local accessibility of WEMC concepts and new insights for the RF itself. Translated into each key research language for maximising accessibility, each team shared the RF with researchers, civil society actors and policy-makers at various forums.³³ (Key terms were further translated into local languages in Indonesia and Pakistan.) The aim was to reorient existing perspectives on women's empowerment and to identify gaps requiring further conceptual work. Reviews generated discussions around core issues, e.g. the lack of attention to sexuality (Pakistan, Indonesia and Iran), the cost of empowerment (Pakistan), who decides who is or is not empowered (Indonesia), leadership, power and empowerment (China). Professors of the Indonesian academe engaging with WEMC believe the RF answered concerns about research methodology disconnected from ground reality and plan to apply the RF in their own colleges and use it in teaching. In Pakistan, the RF has been requested by gender study centres and is being used by different departments in AKU apart from the Community Health Sciences that was directly involved with WEMC and used the RF to integrate WEMC concepts in an on-going short course. Sharing an abridged RF version, adapted to the Iranian context, with various Iranian scholars outside the RPC enables WEMC to inform research in Iran beyond the project life-cycle. Activists in Iran, Indonesia and Pakistan have started plan to apply and adapt the RF concepts in their institutions' activities.

4.1.1. Capacity Building Output

A pool of at least 80 researchers on women's empowerment in 4 countries is trained, with at least 30% involved in active research. (OVI 2, Research)

Far exceeding its 5-year target, WEMC enhanced the capacity of a very diverse set of 228 people to undertake research on women's empowerment issues, to process and analyse data, and to write research reports and papers in four years. Of the 159 researchers whose capacity was furthered in the last year (2009-10) 73 or 45% were known to be actively involved in research.

²⁹ The total refers to materials produced by WEMC according to the DFID RS High Level Indicators, including a range of academic, policy and other research outputs e.g. films, conference papers, research reports (both peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed)

³⁰ Dr. Anita Mir, professor at Lahore University of Management Sciences and University of London, Birkbeck, Personal communication to Acting Director, WEMC via email 14-03-10

³¹ Respectively stated by a UK academic, official of UN ESCAP, the Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Thailand, and a University student, Hong Kong.

³² Personally communicated by Lois Herman, Coordinator, WUNRN to the WEMC Acting Director.

³³ Examples include: (1) the joint roundtable by WEMC & Pathways to Empowerment RPCs entitled *Negotiating alliances, overcoming opposition: women's movements and other social movements*, Cape Town, South Africa, Nov 13, 2008; (2) The UNESCAP-WEMC forum '*Where's the power in women's empowerment*' presenting the WEMC RPC, Aug 4 2008, UN Convention Centre, Bangkok, Thailand; (3) WEMC panel at the AWID Forum 08, *Women democratizing power from the inside out: challenging cultural, religious and political impositions*, Cape Town, South Africa, Nov 16, 2008; (4) The 16th Congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) in Kunming, China, July 2009; (5) University-Community Engagement Conference, Penang, Malaysia 23-26 Nov 2009, the APNGO Beijing+15 Forum in Manila, Philippines (22-24 Oct 2009)

In view of the disparate skills of component teams, capacity building catered to the specific needs of each team. For some team-members, WEMC was their first research experience, such as Afghan refugee school teachers in Iran, women migrant workers in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan and numerous community women in Indonesia who were both investigators and beneficiaries. Key Partners spent time building research skills of their teams in a variety of ways, from extended formal training programmes to continuous mentoring and from data collection to analytical writing. (See Section 5.2 and Annex 6) The RPC also deepened and expanded understanding around women's empowerment and research processes amongst all Partners, including senior academics.

A most valuable WEMC investment was to train teams in film documentaries for both research and communication/advocacy purposes. Video filming was an important part of the research process **in Iran**; video documentation was especially useful in the health and social services sectors, serving multiple purposes. The films on women Volunteer Health Workers (VHWs) are an important source of validation and renewed energy for empowerment initiatives amongst VHWs besides being adopted by the Ministry of Health in its work. Attesting to cross-context use, a previous WEMC researcher, invited by the Ministry of Social Services to organise trainings to help disadvantaged women by using documentary and media skills, is using the WEMC-SG documentary from Pakistan *A Small Dream*, subtitled in Farsi. Chinese researchers also use this film in workshops and discussions. Women migrant workers learnt to use filming techniques to collect, review, and then present documentary evidence to authorities of the problems they confront and violations of their rights. Video documentaries have proved to be the most versatile and effective tool of communication as described below.

Sustaining research capacity: To institutionalise capacity for participatory action research on women's empowerment beyond its life cycle, WEMC collaborated and worked with research and civil society institutions not directly engaged in the RPC. As a result, researchers in Indus Resource Centre (Pakistan) for example, trained by AKU, adopted a participatory approach in their project on integrating reproductive health in school curricula. In China, IGS research, undertaken in collaboration with existing academic and research institutes, brought new perspectives on research and women's issues both because of the subject matter and the novel participatory research methodology. Capacity built is sustained by the absorption and relocation of WEMC researchers to other organisations/institutions working on women's rights where their learning continues to inform their work. Several WEMC researchers at Shirkat Gah were absorbed in its main Women's Empowerment and Social Justice Programme (WESJP); others joined international organisations with research components and still keep in touch. In Indonesia, a SCN researcher joined the Research Division of the *Komnas Perempuan* (National Commission on Violence Against Women), while SP officially integrated research as a necessary component in its on-going programmes. Two WEMC researchers in Iran joined the Ministry of Social Services to work on empowering socially and economically disadvantaged women through professional development trainings, and to run Training of Trainers programmes for the ministry's staff across the country to build legal awareness. Another works with the Health Ministry. Interaction with WEMC has led researchers outside the RPC to work on related topics: a student, introduced to WEMC concepts through AKU³⁴ is now doing her MPhil on women's empowerment at Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur. A researcher in China involved with IGS used a WEMC paper to formulate a new research proposal submitted to a Chinese government funding scheme. Two Iranian WEMC researchers enrolled for Masters degrees, are writing theses on legal justice and extreme domestic violence (including spousal killing), and women, sports and participation in the public sphere in Iran, at the University of Tehran, Department of Women's Studies.

At least 25 institutions or organisations and at least 20 women's groups in at least 4 countries are strengthened to engage in evidence/ research-based advocacy (OVI 1, Research)

³⁴ The course, *Community Based Social Development for Women's Empowerment* was run in 2008.

By 2010, WEMC strengthened advocacy capacity in at least 100 institutions/ organisations. These include: 49 women's groups including 5 alliances,³⁵ and 2 networks³⁶ in 4 countries to engage in advocacy initiatives.

Capacity for advocacy initiatives was enhanced in many ways. Training in documentary film-making introduced a novel means of sharing research concepts and findings as well as amplifying women's voices. Trainings built the capacity of WEMC Key Partners, their partners and other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) as well as women at the grassroots in Hong Kong, Iran, Indonesia, Pakistan and China to use films as a medium of advocacy.³⁷ Other RPC activities advancing women's advocacy capabilities included (1) how to derive lessons from documenting women's campaigns; (2) providing women with information about their legal entitlements as well as relevant supportive policies and how to access such entitlements/schemes; (3) facilitating access to decision-making and planning forums and the skills for addressing these; (4) providing research findings and products.

In Iran, workshops run before the 2009 elections shared different empowerment strategies used by women's groups around electoral politics, especially the use of quota systems with politically active women from across the country. Participants used new knowledge to further strengthen women's coalitions, particularly in negotiations with government representatives, but also in grassroots advocacy. WLUML built advocacy capacity for a research-for-activism group focused on sexuality and gender-based violence, an informal group seeking to respond to fundamentalists' use of gender as an identity marker, the Human Rights Commission and the Network of Volunteer Lawyers for action against the punishment of stoning to death, a women activists' group working on a draft Alternative Family Law and a group of women who set up an online legal education community website³⁸ (on marital contracts, divorce and custody rights). Additionally, researchers trained a youth media group on film-making, and '*The Iran Feminist School*' website personnel on using and uploading video-documentation. (WEMC-WLUML also contributed materials for the website.)

In Indonesia, strengthened capacity enabled women's groups to make their voice audible to relevant policy-makers and administrators, namely: (1) village chiefs and institutions in five villages in different districts; (2) District agencies in Bantul such as the Agriculture Agency, Cooperative and Agriculture Agency (Padang Pariaman); (3) legislative members in Bantul District.

The advocacy capacity of grassroots women was built through several short courses for 2 women's schools³⁹ and 10 CSOs. The experience of others helps rethink strategies, for example, having attended the University-Community Engagement Conference and a follow-up advocacy focused workshop jointly organised with IWE, two SP partners⁴⁰ decided to concentrate on building leadership capacity in the safe spaces of 'women's schools' (Makassar & Palu) as the most effective means for ensuring sustained local advocacy. Strengthened capacity has a ripple effect. Strengthened research-based advocacy of WEMC associate partner Solidaritas Buruh Migran Cianjur (SBMC) enabled its research results to underpin a campaign that helped to eliminate a Regional Regulation discriminating between migrant workers.⁴¹ Likewise, an associate partner supported the establishment of the women's collective, *Bina Mandiri* (Build Your Independence)⁴² and facilitated its linkages with Radio Kanjuruhan for a regular talk-show about returned migrant workers. *Bina Mandiri* members were trained on handling as well as undertaking advocacy on domestic violence cases.

³⁵ International Migrants' Alliance (IMA); other alliances e.g. PILAR, GAMMI, Women's Coalition for Justice, Makassar and Alliance of Muslim and non-Muslim Alliance Women, China are counted in the number of organisations and women's groups.

³⁶ The two networks are the Pakistan Reproductive Health Network (PRHN) and the Leadership Development Mechanism (LDM).

³⁷ See films at http://www.wemc.com.hk/web/links_and_resource.htm

³⁹ Siko Sintang women's school in Palu and Sipakalebbi women's school in Makassar

⁴⁰ SP-Palu and SPAM. NB: SP operates nationally through local member communities, some of which were associated with WEMC.

⁴¹ The Cianjur Regency Regulation No. 15 year 2002, supposed to protect migrant workers abroad, actually controlled the allocation and placement of migrant workers in certain types of occupation by only providing legal coverage to workers having registered and signed the placement agreement (i.e. workers who passed the selection of PJTKI – Penyelur Jasa Tenaga Kerja Indonesia), excluding other migrant workers recruited through sponsors.

⁴² Bina Mandiri is the first women's organization ever formed in the Donomulyo Sub-District. It was set up with the support of SP and an associate WEMC Partner, Dian Mutiara, in August 2008 by women who were involved in WEMC research.

SCN bolstered advocacy skills of 10 women's groups⁴³ in three WEMC sites (Padang Pariaman, DI Yogyakarta and Cianjur) in a variety of areas such as: problem-solving, reproductive health, improving family income, gender equality and women's roles in disasters such as earthquakes. New skills enabled the Volunteer Preschool Teacher's Society (*Paguyuban Guru Wiyata Bhakti*) to hold dialogues with relevant government officials; and the Family Prosperity and Empowerment (*Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*) campaign to decrease domestic violence. Survivors of domestic violence learnt to conduct awareness sessions to bring home the message that domestic violence is a criminal act and community members need to respect each other within and outside the family unit. The Housewives Group of Mulyasari Village, formed around the religious instructions of *Majelis Taklim* in Cianjur, achieved a more participative teaching method in religious instructions responding to the subjects they identified. Other groups whose capacity was built included a women's collective and a 'Women's coalition for justice' asking for a judicial review of the Anti-Pornography Law based on WEMC research findings (See *WEMC Annual Report, 2008-9*). Associate partners strengthened by WEMC to engage in advocacy include: Rahima, (empowerment through religious schools); LSPPA, (women making new choices in culture-specific contexts); and Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia (women's political participation and organising). LSPPA's increased capacity led to the reactivation of an organisation of non-formal kindergarten teachers' group in Bantul to improve terms of employment and draw public attention to their problems.

In China: a WEMC workshop around leadership enabled members of the Gansu Academy of Social Sciences to assume more assertive roles within the WEMC-catalysed Northwest Minorities Research Centre for Women and Gender Studies and strengthened their ability to engage in future advocacy initiatives. A group of Dongxiang Muslim women used a women's handicraft/embroidery exhibition to bring to the attention of religious and secular authorities, women's need for a collective space outside of the home. Enhanced capacity of the Gansu Alliance of Muslim and non-Muslim Women strengthened the role of local alliance building in providing safe spaces for women. Lanzhou University activities helped to create Hanji Women's Centre as a 'safe space' that widens civil space for women and functions as an advocacy group on women's health. A documentary film on Kaifeng Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque produced by the Henan Academy of Social Sciences in collaboration with local communities and women leaders became an important advocacy tool for preserving this old traditional and important space for women. The process of filming had unintended consequences e.g. consciousness-raising concerning women's history expanding the space of conversation and consultation; the process also extended the network of solidarity and information, and is used by local Muslim women to defend their homes (and the women's mosque) against urban re-development.

In Pakistan: AKU ran trainings on making 5-minute public presentations and writing petitions for women research participants in three urban and two rural field sites (including 41 government-employed Lady Health Workers). Subsequently, some women articulated their particular concerns and needs in speeches and petitions presented to decision-makers at policy dialogues. Informal women's groups emerged in all but one site; urban groups secured assurance of support from either local government or CSOs.

