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HELVETAS
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Reporting on the
Gender Learning Day – 18 September 2020

The Gender Learning Day of 2020 was hosted by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and co-organised by the two backstopping partners HELVETAS and Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies (ICFG). Due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, this year's event took place online for the first time. The event gathered the SDC's GenderNet members and gender experts as well as the team member responsible for gender-related issues from Swiss NGOs and the SDC's partners in Switzerland but this time also from abroad. The main focus of the event was on lessons learned and good practices for strengthening and supporting women's political leadership in local and national political institutions and processes. The aims of this event were the following:

- To explore different dimensions of women's political empowerment and leadership.
- To develop an understanding of what women's political leadership means for the SDC and its partners.
- To strengthen and foster practices by learning about what works, why and how in different contexts.

1. Opening session

Corinne Hauser (SDC) opened the Gender Learning Day with information about the objectives of the day and background information about the topic of women's political leadership in general and also in relation to the SDC. Corinne showed the key policy frameworks orienting SDC's commitment to closing the gender gap and explained the SDC's three strategic priorities in the area of gender equality: women's right to live free of all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, women's economic empowerment and women's political participation. The latter is addressed by several programmes, some of them purposefully promoting women's political empowerment and participation, others approaching this within e.g. local governance or democracy promotion programmes. Further, it is a priority learning topic for 2020/2021in the SDC Gender Network. A literature review on women's political empowerment is underway and an experience exchange with SDC offices planned. Today is another milestone of this learning trajectory.

Furthermore, Corinne embedded the day's subject in evidence-based findings from the literature. These indicate key factors that influence women's *entry* into politics as well as their ability to *act and influence* change in institutions and processes. Four "Cs" are key elements for women's access to political participation: confidence, culture, care responsibility and cash. Other key factor is the behaviour of political parties, i.e. their decision to nominate and support women candidates and under what terms. In view of women's agency, strategic coalitions, alliances with civil society actors and women's movements as well as cross-party networks are essential. Interestingly, the evidence shows no clear evidence that the local level is more conducive for women's entry and agency in

politics. On the one hand, the proximity and relevance of local issues for women's concerns are rather conducive, on the other hand, social norms, patriarchal constraints and clan structures might be bigger hurdles to overcome at the local level. The benefits of gender-equal decision-making institutions are proven: gender-equal institutions shift the political agenda towards a more inclusive world. Worrisome is the increasing trend of violence against women in politics, including in the virtual space. Also, arising authoritarian regimes increasingly limit the space for feminist activism and dissent, and they often portray conservative gender stereotypes. The women's rights agenda is witnessing a pushback worldwide.

Find the complete presentation here.

2. Empowerment and Role-Modelling as Factors of Women's Political Leadership

Marianne Meier (ICFG) presented the members of the event with theoretical background information about women's political leadership, empowerment and role modelling. The goal of the presentation was to discuss the different dimensions of women's political empowerment. The discussion of these three topics showed that they are highly interlinked and interdependent. The starting point of the presentation was the concept of empowerment. Marianne showed that empowerment is a process by which the ability to make life choices is

increased. Empowerment is very dynamic; on one side is an ongoing process and on the other side is an outcome. The concept of empowerment is multidimensional and comes along with the concept of agency. Empowerment is not automatically linked to gender, goes beyond gender and applies to anyone who is disadvantaged or discriminated against for whatever reason.
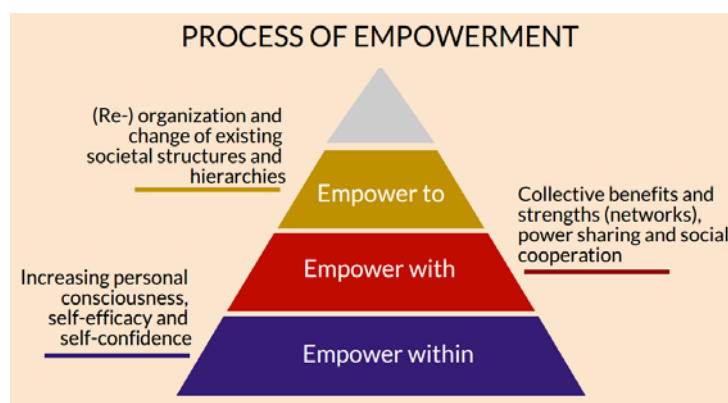
Empowerment can be manifested in three concrete areas: "(re-)organization and change of existing societal structures and hierarchies", "collective benefits and strengths (networks), power sharing and social cooperation" and "increasing personal consciousness, self-efficacy and self-confidence".

