

(Extracted from WEMC Final report pages 5-26)

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.'¹ 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.²

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.**'³ 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 UNESCAP⁴. **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**

¹ http://www.wemc.com.hk/web/rf/3_WEMC_Research_Framework.pdf, page 16

² WEMC-AKU research reports of field findings.

³ *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

⁴ 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*

of otherwise well designed policies to bring about desired results. WEMC's multi-contextual research 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.⁵

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 oppressions⁶. 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,⁷ 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.⁸

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

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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*.

⁸ F. Arshed. 2009. "Women's Self-Understanding of Empowerment" presented at the *University-Conference Engagement Conference* (23-25 Nov. 2009) Penang, Malaysia.

incremental addition of resources, but from the strategic use of these resources to challenge and transform power relations. **'Agency without contestation' serves to reinforce individual women's submission to authority at the meso level.**⁹ 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 action¹⁰.

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 domain¹¹.

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)¹² 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.¹³ 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:

⁹ 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*.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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

¹² 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*.

¹³ 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

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 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.¹⁴ 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 (v) 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

¹⁴ 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. Kottogoda, SAPANA, South Asia Free Media Association.

they identify, etc.¹⁵ **Women's concepts of empowerment and implications for governance and development could not be finalised**, due to abrupt closure.

Identifying and positioning the self for negotiating enhanced rights The pivotal role of diverse collective identities (referred to as social identities by UNESCO¹⁶) and implications for citizenship needs further exploration.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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

¹⁵ 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-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*.

¹⁶ United Nations Educational Cultural and Scientific Organisation, 2009. *World Report: Investing in Cultural diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*

¹⁷ 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)

¹⁸ 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*.

1.1. 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 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 products¹⁹ 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.'²⁰ by a professor and e.g.: 'refreshingly innovative', 'fantastic feedback across the board', 'very useful', 'exciting work'²¹. 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).²²

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.²³ (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.

1.1.1. Capacity Building Output

¹⁹ 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)

²⁰ 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

²¹ 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.

²² Personally communicated by Lois Herman, Coordinator, WUNRN to the WEMC Acting Director.

²³ 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)

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.

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 AKU²⁴ 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

²⁴ The course, *Community Based Social Development for Women's Empowerment* was run in 2008.

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)

By 2010, WEMC strengthened advocacy capacity in at least 100 institutions/ organisations. These include: 49 women's groups including 5 alliances,²⁵ and 2 networks²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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 website²⁸ (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 schools²⁹ 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 partners³⁰ 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.³¹ Likewise, an associate partner supported the

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ The two networks are the Pakistan Reproductive Health Network (PRHN) and the Leadership Development Mechanism (LDM).

²⁷ See films at http://www.wemc.com.hk/web/links_and_resource.htm

²⁹ Sikoa Sintuvu Besi women's school in Palu and Sipakalebbi women's school in Makassar

³⁰ SP-Palu and SPAM. NB: SP operates nationally through local member communities, some of which were associated with WEMC.

³¹ 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 – Penyalur Jasa Tenaga Kerja Indonesia), excluding other migrant workers recruited through sponsors.

establishment of the women's collective, *Bina Mandiri* (Build Your Independence)³² 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.

SCN bolstered advocacy skills of 10 women's groups³³ 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

³² 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.

³³ 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'

area of land rights, 5 SG-WESJP and 4 WEMC³⁴ outreach partners in using interactive theatre for advocacy. SG also built advocacy capacity amongst the 6 new community-based organisations (CBOs) it catalysed³⁵ by back-stopping activities, providing expert inputs in initiatives and facilitating engagements with government 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 WLUMI 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 organisations³⁶ and 16 women's groups in two WEMC-supported alliances in Hong Kong: PILAR (United Indonesians Against Overcharging) and GAMMI (Indonesian Migrant Muslim Alliance)³⁷. 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 Ulama³⁸, 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

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ 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; Sakkhiyan Women's Welfare and Women's Zone in Vehari, Punjab.

³⁶ 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

³⁷ Alliance members include rural Muslim women, female doctors and nurses, female Muslim government officers, Muslim and non-Muslim researchers, female Islamic leaders.

³⁸ 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.

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).

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 insiders³⁹ 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 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**⁴⁰. 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 reality⁴¹. 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

³⁹ '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.

⁴⁰ 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'*.

⁴¹ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-wtNStRsM>

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), 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*.⁴²

Examples of successful country-specific communication strategies

In Iran the WEMC resource book on dress codes regulations⁴³, 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 findings⁴⁴ 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

⁴² F. Shaheed cited on page 15

⁴³ Shadi Sadr, the author, led the legal WEMC-Iran research.

⁴⁴ For the report abstract see: <http://www.meydaan.org/ShowArticle.aspx?arid=442>.

purview of identity as well as discussions and rethinking around women's role in decision-making, family laws and education⁴⁵. 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.

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 made⁴⁶.

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 issues⁴⁷ 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 IUAES⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁵ The groups were: Sangat; Nisa Development Organisation; Young Men's Society; Sakhian Welfare Organisation and Al-Huda

⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷ 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.

⁴⁸ International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, the largest world forum of anthropologists and ethnologists.

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 internet⁴⁹. 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 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)

1.2. 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)⁵⁰ 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

⁴⁹ See in particular, www.jensedigar.com, www.youtube.com/user/jensedigar, www.farsidari-wluml.org

⁵⁰ <http://www.gtz.de/en/689.htm>

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 Brief presented to UNESCAP⁵¹ 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 2010-15⁵². 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.

⁵¹ 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)

⁵² The Ministry accepted drafted recommendations and started to take this forward in late 2009, but 2010 constitutional amendments made the NPA a provincial responsibility.

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 *Sabar 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 (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 *Abong* (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 Sintawa 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 institutions⁵³ 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*⁵⁴ 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.

⁵⁴ Imams are (Muslim) religious leaders of mosques or communities.

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 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*⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶

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.⁵⁷ The Hanji 'Good Day' Centre, now an established meso level institution, connects local women with medical

⁵⁵ See <http://fairfamilylaw.net>,

⁵⁶ See www.hamsary.org

⁵⁷ Personal communication from Prof. Liu, Director of Research Centre to IGS.

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 *Abong* 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)

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 campaigns⁵⁸ 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 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 (*Abong*) 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-WLUMI 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.

⁵⁸ Campaigns include: Open Stadiums to Women, SKSWI, Campaign for Alternative Family Law, Equal Citizenship, and the Women's Charter.

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.'