SG workshops strengthened the capacity of the Sindh Agricultural and Forest Workers Cooperative Organisation on using video-documentation for advocacy, the South Asia Partnership-Pakistan and thirteen of its community partners on applying WEMC research methodology to support advocacy especially in the area of land rights, 5 SG-WESJP and 4 WEMC⁴⁴ outreach partners in using interactive theatre for advocacy. SG also built advocacy capacity amongst the 6 new community-based organisations (CBOs) it catalysed⁴⁵ by back-stopping activities, providing expert inputs in initiatives and facilitating engagements with government

⁴³ These groups included (1) *Perempuan Buluh Perindu* Cooperative Women Group in the village of Teluk, Padang Pariaman (West Sumatra); (2) Bato Women's Group; (3) Korong Bungin Women's Group; (4) Pakasai Women's Institution; (5) Pesisir Selatan Women Institution in Padang Pariaman; (6) Group of PGWB from the Bantul district & (7) PKK from village of Purwodadi in district of Gunungkidul in DI Yogyakarta; and (8) *Majelis Taklim* Housewives Group of Mulyasari Village; (9) PKK administrators of Mulyasari village; (10) Women's coalition for justice'

⁴⁴ Sukkhiyan Welfare Society and Young Men's Society in Vehari District and Nisa Women Welfare and Social Development Organisation and Social Sangat in Usta Mohammad.

⁴⁵ Social Sangat and Nisa Welfare and Development Organisation in Usta Mohammad, Balochistan; Peasant Women Society in Okara, Punjab and Peasant Women Welfare Foundation in Khanewal, Punjab; Sukkhiyan Women's Welfare and Women's Zone in Vehari, Punjab.

officials. WEMC-SG strengthened the strategising skills of the 2 peasant women's organisations it helped to form and facilitated women leaders and their umbrella association, the *Anjuman Muzareen Punjab* (Peasant Association Punjab), in final negotiations with the provincial government around land rights, culminating in a government commitment not to give out large tracts of land on long lease to either local or foreign concerns. Training by SG-WESJP enabled the WEMC-catalysed Nisa Women Welfare and Social Development Organisation (*Nisa*) in Balochistan to monitor the 2010 by-elections, to campaign for women's franchise and facilitate women's voting by helping them obtain national identity cards.

Cross-border research: An Afghan Family Law workshop conducted by WLUML for 14 Afghan school teachers (May 2009) discussing the new marriage contract and women's empowerment propelled women-led small community discussions to share information and to strategise on raising further awareness amongst the Afghan community on women's legal rights under the new contract. 2000 copies of a small illustrated book for teenagers on reproductive health and rights produced by WEMC were distributed to teenagers in Afghan schools (1000 in Iran and 1000 in Afghanistan). WEMC also organised a competition on its contents through the Cultural Committee of the Council of Afghan Schoolteachers and the Centre of Afghan Youth. The book and competition were so popular that more copies and a repeat competition were requested in 2009, but could not be accommodated due to lack of resources.

ENGENDER strengthened advocacy capabilities of 24 migrant workers' grassroots organisations⁴⁶ and 16 women's groups in two WEMC-supported alliances in Hong Kong: PILAR (United Indonesians Against Overcharging) and GAMMI (Indonesian Migrant Muslim Alliance)⁴⁷. Facilitated by WEMC, PILAR was established on 1 April 2007 to support Indonesian migrant women's empowerment initiatives, to create a critical space for workers to address labour migration issues, to provide rights education and to help develop leadership capacities. PILAR became the principal vehicle in the rapid reversal of a key government policy, (SE2258 issued on 7 December 2007 by the Indonesian Consulate in Hong Kong) curtailing the right of Indonesian women migrant workers to change employment agencies. Field partners learnt how to plan and design research to document women's real-life stories. Migrant women workers engaged in WEMC research learnt to document the narratives of women who encounter high fees and their relationships with their families back home, and used compilations of such stories for advocacy. Capacity was strengthened for women's empowerment-related advocacy within field partners: Mission for Migrant Workers, Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, Tenaganita and Transient Workers Count Too, with extensive experience in migrant worker issues in East and Southeast Asia.

WEMC-SEARC facilitated collaboration between migrant women workers and Fatayat Nadlatul Ulama⁴⁸, the women's wing of an Indonesian religious scholars' organisation and built advocacy capacity amongst both workers and scholars. Newly oriented to the concerns of migrant workers, scholars produced a handbook providing gender-equitable and progressive interpretations of Islamic texts. Women's advocacy initiatives were bolstered by the handbook and scholars' confirmation that demanding empowerment and democratic processes are just from an Islamic perspective.

Finally, the advocacy skills of WEMC Key Partners have been honed and enhanced through the WEMC project through mutual sharing and for example, collaboration with the Institute of Women's Empowerment (IWE), an organisation formed by some WEMC researchers and engaged in a joint programme with WLUML, *'Women reclaiming and re-defining culture: asserting rights over body, self and public places'* (on advocacy and capacity-building).

⁴⁶ PILAR's 24 organisations: Akhwat Gaul, Alexa Dancers, Al Fattah, Al Hikmah, Al Istiqomah Internasional Muslim Society, Al Ikhlas, Al Jamiatus Solehah, An Nisaa International Muslim Society, Arrohmah, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia (ATKI-HK), Birul Walidain, Borneo Dancers, Dance in Freedom(DIF), Forum Muslimah Al Fadhillah (FMA-HK), Ikatan Wanita Muslim Indramayu Cirebon (IWAMIC), Ikatan Wanita Hindu Dharma Indonesia (IWHDI), Java Dance, KREN Dancers, Nur Muslimah Shatin, Peace, Simple Groups, Terali Dancer, Wanodya Indonesian Club, Zaqia

⁴⁷ Alliance members include rural Muslim women, female doctors and nurses, female Muslim government officers, Muslim and non-Muslim researchers, female Islamic leaders.

⁴⁸ Fatayat, the young women's wing of Nahdlatul 'Ulama (NU), was established on 31 January 1926 is one of the two largest Islamic social organizations in contemporary Indonesia with a membership of about 35 million. Politically, NU has Resisting fundamentalist efforts to make Indonesia an Islamic state, NU advocates social improvement through democratic means.

4.1.2 Communication

The diversity of media used for communicating WEMC findings reflects the range of audiences addressed (OVI 4, Communication)

Customising communication to influence specific audiences, Partners used both traditional and innovative media to convey research findings and messages. Traditional methods included seminars, conferences and workshops, publications and policy briefs, public policy dialogues as well as informal interactions. Informal interactions were particularly significant in more restricted communication environments. Innovative methods, especially in communicating research findings and essential information to women in research sites included documentary films, songs, interactive theatre performances, research-based narrative story-telling, primers, postcards of success stories, radio and television. Specifically, communication was geared to address:

- General public as well as specific audiences using multilingual websites and blogs, films, publications, etc. [Annex 5A], interviews on mainstream radio, TV, print media (Hong Kong, Indonesia Pakistan, UK), web dissemination of products, case studies, 'success stories'
- Policy-makers through formal audiences (Indonesia), public dialogues with community women and organisations (Pakistan, Indonesia, migrant workers), public forums (RPC as a whole); conferences and interactions with academics (China, Iran, Indonesia, Pakistan)
- Community women using radio, newsletters, primers, CDs of songs (Indonesia, migrant workers), research-based story-telling and interactive theatre (Pakistan), as well as more common discussions and capacity building activities in all sites.
- Civil society via WEMC-organised events in international forums and national/local seminars, forums, workshops, symposia, etc. [Annex 5C]

As an RPC, WEMC prioritised the UN system as a pivotal consensus-building and norm-setting forum at the international macro level. Communication was through invited inputs at regional and international events such as the review of Beijing Platform implementation in UNESCAP, a High-level Roundtable with the Jordanian government, UN Special Rapporteurs at the Global Forum on Migration and Development. (See purpose achievements for results of communication.) Researchers have built on pre-existing links and networks to insert key messages both creating opportunities to do so and availing of invited inputs, especially in on-going processes of development and policy planning.

At least two RPC members are invited per year as resource persons or experts by policy-makers, development practitioners and other decision-makers to provide inputs. (OVI 3, Communication)

By the last year, **invited inputs at policy-making events were too many to count effectively, but at least 20 were received for significant forums**, including from UNESCAP and international conferences on migration. At the national level, in Pakistan, Key Partners' inputs were invited by the National Assembly Parliamentary Committee on Women, the Women's Caucus, Planning Commission, as well as international development agencies (UNICEF, UNIFEM) and bilateral development agencies (German Technical Assistance and DFID). In Indonesia, invited inputs were made for developing an action plan extending the Integrated Protection of Women and Children Empowerment to WEMC research sites, from the Ministry of Women, *Komnas Perempuan* (National Women's Commission), Legal Bureaus of the Department of Internal Affairs, and migration-related authorities.

Drawing upon research insights, interactions led to a series of changes in policies and practices (all components) and inputs in the formulation and reviews of national policies on health, minorities, development plans (Pakistan, Indonesia) and international agendas (UNiTE campaign, High-level Roundtable on migrant workers, UN Special Rapporteurs at the Global Forum on Migration and Development; UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health)

At least 100 civil society & educational institutions in 20 countries use the RPC's multimedia outputs, including its publications, Web site and films. (OVI 2, Communication)

WEMC's publications, videos and web materials are used as teaching and reference materials in research, courses, training and advocacy by **at least 163 institutions in 19 countries** (Canada, China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, USA, Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey, Iran, Philippines, UK, Italy, Switzerland, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Mexico and South Africa). This includes:

- 40 educational institutions in 10 countries (Canada, China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, UK, USA, Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey) including senior professors and students.
- 123 civil society organisations in China, Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, UK, USA, Italy, Switzerland, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Afghanistan, India, Mexico, South Africa.

These numbers exclude all national and sub-national institutions and a vast array of other users: international civil society groups include e.g. ARROW, ISIS-Manila, AWID, and Sisters in Islam as well as UN agencies that have received or requested copies of WEMC products such as UNICEF, UNESCAP, UNIFEM, UNDP; the Government of Thailand; numerous individual researchers not affiliated with specific institutions; religious teachers in Indonesia using WEMC documentary films, and media groups/institutions. Also not counted are people accessing WEMC products via YouTube and websites, such as the Farsi-language website of WLUML, and Partners' own websites. More than 60 websites excerpt and are linked to WEMC materials [Annex 5B]. Products have been distributed widely to a diverse set of audiences including, apart from countries mentioned above, Qatar, Australia, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Germany; they have also been requested by many groups in different countries. It is difficult to track usage, without dedicated resources, but feedback indicates appreciation (see box).

Equally importantly, films are being successfully used across RPC sites. Hence, the issues raised in films from one team have been the anchor for discussions in other countries: e.g. films from Iran and Pakistan have been discussed in Indonesia; the Indonesian film on child mortality in Pakistan; and the Pakistani *A Small Dream* subtitled in Farsi in a training programme of Iran's Ministry of Social Services across 30 provinces.

'I liked your film a lot. The heroine is amazing... Our women's class really enjoyed the film because they could relate to the women, and they could understand the dialogue. They thought the heroine was very brave and especially that she had the conviction to convince her parents. We really appreciate the film and will use it a lot in our design school!'

Judy Frater, Project Director of Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya, design institution for traditional artisans in India.

The RPC's communication strategy responds to lessons learnt from interactions with policy-makers, implementers, development practitioners, decision-makers, and other agents of change (OVI 1, Communication)

WEMC's Communication Strategy was shaped by the RPC's intention to undertake a transformative research process that, building analytical capacity and strategic alliances, would advance its stated objectives:

1. To document, analyse and multiply women's empowerment strategies that successfully transform structures of disempowerment
2. To make visible, validate and strengthen women's agency as insiders⁴⁹ challenging disempowering structures and promoting democratisation
3. To pinpoint ways whereby good governance, democratisation, and appropriate development can strengthen and support women's agency

Tailored to the needs of the intended audience as well as the socio-political context of research and communication, and executed at the micro, meso and macro levels using extremely diverse modalities, the

⁴⁹ 'Insider' and 'outsider' are relative concepts. In this instance, 'insiders' denote all women living in Muslim contexts that the RPC is studying, including non-Muslim women. 'Outsiders' are those outside these contexts.

WEMC **Communication Strategy has been extremely effective.** It has (a) **effectuated local change** by catalysing and supporting women's empowerment initiatives by means of sharing research findings and insights at the community level and simultaneously building women's capacity to articulate and then amplify their voices; (b) it has **reoriented the local environment** to be more conducive for women's interventions by communicating with meso level policy implementers, opinion-makers, and civil society associations as interlocutors able to support and multiply the WEMC messages in diverse settings; and (c) it has **helped to make policies more supportive** of and responsive to women by engaging with policy-makers from sub-national to national levels on the one hand, and with policy-influencing and policy-making institutions at the regional and international levels, on the other.

At the grassroots, research, capacity-building and communication were intertwined. To promote its purpose of a *growing critical mass of civil society expertise able to engage in long-term policy debates to promote women's empowerment*, WEMC prioritised women in research sites and civil society institutions as the audience for communicating research insights and findings as well as for sharing key information on existing policies and laws. Communication built women's analytical skills and cognitive ability to better understand the dynamics of structural power arrangements and how this impacted their lives. Various methods were used to communicate research findings and to promote women's voices. At the grassroots level, discussions, small and large gatherings and research-related activities were complemented by interactive story-telling, theatre, songs and films on DVDs.

By June 2010, WEMC had produced **fifteen documentary films**⁵⁰. Completed films have been shown nationally and internationally, on cable television and in academic settings, to activists and to planners.

Amplifying women's voices and spreading awareness of critical issues, these films help to influence the thinking of policy-makers, the general public and the affected communities. The Indonesian documentary on the Whipping Law in Desa Padang South Sulawesi, shown on March 8th 2009 moved the Governor to issue a Governor's Statement revoking whipping in the Bulukumba Regency and all other laws that discriminate against women and carry inhumane punishment as unconstitutional. Shown for ten consecutive days on a local cable television network in Balochistan, *A Small Dream*, helped mobilise financial support for this amazing teenagers' educational initiative led by a woman who turned 21 in 2009 advancing their dream of making their street school a permanent reality⁵¹. International screening and distribution by the hundreds of WLUML's film on the legal punishment of stoning-to-death, *Mokkaramah*, (e.g. at the 2008 AWID Forum, the UN CSW 2010, International Iranian Studies Association, Toronto, 2009) generated pressure on the Iranian government to seriously consider removing the stoning law. A bill is currently awaiting the last stages of processing in Parliament. In China, the process of making the documentary film on the Kaifeng women's mosque mobilised women worshipers to insist on the right to societal resources to develop their faith, and to make efforts to ensure their mosque was safe from possible demolition, ensuring the future of their congregation. The second documentary *'Muslim Women and Religious Dress in China'*, shown and debated at an international conference in Beijing led to requests for copies from major educational institutions in China and abroad for use in teaching as well as from donors and activist organisations.

