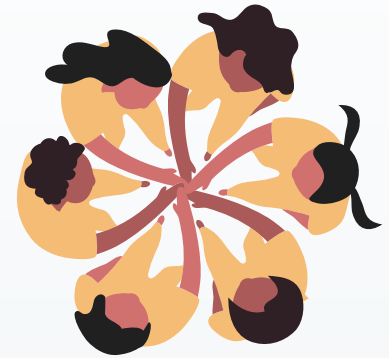**equitas**

**رابط
RAWABET**

THE COMMUNITY STRENGTHS APPROACH FOR PROMOTING WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT

This good practice was developed based on the experience of Equitas and its partners of the Rawabet Initiative, an initiative implemented in the **Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region**. The good practices featured in this series are 'living practices,' meaning that they are continuously evolving and adapting.

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In the context of the implementation of community-based actions, if we want to tackle power imbalances then we must think of those concerned by the problem not as people recruited to participate in the activities of community-based actions, but rather as **agents with attributes to participate actively from the beginning of the action.** Marginalized groups, especially women in rural areas, have been socialized to see themselves in a lower position compared to others, to see themselves as insufficient people because they often have no education, or that they have nothing to contribute. The impact of such messages is significant, and we should not underestimate its effect on the **social construction of marginalized people**, especially women.

The main components of a community strengths approach include:

- **The mindset of human rights education work:** Organizers must come up with a participatory vision/approach that conceives of women's participation beyond the concept of 'beneficiaries'. They are important actors who will play an important role in the action. **It is important to ensure that women and their concerns (issues related to their rights) are represented in decision-making positions in the organization otherwise there will be a power gap.**

- **Determine the profile of the people who will be involved:** their difficulties, their living conditions, their needs to ensure that the people affected by the problem are at the heart of the action. Convey a clear message: What the goal of **community action is and the role that participants can play.**

- **Allow women to name the reason for their involvement:** Create a safe (non-judgmental) space for them to express themselves freely. Allow them to realize the importance of this involvement for them and for their causes. Moreover, to fully understand that they have a new positioning. Be careful not to make unachievable promises.

- **Make an in-depth mapping/analysis of important skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours during community action (not only in the technical way, go beyond standard skills:** to ensure that women themselves can identify what they can contribute (at group level: their network, their determination, their ability to mobilize other women, their ability to write.../ at the individual level: their ability to speak, to organize, specialized knowledge) and can name their need for learning and what they want to develop further/change.

- **The correspondence within the group between the available skills and the needs identified:** Everyone is learning but make sure to find the opportunity for everyone to be a mentor, as it values and shares everyone's skills.

- **Integrate community members into the monitoring and evaluation process**, through the coaching position and monitoring, establish systematic and intentional opportunities to make a self-assessment of their development so that they themselves observe/value the progress made at the individual levels and at the level of development and implementation of knowledge translation.

  - Self-assessment of progression: the success of progression is that identified by the person themself, keep in mind that it can be variable and different from one person to another.

- **Ensure that women themselves reflect on and share learnings** to ensure their integration into the knowledge translation process.

- **Make sure to create moments to celebrate this journey**, this evolution and this experience with women.

LESSONS LEARNED

It is not always easy to get the "target group" out of the position of beneficiary to be active and bearer of its own cause. Since the practice of "assistance" has been established by civil society organizations for decades, wherein the role of community members have been rarely or little valued, they have become accustomed to playing the role of the "consulted" or "witness" of their own situation and that experts will come to help them to realize the solutions to their problems. In order to put into practice the participatory approach as described above, it is essential to offer a secure framework conducive to women's empowerment based on their skills.