Based on analyses of ethnographic data, **the messages of WEMC's new narrative enriched by insights and lessons has been spread** through numerous presentations in international conferences from Kunming and Hong Kong in China to Sussex University, UK and the Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan; as well as at mass events like the AWID 2008 *'The Power of Movements'* Forum and the 2009 Asia-Pacific NGO Forum on the Beijing 15 years assessment attended by activists, academic researchers and development practitioners as well as by some donors. [See Annex 5] Of particular relevance to transformative research was the 2009 University-Community Engagement Conference (University Sciences of Malaysia),

⁵⁰ Other than smaller productions, the major WEMC films include: WLUML (5): *Mokkaramah* on stoning to death, *Women's Charter, Family Law Reform Campaign* and two films on *Volunteer Health Workers*; Engender: (1) *Bergerak! (Action!)*; SG (2): *A Small Dream* and *Two steps forward (peasant women struggling for rights)*; SP (2): *Makkunrai Makkuntani* (The woman who questions) and *Terminal Selapajang: Why Must I be different?* on the migrant women returning home; SCN (3): *Musim Ketiga*, (The Dry Season, on women's daily struggles), *Kebun Pocong* (named after the village with unusually high infant mortality rates), *Bubrak* (Openness) IGS (2): *The Kaifeng Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque* and *'Muslim Women and Religious Dress in China'*.

⁵¹ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-wtINStRsM>

seeking to identify how academic research could better support communities desiring change. WEMC's two panels and presentations made such an impact that these were specially mentioned in the closing plenary and WEMC team members asked to stand up to be recognised.

To influence **policies at the international level**, WEMC concentrated its efforts on the UN system because of its unique consensus-building and standard-setting role across the diversity of the socio-political specificities of countries. WEMC effectively provided inputs into UN documents and initiatives via presentations at UNESCAP around the 15 year review of implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. The May 2009 policy brief presented to UNESCAP was appreciated by organisers and contributed to the background documents for the subsequent November 2009 High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting. The November 2009 presentation by WEMC Acting Director contributed to the UN Outcome document: *The Asia-Pacific UNiTE Campaign to End Violence Against Women, Outcome document and proposed strategic Directions, regional Consultation Meetings on the UNSG UNiTe Campaign*.⁵²

Examples of successful country-specific communication strategies

In Iran the WEMC resource book on dress codes regulations⁵³, circulated in manuscript form even before being completed and published in 2010, is an invaluable resource for further research and discussions within and amongst different women's groups starting to address *hijab* and the bodily control of women. A senior researcher and her team members shared WEMC findings⁵⁴ with a broader audience in the first public forum around the Women's Charter (13 Jan 2008), which informed the discussions and subsequent formulation of demands. Findings around health and the two films on VHWs were requested by the Ministry of Health and shown to women VHWs and rural health workers (*Behvarz*) in ministry-organised workshops. Following presentations of findings in a government high-profile event, aired on television, the Health Ministry expressed its interest in adopting some of the methodologies and research findings in its own work. The VHW films were also used by VHWs themselves as tools for discussion and as a means of promoting their programme and reaffirming the importance of their initiatives. Of the various teams, Iranian researchers have used internet and websites most effectively, ensuring communication in otherwise difficult circumstances.

In Pakistan, Partners combined macro-level policy dialogues with building a constituency and catalysing change at the grassroots. Influencing health policies and revising the 1998 National Plan of Action and 2002 women's policy were a particular concern. Building capacity on 'what we would like to say, to whom and how' enabled community women to articulate their needs and concerns in AKU's 'Dialogue for Policy' and led to new groups being formed. AKU successfully engaged with women short-story writers, novelists and poets to bring about a change in their conceptions of and writing on women's empowerment. AKU also engaged with women's rights groups to bring about a change in discourse and activism on women's empowerment. SG's sharing of findings via interactive theatre, story-telling narratives, competitions, public debates and seminars raised awareness and catalysed new debates and discussions amongst community stakeholders. Communication activities encouraged the formation of new groups, helped to change negative local practices, and opened discussion on redefining culture by eliminating negative practices from the purview of identity as well as discussions and rethinking around women's role in decision-making, family laws and education⁵⁵. In turn, theatre training led young men and women to form their own theatre groups to highlight social issues in their communities. WEMC findings have informed interactions with UN development agencies, the Ministry of Women, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Women and the Women's Caucus in advocating revisions of the 2002 national policy on women and 1998 National Plan of Action (NPA). Proposed revisions for the NPA were sent to the Planning Commission to inform the formulation of the new five-year development plan.

⁵² F. Shaheed cited on page 15

⁵³ Shadi Sadr, the author, led the legal WEMC-Iran research.

⁵⁴ For the report abstract see: <http://www.meydaan.org/ShowArticle.aspx?arid=442>.

⁵⁵ The groups were: Sangat; Nisa Development Organisation; Young Men's Society; Sakhian Welfare Organisation and Al-Huda

In Indonesia, effective communication of research findings resulted in abolishing local edicts that discriminate against and obstruct women's freedoms of movement and dress. Sharing findings helped the initiation of a judicial review of a much contested 'anti-pornography' legislation. However, the rejection of the Judicial Appeal by the Supreme Court served to underline that research itself is insufficient for reforms; this necessitates systematically mobilising wider public understanding and support for the demands being made⁵⁶.

Communicating research results enabled SCN to deepen linkages with diverse civil society sectors, at both local and meso-levels. By the end of 4 years, researchers had sustainable relationships with five women's groups in five sites. In SP research areas, radio broadcasts developed rather quickly and successfully as a means of communication – at the requests of channel producers and also time negotiated by partners. 'Talk-shows', with live call-in sessions, interviews, short publicity-like broadcasts about imminent issues⁵⁷ and regular radio features on a regional, semi-governmental station focusing on development issues in the region (Radio Kanjuruhan) are very popular, allowing messages to reach a very wide audience.

In China, the emphasis was on alliance-building and institutionalising newly formed associations to ensure the most favourable conditions for sustainability. Constant informal and formal visits with local government and community leaders helped to keep open communication channels for influencing. In closed spaces, the 'insider' status of researchers in relation to communities studied greatly facilitated communication and allowed local alliances to emerge. Large conferences showcasing WEMC findings were exceptionally useful in starting dialogues and discussions on relevant subjects. Of particular importance was the relatively safe space of a panel organised by WEMC-IGS at the prestigious 16th Congress of the IUAES⁵⁸ 2009 in Kunming, China. Sponsored by the government, it allowed the China component to share findings with home and international audiences and gain the visibility they were looking for. A second event, a workshop hosted by the China Communication University, Beijing, while providing greater visibility increased local political surveillance (see lessons of communication).

In cross-border research, Migrant women workers and association used pamphlets, primers, booklets as well as a film and a DVD of songs to convey their messages and research insights amongst migrant workers and civil society groups; formal meetings and petitions to engage/negotiate with authorities, occasionally complemented with public protests to press for change. WEMC enabled groups to reach ever higher levels of authority up to the international arena with the relevant UN Special Rapporteurs and at high level consultations and conferences to convey their concerns and to advocate for appropriate changes.

In the Afghan research, the leader of the WEMC-WLUML media group made a film documenting women's successful setting up of clandestine schools for Afghan refugee children in Iran, and the subsequent transference of their experience to Afghanistan. Screened even before finalisation, the film is a tool for empowering young women by showcasing role models from their own contexts, for promoting grassroots education initiatives and centres in refugee communities, and a means of generating discussion around the impact of the setting up of these clandestine schools (and education provided to large numbers of refugee children) on the roles of women in their communities, and community development at large.

Overall For all components, the **internet (including YouTube) provides important platforms for dissemination**. Platforms for WEMC communication products include the WLUML English and Farsi websites. Primary mediums have been journal articles, books, and films uploaded on to the internet⁵⁹. Occasionally, international television has been used as an avenue for disseminating findings by way of interviews etc. with researchers. Across WEMC components, video documentaries have proven to be a most effective way of disseminating research results that also present a more holistic picture of the issues and

⁵⁶ The public 'Jaipong' dance campaign generated much media publicity but did not garner sufficient public support to convince the 8 judges of the Appeal Court who were not sympathetic to the arguments of the Judicial Review statement of the coalition.

⁵⁷ Researchers were interviewed by *Bens Radio, Jakarta Local Station* about the Religious Court Law Material regarding the Anti-jeans trouser regional regulation in West Aceh (24 Feb 2010); jingles on Green Radio reiterate women's rejection of the Anti-Pornography.

⁵⁸ International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, the largest world forum of anthropologists and ethnologists.

⁵⁹ See in particular, www.jensedigar.com, www.youtube.com/user/jensedigar, www.farsidari-wluml.org

situations on the ground and, by featuring the opinions of the directly concerned women in the communities, serve to amplify women's voices. WEMC documentaries are freely accessible on WEMC's website. (See list Annex 5)

4.2. Impacts: Achieving the WEMC purpose

WEMC films, WEMC-catalysed civil society groups and strategic alliances, WEMC-facilitated linkages with media, policy-makers and opinion-setters have been crucial for making visible, validating and strengthening women's agency as 'insiders' challenging disempowering structures and promoting 'democratisation from the inside out'.

- **At least 10 WEMC recommendations incorporated into government policies and practices (Purpose OVI 1)**
- **Decision-makers, especially policy-makers & implementers, as well as agents of change utilise WEMC's new knowledge to support gender equality and women's empowerment (Purpose OVI 5)**

Far exceeding expectations, in four years, eighteen WEMC recommendations accepted and acted upon by authorities introduced new policies or amended existing ones in the four nodal countries of research and cross-border research component, ensuring lasting change. **Sustainability also stems from the usage of new knowledge generated by WEMC by diverse government authorities in government planning, policy-formulation and implementation.**

Migrant women workers: Four specific WEMC-facilitated policy changes relate to the terms of contract and procedures for Indonesian migrant women workers. Three specifically concern employment opportunities of over 100,000 Indonesian women workers in Hong Kong and several thousand more in Macau, including a reduction in the obligatory placement fees for migrant workers by approximately GBP 526.17 (HK\$21,000 to HK\$15,000). One policy reform carried out by the government of Indonesia cancelling local service fees for potential migrant workers to obtain the required Identity Cards for migration, potentially impacts over half a million workers. These changes directly impact the poverty levels of the concerned women and their families. While the activism was carried out by workers' groups, WEMC research catalysed advocacy by (a) bringing to light the discrepancies and policies regulating work for migrant women workers, and (b) enabling migrant workers to discuss issues relating to women's empowerment and the particular source of their disempowered state. Additionally, the enhanced activism of migrant workers for their own empowerment supported by WEMC led to women migrant workers being invited to policy dialogues by the Department of Manpower and Transmigration in Jakarta and the Indonesian Consulate in Hong Kong.

In Pakistan, WEMC-catalysed policy changes introduced by the Punjab provincial government in running 34 women's shelters improved conditions for 4000-5000 women in distress each year using these facilities. Field research indicated a severe problem of violence and the need for more effective government responses. Using an invitation by the Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)⁶⁰ to input in other aspects of the Social Welfare Department activities, WEMC-SG convinced GTZ and the government of the need to undertake specific research to improve the effectiveness of government-run shelters. The research (using additional multiplier funds) was conducted prior to engaging in policy dialogues. SG successfully advocated introducing a Standard Operational Procedures Manual as well as training on human rights and family law for departmental staff. It then further developed the Manual and the modules (the latter with SG-WESJP). This has been adopted by the Punjab Social Welfare Department. A ripple effect is possible since the new policies in Punjab shared with the Government of Sindh have received a positive response.

Research indicated an urgent need to revise the 1998 National Plan of Action for Women and the 2002 National Policy on Women's Development and Empowerment along the lines recommended in the Policy

⁶⁰ <http://www.gtz.de/en/689.htm>

Brief presented to UNESCAP⁶¹ in 2009. With multiplier funds, WEMC led a civil society NPA review in collaboration with SG-WESJP and coordination with the Women's Ministry. WEMC collated recommended revisions and submitted these to the Women's Ministry for finalisation as well as to the Planning Commission as inputs for the under-construction 5-year Medium Term Development Plan 2010-15⁶². On the policy, SG-WEMC convinced the Parliamentary Women's Caucus and the newly appointed Advisor to the Prime Minister on Women to take this forward with invited inputs from WEMC researchers. Changes in policy and NPA impact all Pakistani women. In the meantime, WEMC provided inputs for the Government's report on CEDAW and proposed CEDAW implementation plan of action.

In Indonesia, as recommended by WEMC, in November 2008, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment extended its Integrated Service Centre for the Protection of Women and Children (*Pusat Pelayanan padu Perlindungan Perempuan dan anak P2TP2A*) to Palu, a WEMC research site. This expansion potentially benefits women and children of the area's 270,000 people. Subsequently invited to join the Regional Palu Office Drafting Team, WEMC-SP researchers used research lessons and insights to help formulate the programme's women's empowerment component. In South Sulawesi, WEMC findings and recommendations shared in policy dialogues with officials of the Bulukumba Regency in 2008-9 coupled with showing its film on whipping, led to an official investigation of gender discriminatory regional and village regulations by the Head of the Legal Bureau (Department of Internal Affairs). This was followed by the issuance of a Governor's Statement to Abolish the Whipping Law and a Governor's Regulation to the 23 District Heads to stop regional regulations that discriminate against women in the name of 'religion'. Effective implementation of the Governor's Regulation will positively affect the entire South Sulawesi population of 7,497,701. Additionally, the Head of the Makassar Legal Bureau, Internal Affairs is using WEMC research results on gender-discriminatory regulations in Bulukumba District as reference material for national discussions; and the District Parliament Head in the Cianjur Regency is using WEMC findings for revising the Regional Regulations.

WEMC catalysed a request by the Indonesian Department of Transmigration and Work asking an associate partner, Fatayat NU, to run weekly workshops around gender and Islam for the Department's female officials. This new initiative was championed by the wife of the concerned Minister after being inspired by a WEMC- Fatayat NU discussion around Fatayat NU's draft handbook prepared for WEMC on women's rights as migrant workers, as women and as citizens from an Islamic perspective. WEMC research findings on migrant workers, discussed and disseminated to the female officials in the course of these workshops overturned the common presumption amongst Department officials that the reported cases of violations of human rights and abuse of women migrant workers are isolated incidents. As a follow up, the Department and Fatayat NU plan readings of the final handbook with prospective women migrant workers in popular destination areas so as to raise awareness of being rights-holders and to assist women in asserting their rights.

In Iran, the most tangible impact is in the health field: A health-related book based on WEMC research, *Social Contexts, Women & Family Health* has been accepted by the Ministry of Health as a standard text for all medical universities and schools in Iran; a highly successful workshop on the WEMC Volunteer Health Workers research in Tabriz run by the lead health researcher at the Ministry's invitation was reported on the regional television news. Subsequently, invited as a resource person on the *Sahar Programme 1* television channel, for a discussion on the role of women and health in the family and society, she shared insights from the research on both volunteer health workers and rural health workers. The programme was broadcast live to North Africa and the Middle East, and translated into French for the channel's 'Health Week' programme

⁶¹ F. Shaheed. 'Structural Barriers, Cultural Constraints, Meso Traps & Other Challenges: Women's Empowerment in Institutional Mechanisms and Power & Decision-Making - The Beijing Platform for Action 15 Years On', Policy Paper for the Expert Group Meeting - UN ESCAP May 13-15, 2009. (http://www.wemc.com.hk/web/e-bulletin/09-2009/files/UN_ESCAP_EGM_B_15_FSMay09.pdf)

⁶² The Ministry accepted drafted recommendations and started to take this forward in late 2009, but 2010 constitutional amendments made the NPA a provincial responsibility.

(12 April 2010). The Ministry of Social Services has accepted, though not yet started to implement, a proposal for cross-country training for young women on women's legal rights under marriages and marriage contracts.

In China, recommendations jointly forwarded by IGS and local Partners and supported by policymakers and members of the Standing Committees of the Ministries of Ethnic Affairs and Religious Affairs led to the establishment of the Northwest Minorities Research Centre for Women and Gender Studies in Lanzhou, a major achievement that will bolster focused research on gender issues. Researchers, with the WEMC-catalysed Alliance of Professional Muslim and non-Muslim Women, created the Hanji Women's Centre as a 'safe' institutional space for Muslim women, in a conservative, gender-segregated environment. This could serve as a prototype for other places where the legitimacy of women outside assigned domestic spheres is precarious. A joint initiative of WEMC researchers, non-Muslim professionals, women *Ahong* (religious leaders) and ordinary Muslim women in producing a documentary film helped to establish women's right to shape decisions on the provincial government's radical urban redevelopment project. Their recommendation 'saved' their women's mosque. In Henan, WEMC researchers' role as teachers on Islam allowed full showcasing of WEMC philosophy and methodology to the most powerful men and women in China's largest province through an innovative educational project for all levels of the provincial administration hosted by the influential Zhengzhou University.

In Iran, a network catalysed by WEMC including WEMC researchers, progressive groups and some Afghan school teachers succeeded in convincing the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Afghan refugee question to overturn the ban on Afghan refugee children attending Iranian schools although the government has instituted a fee for them to attend schools.

The outcome of several more recommendations, under consideration by various officials and authorities remained unknown at the close of the project. These include the *Wiyata Bhakti* Teacher Union Institution's demand for just remuneration in Indonesia, the revision of the terms of reference, names and activities of Lady Health Workers by the Health Ministry and the revised policy and National Plan of Action on women in Pakistan.

Initiatives launched by groups catalysed or inspired by the WEMC RPC activities and transformative new knowledge with sustainable plans and reliable, non-DFID resources. (Purpose OVI 2)

Bolstering women's empowerment initiatives that challenge disempowering actors and factors, by June 2010, a remarkable 27 new groups directly emerged from WEMC activities; all promoting women's empowerment, groups are either self-supporting or with non-DFID financial support.

The Institute for Women's Empowerment (IWE), a new registered entity, was formed by some WEMC researchers to continue the related work beyond WEMC's life-span and to expand activities to non-Muslim contexts. Supported by a 3-year grant from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IWE is collaborating with the International Coordination Office of Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) in a joint advocacy and capacity-building programme '*Women reclaiming and re-defining culture: asserting rights over body, self and public places*'. IWE has also collaborated in capacity-building activities for WEMC Partners.

In Pakistan, ten new groups emerged: six formally registered associations, four non-formal women's community groups, and a youth group with a strong women's rights agenda. Registered organisations include two women peasant societies associated with the Punjab-wide peasant organisation (Anjuman Muzareen Punjab) demanding land rights, the first-ever women's indigenous group, and a new youth group in Balochistan's remote conservative district of Jafferabad. The emergence of this first truly indigenous women's rights group in the area has opened the way for many CSOs to introduce their programmes. Working for women's inclusion in all decision-making spheres, it facilitates both the outreach and accountability of State programmes. The youth group convinced a government boys' college to utilise unused classrooms for girls' higher education, promising to teach students themselves until proper arrangements can be made.

In Indonesia, eleven new groups of women include two livelihood-focused cooperatives: *Buluh Perindu* (Padang Pariaman) provides women a space to share experiences and plan activities collectively and reinforces economic resources by assisting women to sell produce and access government micro-credit. In Malang, led by returned migrant workers, women in the *Bina Mandiri* collective help each other find alternative means of subsistence; they regularly use research-derived knowledge and skills to discuss problems and share empowerment-related thinking and analyses with a regional audience via a radio talk-show. Other village-based initiatives are: a women's group (*Balai Perempuan*) in Bungin Pariaman and two informal 'women's schools' in Palu (*Sikoa Sintuva Besi*) and Makassar (Bulukumba District) (*Sipakkale'bi*) that provide 'safe spaces' for 'learning' - a valorised activity since involvement in WEMC underscored 'knowing' and 'understanding' as the basis for actions aimed at changing existing realities. Spaces enable women to sharpen analyses of power structures and systems and to prepare for public speaking and advocacy.

Similar 'safe spaces' **in China** enabled three local institutions⁶³ to coalesce and to (1) facilitate the emergence of the Alliance of Muslim and Non-Muslim Women around health issues, (2) establish the Hanji 'Good Day Centre' in Lanzhou and (3) make the film documentary on Kaifeng Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque. Recently a new organisation of female *imams*⁶⁴ has been formed in Henan.

In Iran, despite an increasingly challenging environment, WEMC researchers catalysed and trained a Young Women Lawyers' group that continues researching legal rights as a basis for related advocacy, and a Media Youth group that uses skills taught by WEMC in documentary film-making to share innovative strategies for challenging women's exclusion from public spaces via a first successful film. WEMC supported the establishment of a Women's Centre in Bam, the site of an earlier massive earthquake that left many women without any institutional support. The Centre provides training and legal advice in various areas to women. Other initiatives inspired by WEMC include the *Stop Stoning Forever* Campaign pushing for legal reform on adultery laws; the sexuality and youth research inspired by WEMC research methodologies and approaches; the Alternative Family Law project and an online legal education community.

Cross-border capacity-building in research led to the formation of three groups of Afghan refugee teachers in three cities (Mashad, Qom and Tehran). Using WEMC-taught research skills, these groups document the lives, skills and experiences of thousands of officially unrecognised teachers to gain recognition of their teaching skills and experiences and to improve teachers' economic and social rights within Iran and on return to Afghanistan. WEMC action research on empowerment processes with and by Indonesian migrant women workers catalysed a 24-organisation strong alliance of migrant workers, supported the establishment of the International Migrants' Alliance comprising over 100 organisations in 24 countries (15 June 2008), and helped Indonesian partners to establish the Indonesian Migrant Workers Centre for returned migrants in Indonesia. Moreover, the increasing networking facilitated amongst migrant workers' organisations, migrant women and other support groups, including religious ones, have helped to nurture leaders quickly to account for the transient population in which workers inevitably leave.

Additionally, WEMC strengthened and/or re-oriented existing groups towards women's empowerment. For example, inputs bolstered a major labour group, ATKI-HK, and the largest 16-group alliance of religiously-identified Indonesian women's groups outside Indonesia. In Pakistan, WEMC bolstered a young women's community school and reoriented a nascent group to work on women's rights and empowerment; it fortified and introduced new perspectives amongst feminist writers and rights groups. In China, WEMC workshops re-oriented the personal philosophy of the leadership of Henan Community Centre of Education and Research, a significant women's resource network run by a Christian activist, thereby influencing the Centre's approach to research projects and capacity-building events. At the same time, the Centre's experience was indispensable to WEMC's own capacity-building work. Re-oriented groups

⁶⁴ Imams are (Muslim) religious leaders of mosques or communities.

include international groups such as the reproductive health-focused ARROW, which adopted women's empowerment as a priority area for their next five year plan, following engagement with WEMC-AKU.

WEMC has seeded multiplication. A plethora of **spin-off projects** have emerged, inspired by WEMC activities such as joint projects to produce documentary films, collaborative capacity-building activities and numerous advocacy initiatives.

Indonesian Partners and associated partners continue collaborations with the National Women's Commission (*Komnas Perempuan*) and activities to reverse the anti-pornography laws. A new collaboration between SEARC and an associate partner of religious scholars (Fatayat NU) has started workshops for civil servants on women's rights from an Islamic perspective. In Minangkabau, a new project by SCN-CREST and IWE on women's inheritance and property rights is focusing on providing a database of progressive cultural resources on women's land rights; developing a capacity building methodology on women's land ownership rights in the contexts of customary laws, cultures, state laws and religious interpretations products; and supporting selected local groups to explore and develop strategies for asserting women's land rights. The project uses WEMC findings on the customary land rights of Minangkabau women and includes a WEMC field site as one of three project implementation areas.

In Pakistan, Key Partners have been working with the women's ministry, the National Assembly Standing Committee on Women and Parliamentary Women's Caucus to revise the 2002 policy on women and 1998 National Plan of Action implementing the Beijing Platform, as well as CEDAW commitments. Separately, Partners have worked with the Ministry of Health and Pakistan Planning Commission. In Pakistan, many WEMC concepts and its approach were integrated into AKU's Department of Community Health Sciences and other departments as well as in SG's main Women's Empowerment and Social Justice Programme. WEMC-SG researchers continue research on sexuality through separately mobilised funds.

In Iran, the Network of Volunteer Lawyers was introduced to the Ministry of Justice and of Health by WEMC, to work on violence against women. The website, *Towards Alternative Family Law*⁶⁵ inspired partly by WEMC and partly by the One Million Signatures Campaign, carries WEMC research on family law which is also used for drafting alternative laws seeking to render the family a *de jure* gender equitable social institution (the most widespread important demand of women and the women's movement(s) in Iran). An extremely successful on-line legal education website on family law and marriage contract has been set up by WEMC's legal researcher and Meydaan site.⁶⁶

In China, WEMC researchers and the WEMC-catalysed Alliance of Muslim and Non-Muslim women in China promote female education and engage with provincial government departments in Lanzhou and Gansu Provinces. The Media and Gender women's group (China Communication University) is reconsidering its research strategies following joint meetings with WEMC in 2008 and a perusal of WEMC literature.⁶⁷ The Hanji 'Good Day' Centre, now an established meso level institution, connects local women with medical professionals, doctors, etc. beyond the local township; a very loose nascent group based at the Centre is bringing local women together with political and religious leaderships to address issues local Muslim women feel unable to take up with political leaders. A recently constituted organisation of female *imams* or *Ahong* in Henan is engaging in meso level networking to advance the interests of their members through approaches made possible by linkages set up by WEMC and by capitalising on their access to policy-makers and Government leaders.

WEMC research catalyses women's collective challenges to disempowering discourses and practices that use 'religion' and 'culture' (Purpose OVI 4)

⁶⁵ See <http://fairfamilylaw.net>.

⁶⁶ See www.hamsary.org

⁶⁷ Personal communication from Prof. Liu, Director of Research Centre to IGS.

Without exception, all initiatives established and strengthened through WEMC bolster women's collective challenges to disempowering discourses and practices that use 'religion' and 'culture'.

Indonesia: Involving Indonesian religious scholars in research processes led to their developing progressive interpretations compiled in a handbook providing theological arguments for the rights of migrant workers as workers, as women, as citizens and as Muslims, and also affirming that Islam obliges the government, civil society, placement agents and the community to promote social justice for migrant workers in all aspects. Workshops sharing the draft manuscript elicited feedback from migrant workers and organisations in Indonesia, Malaysia, as well as returned migrants from Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the Middle East to ensure the relevance and adequacy of the textual interpretations to meet workers' needs. In other research sites, emulating new women's empowerment focused groups, women have started using the local radio to discuss and promote women's empowerment.

Reorienting existing spaces and processes towards supporting women's empowerment: WEMC discussions around women's lived experiences and gender training in *majelis taklim* gatherings in Cianjur, Indonesia, reoriented religious instruction from top-down lecturing to a problem-solving approach obliging religious authorities to research and respond to women seeking solutions to their everyday problems. Teaching now encompasses concerns for social transformation in the local community in addition to religious issues. Women leaders initiating these reforms note that many women have been emboldened, no longer embarrassed to ask questions. The process has planted the seeds for a collective movement that could be replicated in other *majelis taklim* groups.

In **Pakistan's** highly conservative and violence-prone research site in Balochistan, where all negative aspects were attributed to the tribal culture, a sharing of WEMC findings first through story-telling with women, then through a youth-focused competition on the subject of culture and women's status, followed by interactive theatre and public seminars, catalysed debates around culture and cultural identity. WEMC seminars for joint audiences of women and men broke traditional practices of gender segregation in public forums. Discussions, given further impetus by the 10-day consecutive airing of WEMC film *A Small Dream*, led women as well as men, especially the youth, to start redefining their local cultural identity to eliminate linkages with gender-based violence and other detrimental practices. These events provided women a first opportunity to raise issues publicly in front of their men. Similar debates around customary practices denying women rights were ignited after research findings were shared through interactive theatre in Punjab sites in 2010. Project time was insufficient to track concrete outcomes. In Karachi, the film documenting the efforts of the Replication School run by youngsters who are students aged between 15-19 years, gave further impetus to gender changing discourses. In practical terms, women in Balochistan reported reduced violence and attributed this to male researchers engaging with community men. Separately, the presence of a women's rights organisation (that includes men) has enabled the first few couples marrying outside the norm to remain unharmed.

In Iran, where various campaigns⁶⁸ challenge the regime's use of religion and cultural ideologies to impose restrictions on women's bodily autonomy and public participation, WEMC research on the veil and sexuality both contributed significantly to and challenged existing debates around gender segregation. The 'Women & Politics' research component helped bring to surface the impact of the ideologies of some prominent factions in government and state structures on women's autonomy and access to rights. In related debates, the WEMC 'Quotas' Workshop (May 2009) provided a base for articulating women's demands in direct negotiations with presidential candidates that were also promoted by informational pamphlets, street and face-to-face campaigning. Research greatly reinforced a women's empowerment agenda amongst the 100,000 strong women Volunteer Health Workers (VHWs) who, while transmitting health messages, are redefining and expanding their mandate in other areas of the public sphere, e.g. mobilising neighbourhoods to demand improved services and encouraging women (and men) to exercise their citizenry rights. New-found self-confidence transformed these women from subservient wives to spousal partners, providing a role-model for

⁶⁸ Campaigns include: Open Stadiums to Women, SKSWI, Campaign for Alternative Family Law, Equal Citizenship, and the Women's Charter.

others to emulate. In short, the VHW scheme has become an avenue of public participation and subverting the regime's gender ideology.

In China, WEMC-IGS workshops bringing together secular and religious women surfaced issues concerning women's entitlements in both religious and secular spheres. These interactions brought an important legal resource for religious women, who are confronted with patriarchal mind-sets within Islam, catalysing discussions of strategies to convince Muslim male counterparts to abide by State law. The discursive space of meetings helped women 'uncover' inequalities, reinforcing each other's conviction that men need 'education'. The formation of a group of female religious leaders (*Ahong*) emerging through interactions is most significant since previously, religious women, and especially leaders, did not organise in the public sphere so that their voices were muted with respect to received Islamic interpretations of women's place in society. There was no association of female religious leaders until early 2010 when WEMC created a 'discursive' space in which dissent could be safely expressed.

At least twenty women's groups use RPC-established linkages, including dialogic relations with policy-makers, implementers, decision-makers, and development practitioners to advance women's empowerment. (Purpose OVI 3)

Exceeding expectations by June 2010, at least 48 groups, mostly women's associations, were using linkages forged with policy-makers to further empowerment agendas and amplify their voices.

Regularly using linkages were: 24 migrant workers groups in WEMC-supported alliances, seven women's groups in Indonesia catalysed by WEMC, seven women's associations and a youth group in Pakistan, and one each in Iran and China. In China, *Hanji* 'Good Day' Centre enables local women to connect with medical professionals beyond the confines of the local township; the loose group based at the Centre mediates between local women and political and religious leaderships when issues arise. WEMC established linkages between researchers and women members of reformist parties in Iran, the Young Lawyers Network and the Ministry of Law and researchers and the Health Ministry. Linkages created with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Afghan refugee question by WEMC-WLUML working in tandem with other progressive groups and Afghan school teachers ensured that their demand for the educational right of Afghan refugees was heard by decision-makers. Linkages in Indonesia have enabled women to participate in several village development planning forums and to submit proposals to various government authorities and officials to demand better pay, improved facilities etc. In Pakistan, WEMC linkages combined with capacity-building enabled women to resolve a community water problem and to successfully demand provision for educating special children in the government school.

Linkages with non-state entities are also important. For instance, helping to re-orient the predominant discourse in favour of women's rights and empowerment, introductions to mainstream media facilitated by several WEMC Partners enabled migrant women's groups to voice their concerns and demands most effectively on mainstream media, including BBC and the *South China Morning Post*, as well as to conduct radio programmes and intervene in television programmes.

The achievements and impact of the WEMC Outputs (Research, Capacity-building and Communication) testify to expanded and strengthened change agendas for women's empowerment amongst a variety of civil society groups, associations and alliances that effectively contribute to the purpose: 'a sustained, growing critical mass of civil society expertise engaged in policy debates for long-term changes in policies and practices that promote women's empowerment in Muslim contexts.'

4.3. Tabular Summary of Progress Achieved

OUTPUT 1: COMMUNICATION		
The RPC's new knowledge is communicated effectively and persuasively, through diverse means and products, to key policy-makers, implementers, decision- makers, development practitioners, and other agents of change.		
OVI	Progress	Comments/lessons
<p>1. <i>The RPC's communication strategy responds to lessons learnt from interactions with policy-makers, implementers, development practitioners, decision-makers, and other agents of change</i></p>	<p>Built upon specific partner strategies, the WEMC Communication Strategy was reviewed several times and revised twice (final strategy attached as Annex 4)</p> <p>Initially, Partners focused on <u>meso level communication</u>, reviewing and revising communication strategies to ensure effectiveness and responsiveness to site-specific issues, while influencing policymakers and agents of change using formal and informal channels.</p> <p>By the third year, <u>communication at national and international levels</u> had increased substantially. The RPC made strategic use of opportunities offered by major civil society events, international conferences and invited inputs in UN forums to present research insights and messages.</p> <p>WEMC successfully input in UN documents and initiatives via UN ESCAP and the 15 year review of the Beijing Platform.</p>	<p>Sharing results with research communities is essential to catalyse sustainable change.</p> <p>Nationally, planning processes and reporting on international commitments provide important opportunities for sharing key lessons to influence policies and practices. Policy-briefs must be tailored to specific audiences.</p> <p>Amending major government policy requires longer gestation period than the project lifecycle.</p> <p>Cross-sectoral partnerships of academic and civil society institutions are important for bringing grassroots issues to national, regional and international forums.</p> <p>Video documentaries are highly effective in disseminating results and key messages; they also present a more holistic picture of the situation and amplify the voices of directly concerned women. Shown on private channels, at film festivals and CSO events, WEMC documentaries are freely accessible on WEMC's website.</p>
<p>2. <i>At least 100 civil society & educational institutions in 20 countries use the RPC's multimedia outputs, including its publications, Web site and films.</i></p>	<p>WEMC publications, videos and web materials are used for training, research & advocacy by at least 163 institutions (40 educational institutions and 123 civil society organisations) in 19 countries.</p> <p>The number excludes usage by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Government ministries and departments</u> in Iran, Indonesia and Pakistan • <u>UN and development agencies</u> receiving/requesting outputs • <u>Researchers, media groups/ institutions & individuals</u> in various locations including reached Qatar, Australia, Denmark, Norway, Sweden & Germany • People <u>accessing products via YouTube and websites</u>, such as the Farsi-language website of WLUML, and Partners' own websites. 	<p>Tracking actual usage of products distributed, requested & accessed on websites is difficult, e.g. the wide international distribution by the UN-focused WUNRN of WEMC products. This requires dedicated resources and a post-project timeframe.</p> <p>Non-academic products have been pivotal e.g. highly successful & versatile WEMC documentary films are used by government authorities to train the civil services; by professors in university courses; by CSOs for training, in advocacy and opening discussions on sensitive issues by showing films from other components, and by religious teachers in Indonesia. They have also been aired by commercial channels.</p> <p>WEMC manuals/handbooks have been adopted by government officials (Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia) as well as women and CSOs. Other research materials are being used for revising</p>

		policy (Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran) including for legal reforms and development planning.
<p>3. <i>At least two RPC members are invited per year as resource persons or experts by policy-makers, development practitioners and other decision-makers to provide inputs.</i></p>	<p>Achievements far exceed the target: by 2010, WEMC researchers were receiving dozens of invitations; more than 20 significant invitations enabled inputs in key policy formulation, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministries & departments of health, population, social services /welfare (Iran, Pakistan, China), women’s ministries (Indonesia, Pakistan, Afghanistan), national commissions on women (Indonesia, migrant workers), provincial Governor, Dept. of Internal Affairs, EED⁶⁹ (Indonesia), ministry of Education, Parliamentary standing committee, Planning Commission and bilateral development agencies, e.g. DFID, GTZ, HBF (Pakistan), National Party Congress members & other officials, Chinese Islamic Association (executive arm of the Chinese Govt) (China). • International inputs were made in UNESCAP, other UN agencies/forums (Indonesia, Pakistan, ENGENDER) 	<p>Initial invitations depended on pre-existing linkages & recognition of researchers’ expertise by policy-makers & other decision-makers; this changed as the RPC work gained visibility.</p> <p>In more closed environments, informal consultations are a high priority; communication interlocutors, champions & allies are needed to further convey messages in official venues, esp. recommendations for legal and policy change.</p> <p>Invited inputs in international processes/events provide important opportunities for sharing key lessons to influence regional and international policy-making and practices.</p> <p>It is important to influence a variety of relevant policies, e.g. on health, minorities, development plans and not focus exclusively on ‘women’ specific policies.</p> <p>Raising issues at regional and international arenas helps to influence national policies.</p>
<p>4. <i>The diversity of media used for communicating WEMC findings reflects the range of audiences addressed.</i></p>	<p>Highly diverse tailor-made communication media addressed a wide range of audiences, reaching:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <u>General public or specific audiences:</u> multilingual websites, blogs, films, publications, etc. [Annex 5A], interviews on mainstream radio, TV, print media (Hong Kong, Indonesia, Pakistan, UK, Iran), web dissemination of products, case studies, ‘success stories’ b. <u>Policy-makers</u> (i) formal audiences (Indonesia); (ii) public dialogues with community women and CSOs (Pakistan, Indonesia); (iii) public forums (all RPC); (iv) academic events (all components) c. <u>Community women:</u> radio (Indonesia, migrant workers), research-based story-telling, interactive theatre (Pakistan), songs on CD (migrant workers), discussions, films & capacity building (all sites) 	<p>The same research findings/messages need to be packaged differently for different audiences, (exceptionally films, have been effective with all audiences).</p> <p>Sharing findings within research communities is essential to bringing about change; and helps to ensure that policy recommendations are in keeping with the actual needs of women.</p> <p>A transformative research process enables a constant sharing with concerned communities, esp. when a participatory approach is used. This allows permits readjustment of research directions.</p> <p>Using interactive methodologies with communities that allow further discussion is critical. Innovative methods such as interactive theatre, narrative story-telling & competitions around key findings enable direct participation as well as ownership of messages by community women.</p> <p>Policy briefs and formal presentations of findings</p>

⁶⁹ Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst - EED (Church Development Service) is an association of the Protestant Churches in Germany

	<p>d. <u>Civil society</u>: WEMC-organised international events, national/ local seminars, forums, workshops, symposia, conferences etc. [Annex 5C]</p> <p>An <u>electronic Bulletin</u> added in 2009, reached development organisations, academic/research institutions, donors, CSOs, national and local government agencies, relevant UN agencies</p>	<p>have been effective with government authorities and UN agencies.</p> <p>Websites carrying e-publications, webcasts & films allow access by a wide diverse audience and are vital in closed environments.</p> <p>Formal conference papers may be the best modality for influencing thinking and ensuring uptake in certain country contexts.</p>
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OUTPUT 2: CAPACITY BUILDING
The capacity of civil society groups and networks is developed in ways that enhance their critical analyses of changing environments, as well as their growing engagement for women-centred transformations in policy and practice.

OVIs	Progress	Comments/lessons
<p>1. <i>At least 25 institutions or organisations and at least 20 women's groups in at least 4 countries are strengthened to engage in evidence/ research-based advocacy</i></p>	<p>In four years, WEMC strengthened 100 institutions/ organisations⁷⁰, 49 women's groups including 5 alliances, & 2 networks in 4 countries to engage in evidence/ research-based advocacy initiatives viz:</p> <p><u>Indonesia</u>: 24 women's organisations/ institutions & 16 women's groups including associate partners and women's informal schools</p> <p><u>China</u>: 8 institutions, organisations & groups</p> <p><u>Pakistan</u>: 37 organisations, 4 women's groups, including AKU's other departments, and 2 networks (PRHN and LDM)</p> <p><u>Iran</u>: 8 groups and 1 institution:</p> <p><u>Cross border Afghanistan</u>: 3 Afghan teachers' groups⁷¹</p> <p><u>Cross border migrant workers</u>: 24 migrant workers' organisations, 16 women's groups in two WEMC-supported Hong Kong-based alliances (PILAR & GAMMI) 3 field partners</p> <p>Other organisations strengthened include the new Institute of Women's Empowerment (IWE) and Fatayat Nadlatul Ulama of progressive Islamic scholars in Indonesia.</p>	<p>Deepening understanding on gender and development is often a pre-requisite for building advocacy capacity.</p> <p>By providing women a first opportunity to discuss issues of power and empowerment in their lives, research can seed grassroots indigenous strategies and initiatives for empowerment. Although not all can be tracked, these new initiatives are crucial for sustained advocacy of women's rights and gender equality.</p> <p>Addressing women's basic needs (e.g. health care, fair wage) may be a useful path for raising awareness of rights & empowerment, provided a focus on power dynamics is retained.</p> <p>Awareness combined with capacity building encourages women to resolve identified problems both individually and collectively.</p> <p>Strengthening women to be rights claimants requires capacity building tailored to specific issues and circumstances. Sharing successful strategies from elsewhere is a powerful catalyst for local action.</p> <p>Changes in management and premature RPC closure impeded follow-up and planned collaborative work.</p>
<p>2. <i>A pool of at least 80 researchers on women's</i></p>	<p>By June 2010, WEMC RPC had enhanced the capacity of 228 researchers to document & analyse women's empowerment.</p> <p>In 2009-10, capacity continued to be</p>	<p>Continuous investment in conceptual and practical training is essential, especially when the existing pool of qualitative action research expertise is inadequate. NB. It is not always possible to assess the extent to which acquired</p>

⁷⁰ This number includes WEMC Key and Associate Partners

⁷¹ These groups are located in Mashad, Qom, and Tehran.

<p>empowerment in 4 countries is trained, with at least 30% involved in active research.</p>	<p>enhanced of at least 159 persons 45% (73) of whom remained actively involved in research by the end of the project.</p> <p>In 2008-9, 68% of those whose capacity WEMC built were active in research. As the project neared completion and the focus shifted from research and capacity building to communication, the percentage of those involved was reduced.</p>	<p>skills have been incorporated.</p> <p>Capacity can be built in a variety of ways. WEMC used e.g. formal 3-weeks training on concepts, data collection tools and specific topics, tutorials, analysis and writing workshops, seminars and constant mentoring. Learning was often a 2-way process.</p> <p>A paucity of relevant social science materials in research languages can be overcome by using literary texts and films to discuss conceptual issues.</p> <p>Cross-team learning, precluded because of resource and time constraints, would have benefited all concerned.</p>
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OUTPUT 3: RESEARCH		
The RPC's ground-breaking, high-quality and coherent new knowledge transforms understanding of women's empowerment in Muslim contexts, with particular relevance for the MDGs and the Beijing Platform for Action.		
OVI's	Progress	Comments/Lessons
<p>1. Factors that support or hinder women's empowerment are identified, including sources of support or obstruction</p>	<p>Interim analyses confirm several WEMC hypotheses and provide other insights <u>Key insight: meso level public discursive spaces are the most critical supportive factor</u> across sites and regardless of specific issues; they catalyse cognitive ability making visible the power structures impacting women's lives, allowing women to devise appropriate indigenously driven collective action.</p> <p>Obstructive & supportive factors <u>At the micro level</u> the family (extended or nuclear) plays a dual role. The most immediate and critical source of obstruction, but also an essential (sometimes only) source of support, the family is a primary site of contestation for women's empowerment</p> <p><u>Meso level:</u> WEMC's contention that the usually overlooked meso level is absolutely vital was confirmed. Most disempowering factors & actors needing to be overcome are located at this level, making women's indigenous empowerment strategies all the more crucial</p> <p>As predicted, women's empowerment policies filtered through the meso level are impeded/blocked or distorted because e.g. women lack knowledge of existing schemes, village officials are unaware or oppose these;</p>	<p>WEMC shows that it is possible to overcome the challenges of undertaking transformative research in repressive and unpredictable political contexts.</p> <p>An appropriate research methodology is an important resource for women's empowerment; researchers must be responsive to informational and other needs beyond project parameters.</p> <p>Key research insights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public discursive spaces for women can be more important for empowerment than either improved access to resources or facilitated policy dialogues, important as these may be • Improved access to resources <i>per se</i> does not transform power structures, this requires collectivised actions • Cultural control is often exercised through internalised notions of 'honour'. Control over female sexuality (via dress codes, in marriage laws and practice, restricted mobility etc.) is a key factor of control underlying other control mechanisms e.g. access to resources and decision-making forums and often the justification for violence <p>Further work is needed on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's own understandings of power & empowerment to extract lessons for appropriate planning.

	<p>cultural norms imposed by local gatekeepers, too often internalised by women, prevent acceptance.</p> <p><u>At the macro level, the state's role is crucial.</u> A conducive/disabling environment is determined by the combination of supportive measures (e.g. promoting women's equal rights) and obstructive ones (e.g. reflecting patriarchal values promoting the domestication of women).</p> <p>The State's authoritative status means that state policies can unintentionally support women's empowerment, e.g. Iran's VHWs Programme, created to control population enabled volunteers to enhance their agency and community influence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External and internal forces in constructions of and contestations over 'Muslim' and other social identities & impact on women. • The drivers for women positioning themselves variously as citizens, ethnic or religious groups, in negotiating rights to extract lessons for governance/citizenship. • Documenting for replication elsewhere WEMC's research approach, commended by the external Mid-Term Review Report and WEMC CAG, which engendered transformation in specific sites, including processes of knowledge creation in a multi-sited RPC with distinctive and sometimes complex relations and collaborations. • Further cross-comparative analysis to cull lessons for upscaling & recommendations for regional/international action.
<p>2. <i>Comparative synthesised analyses of data from diverse research sites/'Muslim' contexts provide fresh insights on women's empowerment</i></p>	<p>Premature closure impeded consolidation of important progress in comparative analyses of research data between WEMC sites and components</p> <p>Comparative analyses advancing a new transnational narrative on women's empowerment beyond WEMC-specific contexts can influence policies at regional and international levels.</p>	<p>Full comparisons are dependent on mobilising required funding.</p> <p>WEMC experience suggests transformative research is best undertaken by researchers with some degree of 'insider' status in the community or by collaborating with existing groups invested in, or willing to accept the transformative agenda of research.</p> <p>A change agenda needs extensive preparations and a prolonged presence in the research site to allow meaningful partnership and mutual learning amongst researchers and participants.</p> <p>Identifying a specific cause around which to coalesce action helps transformation.</p>

<p>3. A transformative theoretical framework catalyses a growing body of critical, well-founded new knowledge that is tested empirically through participatory RPC activities</p>	<p>The collectively developed WEMC Research Framework (RF), published as <i>Women empowering themselves: a framework that interrogates and transforms</i> (2008) has been praised as ‘refreshingly innovative’, ‘fantastic feedback across the board’, ‘very useful’, ‘exciting work’ and is excerpted on AWID & Millennia 2015 websites.</p> <p>Available in all four main research languages⁷² as well as English (Chinese version is now available at http://www.wemc.com.hk/web/rf/Chinese_Version_RF_Final.pdf).</p> <p>Feedback: Indonesian academics believe it answers concerns about research methods disconnected from ground realities. Academics and activists are adapting & applying RF concepts in their work/engagements. Soft copies proactively circulated by others engaged in women’s empowerment initiatives.</p> <p>Distributed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy-makers & development practitioners at regional, national and local levels e.g. numerous UN officials and governments of Indonesia, Pakistan and Thailand • Academics & university students • Other researchers & activists • Religious scholars in Indonesia 	<p>The combination of academic and civil society institutions as RPC partners invigorated the whole by pooling diverse strengths and perspectives on research.</p> <p>A coherent and explicitly conceptualised research framework (RF) unifying research drew upon and was enriched by grounded, context-specific field research that contributed contextualised understandings and actions.</p> <p>Translating (and adapting) the RF into all main research languages was pivotal, providing important new insights and understanding. Sufficient flexibility within components allowed research directions to be adjusted and redirected for greater relevance/impact.</p> <p>Viewing the WEMC RF as a living and developing document was important. Sharing a published version widely beyond the RPC enabled external inputs and ensured that WEMC concepts and methodological approach reached a broad audience.</p> <p>Should open association with an international programme increase security risks for researchers, it is possible to address (and present) different aspects of the research separately.</p>
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PURPOSE:		
A sustained, growing critical mass of civil society expertise engaged in policy debates for long-term changes in policies and practices that promote women’s empowerment in Muslim contexts		
OVI	Progress	Comments/Lessons
<p>By End of Project:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>At least 10 WEMC recommendation s/sets of</p>	<p>At least eighteen specific WEMC recommendations for policy/policy change were accepted by various authorities within and beyond the four nodal countries of research and acted upon</p> <p><u>Women migrant workers: 5 policy changes</u>⁷³</p>	<p><u>Communication for policy uptake must be tailored to specific country contexts, the level of the intervention and desired outcome.</u> The State itself does not have a uniform outlook. In some contexts and for some communities, national actors may be more supportive of women’s empowerment;</p>

⁷² This includes Urdu, Farsi, Chinese and Bahasa-Indonesian.

⁷³ Cancellation of Order SE2258 prohibiting Indonesian migrant workers from changing (placement) agents (21, Feb 08), Cancellation local service fee for Identity Cards by Gov of Indonesia, Placement fees reduced from HK\$21,000 (1,835.78 GBP) to HK\$15,000, One-day passport renewal facilities for migrant workers in Hong Kong and Macau.

<p>recommendations are incorporated into government policies & practices in the region and implemented.</p>	<p><u>Pakistan</u> A set of 4 recommendations by the Punjab Government to improve government shelters for women; Women’s Ministry agreed to revise the National Plan of Action; Parliamentary Caucus and Advisor to the Prime Minister on Women launched a policy revision process with invited WEMC assistance.</p> <p><u>Indonesia</u>: 3 policy changes in South Sulawesi abolished whipping law & overturned laws discriminating against women on the basis of ‘religion’; Ministry of Women extended its Integrated Service Centre for women and children to WEMC research site.</p> <p><u>Iran</u>: Ban on Afghan refugee children attending Iranian public schools overturned by Ministry of Foreign Affairs.</p> <p><u>China</u>: A women & gender studies research centre established in Gansu; city government declared Kaifeng women’s mosque ‘safe’ from demolition; Islamic Association (part of government structure) acted on recommendations to improve education/training & employment conditions of female religious leaders.</p>	<p>in others the focus may need to be on sub-national meso level actors and institutions. <u>Context-specific communication modalities have to be adopted</u>: mass rallies and public dialogues may be effective in some contexts, quiet advocacy in ‘safe spaces’ via informal engagements in others.</p> <p><u>Policy-change vs. policy application</u> Changing policies requires different interventions than pressing for (better) application of existing policies/laws</p> <p><u>Linkages with groups/institutions outside the RPC</u> including government institutions and semi-autonomous bodies & CSOs bolster women’s initiatives and strengthen advocacy for women’s empowerment.</p>
<p>2. Initiatives launched by groups inspired by WEMC activities & transformative new knowledge have sustainable plans supported by reliable, non-DFID resources</p>	<p>WEMC inspired and catalysed 27 groups working on women’s empowerment in every component, none dependent on DFID funding.</p> <p>Multiple additional spin-off projects inspired/facilitated by WEMC include <u>collaboration with state institutions</u>, e.g. women’s commissions, women’s ministries and other ministries, departments, embassies, parliamentary and other legislative bodies and other authorities.</p> <p>Collaborative activities range from livelihood strengthening with a rights perspective (Indonesia) and legal reform groups (Indonesia, Iran Pakistan) to religious leaders engaging in meso level networking to advance the interests of their members (Indonesia, China).</p> <p>Initiatives include capacity building for govt officials (Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, China), using WEMC materials for further writing and advocacy purposes (Iran, Indonesia) training and research (Pakistan, China).</p> <p>Some Partners started new research collaborations on women’s empowerment</p>	<p><u>Considerable investment is needed to nurture new initiatives and ensure their sustainability</u>; internal capacity should be built for mobilising necessary resources.</p> <p>Extractive research methodologies do not lend themselves to such an outcome due to severely limit interaction with community women needed to enable new thinking and actions to emerge.</p> <p>New initiatives stem from WEMC’s approach. In all sites, research established or re-oriented public spaces for women (whether deemed ‘safe or otherwise), built local networks/alliances and, using diverse entry points, provided women conducive venues to strengthen agency for transforming power relations and increasing women’s public participation.</p> <p>Initiatives, especially new group formation, have been catalysed by sharing research findings in research communities.</p>

	outside WEMC.	
<p>3. <i>At least 20 women's groups make use of RPC-established linkages, including dialogic relations with policy-makers, implementers, decision-makers, and development practitioners to advance women's empowerment</i></p>	<p>By June 2010, WEMC achieved more than double its target: at least 50 groups – mostly women's associations - were using WEMC established linkages to advance women's empowerment and rights</p> <p>Linkages connected a vast array of divergent groups: from <i>The Iran Feminist School'</i> website to progressive political parties, from women in religious instruction gatherings (<i>majelis taklim</i>, Indonesia and <i>jalaseh</i>, Iran) and institutions (<i>Ahong</i> in China, scholars' organisations in Indonesia) to secular associations and women's rights groups (Pakistan, Indonesia), from grassroots WEMC-catalysed new initiatives to migrant workers engaging with national and UN Special procedures and conferences, from local government implementers to mainstream mass media entities.</p>	<p>WEMC added value to & strengthened pre-existing relations: contributing to bolstering processes of documentation, situation analyses & problem identification; providing strategising expertise for actions, navigating directions, accelerating processes; expanding the reach of voices, multiplying effects, advancing calls to different levels and sectors.</p> <p><i>NB. Work with civil society partners</i> requires time/resource allocations & rigorous follow-up. Formal agreements for collaboration can be helpful.</p> <p>Facilitating participation of associated women & groups at major events helps extend their networks and amplifies the RPC messages.</p>
<p>4. <i>WEMC research catalyses women's collective challenges to disempowering discourses and practices that use 'religion' and 'culture'.</i></p>	<p>More gender-equitable interpretations of culture and religion emerged at all sites with women altering daily practices and accepted conventions of gender roles.</p> <p><u>Migrant workers</u> challenged the use of religion as well as culture and e.g. prevented conservative religion becoming the single reference point in an alliance of religiously defined groups (GAMMI). Religious scholars supporting women's rights from an Islamic perspective changed both their own discourse and that of migrant workers.</p> <p><u>Indonesia:</u> No longer viewing a disempowered status to be women's destiny and convinced they are entitled to rights, women re-negotiated relations with their partners, society and government, constructing alternative interpretations of gender relations.</p> <p><u>Pakistan:</u> New discourses are redefining the parameters of cultural identity to divorce it from culturally justified violence. Changed practices include reduced gender-based violence, increased women's political participation, and new possibility of couples marrying outside the norm to live unharmed.</p> <p><u>Iran:</u> Existing campaigns challenging the regime's use of religion and cultural ideologies to impose restrictions on women's bodily autonomy and public participation have been bolstered by WEMC research on women and</p>	<p>A research methodology that facilitates and supports <u>the extensive involvement of researchers in the community</u> of research develops trust and better understanding of local dynamics that can help pinpoint leverage for change. Researchers from within the community become important change agents.</p> <p>Unlike achieving policy changes, often best served by inputs of people perceived to be 'experts', challenging existing cultural and religious normative prescriptions is best carried out by those accepted as community 'insiders'. Discussions held within the community (however broadly defined) can usefully reorient existing venues (e.g. religious instruction but also secular civil society interventions) towards gender equality and women's empowerment.</p> <p>Change is dependent on a rejection of those sources used to justify existing power relations. A changed perception can be brought about by comparative information from another location within or outside the country, by a new sense of collective self (e.g. as migrant workers) or a new ideological perspective e.g. feminist thinking.</p> <p>Sometimes new interpretations of religion can help; at others, knowledge of secular</p>

	<p>politics and especially research on the veil & sexuality that also challenges existing debates on gender segregation.</p> <p><u>China</u>: female religious leaders started to consider how to change patriarchal norms and bring about desired reforms in traditional female education.</p>	<p>laws/constitution, has been a key catalyst.</p>
<p>5. <i>Decision-makers (especially policy-makers & implementers) and agents of change utilise the RPC's new knowledge to support gender equality and women's empowerment in policy and practice.</i></p>	<p>In Indonesia, Pakistan & Iran, authorities are using WEMC products to support women's rights.</p> <p><u>Pakistan</u>: The Punjab Social Welfare Department adopted the research-based Manual of Operations prepared by WEMC-SG for government-run shelters and new rights modules in its regular training; the Planning Commission in preparing a new 5-year plan.</p> <p><u>Indonesia</u>: The Makassar Legal Bureau, Internal Affairs uses results on gender-discriminatory regulations to revise laws; the District Parliament Head, Cianjur, to revise Regional Regulations. A Handbook of Islamic perspectives of women's rights as women workers and citizens is being used to train government officials.</p> <p><u>Iran</u>: Ministry of Health uses two WEMC films on health workers and adopted a WEMC book as standard teaching material. Former WEMC researchers use WEMC-SG film, <i>A Small Dream</i> in a government nation-wide programme.</p> <p><u>Civil society institutions use WEMC products extensively, e.g.</u></p> <p><u>China</u>: Lanzhou Uni. professors incorporate WEMC-derived issues in courses; in Henan, using their access as teachers on Islam at Zhengzhou University, WEMC researchers share RPC insights, concepts/philosophy with government officials</p> <p><u>Afghan refugees</u> use films and publications to consolidate networking and strengthen negotiations with authorities.</p> <p><u>Migrant workers</u> organisations use products & findings to advance their agenda in negotiations with authorities, to change thinking amongst allies and to amplify the reach of public messages including on mass media.</p>	<p>Of the numerous ways of ensuring that research findings are used by official decision-makers, the most useful has been handbooks, manuals and training modules that can be incorporated into existing programmes.</p> <p>For uptake, research findings may need to be converted into evidence-based or supported policy recommendations. Authorities may need to be facilitated even when they are convinced, e.g. by preparing training modules, drafting texts of recommended changes. Skills for such conversion may not exist within research teams and may need to be developed or external assistance mobilised for this.</p> <p>In restricted environments, universities can function as effective agents of change. They provide 'legitimate' spaces in which to share insights and lessons for which few other avenues are possible.</p>

4.4 Impact on poverty

Some WEMC achievements directly contribute to poverty alleviation. Policy reforms carried out by the Indonesian government in consequence of research-based advocacy, lessen the economic burden of over 100,000 **Indonesian migrant workers** in Hong Kong and several thousand more in Macau thanks to the reduction of placement fees for migrant workers by approximately GBP 526.17, while changed regulations open up better employment opportunities. The cancellation of service fees for issuing Identity Cards to potential workers would impact the half million estimated workers. WEMC strengthening of migrant workers' associations, alliances and support institutions that reinforces activism for their own empowerment heightens women workers' collective bargaining capacity to demand better rights and benefits. Similarly, the radio and television talk shows being aired as a result of WEMC research and capacity building interventions enable potential migrants to benefit from the lessons, legal awareness and experiences of other women in catchment areas around the research sites.

Within **Indonesia**, two new women's livelihood-focused collectives bolster women's earning capacity by directly facilitating sales and by improving access to government credit and other schemes. If accepted, the demand submitted by auxiliary government schoolteachers for increased pay scales could improve the economic situation of tens of thousands of women so-employed. Finally, the emergent participation of women in the village planning process relating to budget allocations has the potential to improve economic well-being.

In **Pakistan**, research with women peasants in Punjab, that also provided support for policy dialogues with the government, strengthened the bargaining position of the all-Punjab Peasant Association and women's position within this. In March 2010, in WEMC-supported negotiations, the government assured the peasants' representatives that tenants will be given priority in terms of access to land and that no large land tracts will be rented out to either foreign or national commercial enterprises. Women are represented in the newly constituted district committees of peasants and government officials discussing future plans. This has the potential to greatly alleviate economic pressures on poor tenants and peasants throughout Punjab and, should the Punjab government accept the recommendation to replicate the land-to-women scheme operative in Sindh, will benefit women directly. In the economically deprived Balochistan research site, the emergence of a women's rights organisation has had considerable localised impact for women's economic well-being. In an opportunity-poor environment, *Nisa* finances itself through its computer, sewing, and beauty parlour classes as well as by undertaking commissioned embroidery and tailoring. Former trainees have now established four new computer training centres for women and girls and several beauty parlours. Importantly, the presence of the first reliable locally-rooted women's organisation enabled proper implementation of government poverty-alleviation/relief schemes since *Nisa* could identify truly needy women as recipients. To meet the needs of women who could not be accommodated in the 50 stipends allowed to the union council (administrative unit), *Nisa* convinced women councillors to mobilise other work for an additional 30-40 women.

As indicated by WEMC-AKU data, although 'empowerment' alone cannot ensure good health, the absence of empowerment is strongly linked to ill health (both mental and physical), is in itself a major cause of poverty. Research suggests that women's empowerment can have a considerable positive impact on health as empowered women are better placed to access healthcare, make responsible and healthy choices about their family size, hygiene, educational and nutritional practices, positively impacting their family's health. The link between health and poverty alleviation was not a focus of WEMC, but better health is known to contribute to reduction in disability adjusted life years (DALYs) and increase in quality adjusted life years (QALYs) thereby contributing to national and international development.

In **Iran**, research documented numerous indigenous strategies and initiatives by women to renegotiate their marriages on more equal terms or obtain divorces. These include many small income generating projects set up by various progressive women's groups that, combined with legal training, have started a cycle of change by enabling women to become more economically independent as well as to renegotiate relationships. Strategies include women investing their inheritance or *mahr* (dower) to ensure some independent income for

themselves. Unfortunately the impact of publishing these self-help strategies⁷⁴ as models for other women could not be ascertained within the project time.

In Dongxiang, **China**, research activities around embroidery as a 'safe space' for women to congregate and discuss issues relating to their life-situations and empowerment improved the livelihood options of at least 150 women. In Henan, a new organisation for female *Ahong* seeks to redress the poverty and lack of welfare provision for female religious leaders since the implications of poverty amongst them has ramifications far beyond individuals: it prevents these leaders from improving their own educational (thus leadership) qualifications, impacting the women they guide and counsel, and it prevents social and political networking needed to sustain dynamic congregations and ensure maintenance of the mosque infrastructure. These seeds of change are likely to have ripple effects beyond what has been documented so far, but this can only be gauged by subsequent assessments.

5. Lessons learnt

5.1. Working with Partners

5.1.1. Underpinning strengths and overarching challenges:

Commitment and track records WEMC achievements were built on two strengths:

- (1) Partners' commitment to support changes on the ground among local communities in all research sites *and*
- (2) Partners' pre-existing associations/relations that enhanced the RPC's cumulative social capital.

Both were pivotal in catalysing and reinforcing the reflection-analysis-action cycles amongst community women, in building capacity for research, in promoting evidence-based advocacy, and in amplifying women's voices through multiple channels of communication. However, if **a rich track record of earlier work enabled innovative modes of collaboration in some places, in others**, Partners built relations of trust through WEMC's research approach (e.g. SG in Pakistan) that prioritised eliciting, understanding and being guided by women's own analyses of the power relations and power structures impacting their lives.

WEMC added value to and strengthened pre-existing relations by (a) contributing to and bolstering processes of documentation, situation analyses and problem identification, (b) providing strategising expertise for actions, navigating directions, accelerating processes, (c) expanding the reach of voices, multiplying effects, advancing calls to different levels and sectors. However, **work with civil society partners** requires rigorous follow-up; formal agreements for collaboration helps to ensure responsibilities are met. The time and resource necessary for collaboration with civil society members should be built into the programme plan.

Cross-sectoral partnerships play a pivotal role in bringing issues from the grassroots to national forums and beyond to change attitudes and thinking, to influence public opinion and to open channels for change. WEMC brought together and synergised the diverse interests of academics, NGOs, grassroots, media, semi-government bodies and the public to bring about meaningful change through viable and sustainable partnerships, where dynamic synergies dovetailed in support of women's agendas, be it of migrant workers, of refugees, of peasants or community women.

Common lexicons & understanding: In consortia as diverse as WEMC, a common lexicon and working culture cannot be assumed and must be consciously developed. Investment must be made to build a shared understanding of research methodology and what constitutes capacity-building and communication not only amongst Key Partners but also amongst field partners. In retrospect, more time and funds should have been invested in all components to build rapport and mutual understanding across locations, components, Key Partners and between them and local partners. An early development of such understanding would have

⁷⁴ Thirty Years of Women Struggle to Reformulate the Family Law in the Islamic Republic.(tentative title).

facilitated the subsequent interweaving of the different components by enabling teams to (a) deepen understanding of the concepts used in the RPC and (b) develop appreciation for diverse perspectives within the RPC. Such integration was greatly exacerbated by the abrupt shortening of the project phase, leading to sudden termination of whatever work was either prepared for, or already in progress.

Policy formulation will benefit from further investigation/study on the following issues of pivotal importance to women's empowerment:

- Women's own understanding of power, disempowerment and empowerment
- Accessing the building blocks of power and citizenship rights
- Research as a transformative process supportive of women's empowerment, including reflections on the challenges and achievements of such an approach
- Women organising for empowerment and implications for citizenship:
 - Collective public discursive spaces for women
 - Leadership issues
 - Women organising and redefining citizenship

Transformative Research Teams: Mobilising research teams across various WEMC research sites with not only the requisite language, research skills and sufficient familiarity with ground realities, but also invested in a transformative research process around women's empowerment, presented a major challenge. The bridging of academic and activist circles also requires dedicated time. Sufficient investments must be made to locate, mobilise and then build the requisite skills and, sometimes, perspective within teams. Self awareness/reflexivity must be nurtured amongst action research field teams. Confronted by dissimilar sets of issues, teams used context-specific ways to address these challenges. (See good practices below) Several Partners confronted a further complication/challenge. The uncertainty about post-Inception funds meant that exploratory work was done by existing regular staff, while new teams were subsequently recruited for the main project duration. As a result, the field lessons of the inception phase sometimes had to be re-learned.

The challenge in the China research conducted by academics and research institutions was to ensure effective local partnerships. A partnership initiated by SEARC had to be abandoned (See *WEMC Annual Report 2006-7*) IGS's successful partnerships, built on pre-existing relationships and including researchers embedded in local communities, still required heavy investments in establishing trust and common vision.

Insider-Outer Dynamics: Extractive research methodologies are unsuited for bringing about community-level changes. Transformative research is best undertaken by researchers with some degree of 'insider' status in the community of research. Should researchers consist exclusively of 'outsiders' it is essential to establish and nurture relationships and collaborations with local groups already invested in or ready to buy into the proposed transformative agenda. A research methodology that facilitates and supports the extensive involvement of researchers in the research community develops both trust and better understanding of local dynamics. Action research calls for self-reflection about ethical issues and a recognition that social changes must not be imposed on research participants who are best placed to define their own needs and possibilities for action.

WEMC's experience of transformative research on women's empowerment 'from the inside out', suggests a dialectical process between 'outside intervention' and 'self-motivation'. Facilitated discussions and public discursive spaces provide a springboard for women leaders to emerge at the grassroots who can lead engagements with local government as well as community decision-makers for change. Such an approach contributes to long-term sustainability.

Male researchers: Partners with men in research teams found the male presence was an unexpected bonus in a number of ways. Engaging with men and eliciting their views on women's empowerment issues, male researchers helped to identify possibilities for leveraging change for women's empowerment by providing an invaluable male insider view. Simultaneously, they helped to pinpoint potential obstacles and possible allies.

In some places, women attributed positive changes to the engagements of male researchers with male relatives and/or community members.

For many women involved in WEMC, the enhanced skills, knowledge and self-confidence gained through the process allowed them to develop and adopt strategies for maximising local, regional and transnational media resources. With additional connections and linkages, a significant number were able to find the leverage to press for seemingly impossible change, e.g. between different departments of the Hong Kong Government and between them and the Indonesian Government, or between government departments to improve policy implementation for women e.g. in Pakistan.

5.2 Good Practice/Innovation

Unifying framework & diversifying realities: A main feature of the WEMC RPC was the dialogic relationship between a coherent and explicitly conceptualised research framework (RF) that retains power as central to women's empowerment discourses as a unifying factor on the one hand, and grounded, context-specific field research to bring forth contextualised understandings and actions on the other. The core research questions addressing four thematic areas of the WEMC RF stimulated enquiries and analyses of women's understandings of the power relations in which they are embedded. Adapting the RF to contextual specificities engendered new understandings rooted in women's situational realities. These oppositional drivers presented significant management challenges, but the dialogic relationship generated a creative tension that spurred innovative transformations among researchers and community women alike. This propelled new synergies at the grassroots, especially opening public discursive spaces for women to share experiences, views, and analyses of power, and, based on these, to devise indigenous strategies appropriate in their contexts.

Critically, WEMC's research questions and framework provided Partners sufficient flexibility to allow new dimensions to be added and directions to be pursued. Without such flexibility, the Iran team could not have made its two unplanned films on the VHWs which have been tremendously influential with both government and the concerned women. Similarly, AKU could not have used the participatory action research approach to develop innovative models for women's empowerment with the respective communities; or IGS to create 'safe spaces' as cradles of further reflection, support and action.

Publishing the interim WEMC research framework and making this widely available has encouraged researchers and activists outside the RPC to use and adapt the framework for and in their own work. Simultaneously it has helped to elicit inputs from outside the WEMC RPC on the subject and the document enables a means of sustaining the influence of WEMC thinking in an easily available document.

Transformative research & research teams: WEMC set out to engage in transformative research that, by integrating research, capacity-building and communication, would strengthen civil society voices sufficiently to sustain momentum for women's empowerment after the project life-cycle. In this, the RPC's unusual combination of academic and activist organisations was of vital importance, the process invigorated by the coming together of diverse strengths and perspectives. Such collaborations, however, require careful negotiations of differing perspectives and inclinations of activists and academics e.g. in Iran where researchers were evenly divided between middle to senior academics on the one hand and activists on the other.

Combining activist and academic approaches allowed the development of forms of truly participatory and transformative activities that, in numerous locations, catalysed processes with the potential to sustain a change agenda for women's empowerment. WEMC's experience of transformative research on women's empowerment 'from the inside out', suggests a dialectical process between 'outside intervention' and 'self-motivation' that needs further exploration.

Community-researchers: Cross-border research was carried out entirely by people from the concerned communities who received training from WEMC lead researchers. The process was mutually beneficial. The research benefited from assured access, valuable insights and research commitment; women migrant workers learnt the value of research documentation and gained a new perspective from discussions around women's

empowerment and migration issues; local associate partners focused on promoting migrant workers' rights gained a new gendered perspective on migration. For Afghan refugee teachers in Iran, the research was a source of much-needed validation of their worth as teachers and an unexpected means of networking and building social capital. Teachers are using their new skills in research methodology, data processing and analysis to further document the problems they confront and also using this documentation for advocacy.

The novel experience of research through WEMC helped community-based researchers understand the problems they confront as women in specific contexts, e.g. as migrant workers or refugees. It enabled them to raise grassroots issues at higher levels of advocacy through synchronising grassroots efforts with women's groups, academe, media, national level bodies and civil society groups. The presence of community researchers, who also assumed the role of change agents, both facilitated and accelerated subsequent transformations. The presence of community researcher-beneficiaries in Indonesia and of local academic and research institutions in China, which included some people from within communities, played a similar role.

Research-teams: A positive innovation in Indonesia was the induction of progressive religious scholars in the research process by SEARC. Interaction with community women catalysed a new perspective amongst the scholars whose theological research had excluded engagements with community members, propelling focused research on specific issues raised by women. Collaboration led, amongst other things, to a manual on women's rights as women, migrant workers and as citizens from an Islamic perspective supportive of democratic processes which was later adopted for a new training programme for government officials.

Training research teams:

- An intensive 3 weeks training programme on key concepts and participatory research methods was jointly developed and run for field teams by WEMC Partners in Pakistan (Community Health Sciences Dept. of Aga Khan University and Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre). Training was organised to overcome a lack of grounding in participatory research methodologies to be utilised in the WEMC project, and to ensure familiarity with the complex issues of women's empowerment as developed in the WEMC framework. Subsequently, capacity was continuously developed on both methodology and concepts. Innovating **to overcome the paucity of Urdu language social science materials in Urdu, SG used literary texts to convey/discuss key concepts**. Literature was much easier to access both in terms of language and for an in-depth understanding of the issues.

In Pakistan, working in three languages and with three female teams, SG found its original idea of a single male team untenable and therefore mobilised two more male research teams. The advantage of male researchers has been noted above but this late induction posed challenges as well. Although new teams received crash orientation/training sessions, male researchers inducted later always felt disadvantaged because they missed the basic training.

- Tutorials and dedicated training sessions on methodology as well as concepts were run by the Lead Researcher for Indonesia for teams comprised of women with activist backgrounds unused to the rigor of academic research. This allowed the research project to be informed by the experience of bringing about change while their engagement with WEMC taught Indonesian activists the value of systematic research as particularly effective for convincing decision-makers and implementers to change policies and practices.
- Several research partners instituted analysis and writing workshops for researchers less experienced in these areas. These were found to be most useful.

A 2-person Directorate combined academic and development expertise and sufficient familiarity with all research components was useful.

5.3. Project/programme Management

Balancing research and management needs: The management of a research consortium needs as much critical reflexivity as the substantive dimensions of research work. While WEMC sought to be as 'consultative' as possible, Partners found themselves having to address power relations that reflect contradictions in the wider project context not conducive to collectivised decision-making .

The challenges of success: Project achievements and impact rested upon tremendous teamwork in the field with multiple partners and allies at different levels, necessitating the negotiation of complexities that such teamwork entails.

An unquestionable strength was derived from involving existing small groups (or newly formed ones) in the research process and catalysing many new initiatives, primarily at the grassroots. The very success of interventions posed its own set of challenges.

1. A desire to avail of arising opportunities and to maximise individual Partners' work painstakingly developed in specific contexts, provoked intense debates among partners concerning relative priorities and budgetary allocations. This intensified the challenge of ensuring that all Partners remained focused on the overall RPC objectives in ways that could ensure achieving more than the sum of the RPC's various parts. This would have been overcome had the project been allowed to complete its last year.
2. The very enthusiasm of local partners and researchers to engage in research activities on women's empowerment expanded projects beyond expectations. While such expansion is generally a welcome development, sometimes activities became so widespread that concerned teams were unable to deliver results in time. Additionally, in a few cases, being unplanned, such expanded activities ended up reducing the efficiency of the broader project.

Catalysing and reorienting local groups: Grassroots changes which will facilitate future sustainable engagement for changes in policy and practices are the 27 new groups catalysed by WEMC for women's empowerment and many more initiatives reoriented towards women's empowerment. However, this raises the question of how to ensure that these groups/initiatives are made sustainable. One method adopted by WEMC Partners has been to forge and nurture links with other women's rights organisations, as well as mass media and relevant local and national government officials.

Further, as changes initiated on the ground by WEMC gained momentum, Partners were increasingly propelled to find means for post-project sustainability by mobilising other sources of support – a process rendered more difficult by the global financial crisis that made scarce resources scarcer still. Continued support after project closure is likely to remain critical for some and will require continued support from erstwhile WEMC on Partners'.

Coping with difficult research environments: Authoritarian regimes tend to view social sciences and research suspiciously. Sometimes research can even be considered a criminal activity. Two important principles for overcoming likely difficulties in the context of authoritarian regimes are: (i) adopting research methods that are both robust and flexible, (ii) forging a real partnership between the researchers and the research population. Often, strategies suggested by the research population helped WEMC teams to overcome challenges.

Organising research in independent units can minimise risks but may also increase the challenge of cross-fertilisation and synthesis of both understanding and findings. To guard against possible deterioration in the research environment, it is useful to have contingency plans of possible alternatives for continuing work. Finally, constant and close monitoring is essential to gauge fluctuations in the relationship between a political centre and the community of research which can immediately impact research teams. Difficult research environments require far higher investments in effective and regular communication among researchers and flexibility to allow projects to readjust their activities to changing ground realities.

5.4. Communication

Building on Partners' context-specific communication strategies, WEMC devised and adjusted its Communication Strategy in the light of arising opportunities as well as experiences and changing circumstances. Diverse experiences of successful (and not so successful) local policy dialogues in different communities and contexts suggest that (a) the precise modalities must be designed to suit the specific socio-political and cultural context, (b) policy dialogues are best served by focused research around the specific topic/issue to be discussed with a clear predetermined purpose, (c) visible support already harnessed from civil society organisations, authority figures/institutions or other government officials/institutions is always useful and may be critical to success at the macro level.

In most instances, successful communication has depended on the 'insider' status of many WEMC partners and researchers. This facilitated establishing a variety of institutions and initiatives to work together in alliances. At the same time, the contribution of WEMC researchers as outsiders with only a minimum 'insider' status should not be overlooked, e.g. the presence of a substantial number of WEMC researchers as 'outsider women' at public events in Pakistan enabled local women to sit together with men in a public forum for the first time and gave them the courage to air their views on the issues being discussed.

Community Communication: At the meso level, alliances between civil society organisations working on women's issues and grass-roots community activists (including women leaders) who are the direct agents of change as well as beneficiaries of proposed changes are crucial. These linkages need to be strengthened and, where necessary, created. Sharing research findings in communities of research is an essential ingredient in building constituencies for gender justice since it encourages community members to re-think their positions and understanding of existing issues. Communicating findings also enables researchers to confirm analyses and understanding which ensures that any policy changes proposed to higher decision-making levels are in keeping with the concerned women's needs. For example, in the research site in Balochistan, Pakistan dominated by conservative tribal customs, the lever for changing the discourse around cultural justifications for gender discrimination and women's disempowerment was local champions. This worked where interventions by mere 'outsiders' would not have sufficed. Amongst Afghan refugees, the sharing of research findings provided an unexpected source of validation of their experience and galvanised new networks for further work. In China, sharing knowledge about women's rights movements in Indonesian and Pakistani Partners' communities, inspired Chinese female religious leaders to apply this new information to their own situation with astounding results.⁷⁵ In Iran, the films on VHWs became a means of communication between VHWs within cities and across different cities, helping to strengthen their initiative and networks, to the extent that they are organising workshops to increase sharing of knowledge and experiences. In Indonesia, sharing findings and discussions catalysed new groups for women's empowerment and reoriented existing spaces.

Innovative communication products and activities: WEMC documentary films have been especially effective in effectuating changes. The overturning of the whipping law and other regional regulations discriminating against women in the name of religion was the result of a documentary film sharing research data shown at a policy dialogue with the Governor in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. In China, the process of film making on a local women's mosque galvanised the community into action allowing their structure to be protected by authorities. In Pakistan, a WEMC film aired for 10 consecutive days on a local cable channel intensified and widened the debate on cultural identity, customs and women's rights. Sharing research findings through interactive theatre and narrative story-telling highlighted the problems confronting women as a result of local 'culture' (e.g. impunity for gender-based violence, denial of girls' education exclusion of women in decision-making etc.). Interactive theatre was extremely effective in changing perceptions and attitudes even amongst male village elders who initially opposed 'theatre' as a culturally unacceptable activity. The interactive process allows for public collective discussions on topics which are usually silenced, and give women unprecedented space to speak out in front of men and male family members.

⁷⁵ See Shui Jingjun, op cit.

Policy-makers: Communication strategies for policy-makers and government officials need to be designed purposefully. Addressing 'high level' policy-makers alone may not be sufficient to influence larger policy changes; this usually requires the amplification of multiple voices which, to varying degrees, is always important. Identifying possible allies and champions in civil society, local communities and within formal and informal governance structures is essential e.g. without support from meso level actors occupying managerial positions in the Ministry of Health in Iran, researchers would not have been able to disseminate or promote WEMC findings.

Different tactics may be needed to address policy change vs. policy application. For instance, to introduce mechanisms to strengthen new policy guidelines for government shelters, SG was obliged to conduct field-based research to collect data for evidence-based negotiations. It had to prepare the Standard Operational Procedures Manual and negotiate adoption by the provincial government. To improve the application of existing provisions at the level of a specific shelter, however, a simple policy dialogue explaining the implications of the new guidelines and bringing together shelter staff with other government departments as well as civil society actors was sufficient to establish working links and improved practices. Research documenting various successful campaigns promoting women's rights, participation in political decision making and empowerment initiatives in Iran, indicates the need to run consistent public debates involving various groups and individuals on this issue for policy uptake.

Upscaling communication

When communication is limited to variously controlled 'political spaces', the decision to upscale the level and public visibility of communication interventions needs careful consideration since these may have an adverse impact on the project or the researcher, or both. In China, the experience of shifting from highly productive activities at the meso level to macro level communication at a Government-steered Communication University of China Conference in Beijing (Dec 2008) brought together WEMC researchers, Government representatives and cadres, amongst others. Widening the space for communication, this brought opportunities and increased impact: insights and methodologies from the WEMC projects shared at the Beijing event proved so inspiring to all, including researchers with Government funded projects in Tibet and other minority areas, that many said that they came away with 'new knowledge' and 'ideas for how to conduct research that made them think about many things.' At the same time, it made WEMC researchers/activities more visible to central government authorities, thus more vulnerable.

For most women migrant workers engaged in WEMC, the project provided them with their first opportunities to engage directly with meso level authorities. Even more important for them were opportunities to engage with diverse audiences, e.g. national commissions, Governors, UNESCAP and other UN officials, such as U.N. Special Rapporteurs. The process of being their own direct advocates built self-confidence and experience in negotiations amongst directly concerned women. Amongst migrant women, this led to representatives being invited to discussions with officials in Hong Kong and the Indonesian embassies in Hong Kong quite regularly.

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).