In the next step, Marianne discussed the terms vertical and horizontal leadership and communication styles and linked them to women and men. The literature shows that the horizontal (female) style of leadership is becoming more important, in politics.

At the end of the presentation, the potential and challenges of role modelling and role models were elaborated. Female role models can inspire more women to run for political offices. Role models can have different degrees of interaction, from low to high interaction, depending on how approachable the role model is.

Find the complete presentation and read about empowerment and role modelling here.

Find here additional information.

3. Three case studies –Senegal, Israel/Palestine and Albania

Selina Haeny (SDC) briefly introduced the three case study presenters from the three local organizations and handed over the platform to them. In five-minute pitches, each presenter introduced their case study, and the participants were split into three groups. In each group, the members discussed the case in relation to the following topics:

1. Women's entry and agency
2. Diversity and inclusion
3. Patriarchy and social norms

All the cases are stories of transformation where women acted as agents of change. The following section shows the key aspects of the cases and the takeaway messages. Find more information about the cases, their presenters and the leading analytical questions here.

3.1 Case Study Senegal – Leadership and Peace Building for Young Women

Presenter: Codou Bop   **Organisation:** IAMANEH

The project was carried out under the international "Women's Empowerment and Leadership Development for Democratization" programme and it was funded by the "Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women Programme" of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project was implemented by "Groupe de Recherche sur les Femmes et les Lois au Senegal". a local partner of IAMANEH.

Objective of the project: The overall goal of the project was to increase feminist leadership and peace building at the highest site of power in rural and urban areas, that is, the county government. It targeted young female leaders. Furthermore, to build women's skills to exercise their rights and engage collectively to increase the number of elected women in local councils, resulting in more accountable local authorities and facilitating peaceful resolutions in community and political spheres, among others.

Key takeaway: In order to improve women's political empowerment, skills building to strengthen their leadership skills is particularly important. Additionally, local, national and social media outlets are important to use to disseminate women's voices and to strengthen their agency. Both actions make women more visible in public spaces. As a key constraint for women attempting to be active in politics is violence accompanying election processes, violence against women in politics is an increasing global phenomenon.

Find the complete key take away as a padlet here.

3.2 Case Study Israel/Palestine – Supporting Arab Women in Local Politics

Presenter: Rafa Anebtawi   **Organisation:** Kayan, a local partner of cfd

In 2016,cfd together with its partner organisation Kayan's Women Organisation implemented a three-years project titled "Promoting Arab Women's Participation in Politics" in preparation for the local council elections in 2018 in Israel. The project is still ongoing.

Objective of the project: Strengthening local women's ability to be politically active in grassroots organising, supporting local Arab politicians in being gender-inclusive and sensitive, and engaging media and raising the general public's awareness of women's political participation to influence political parties' responsiveness.

Key takeaway: Feminist grassroots organisations are key agents for women by entering and staying in the political sphere, but these grassroots organisations have to be linked with the existing political groups and systems. The arrangement of candidate lists has to be examined critically. Women in politics are role models for the younger generation and their engagement in formal decision-making positions. Women and men candidates should be listed alternatingly. The patriarchal structures, corruption, education and being an outsider to the political system are barriers for women to be a part of the political system.

Find the complete key take away as a padlet here.

3.3.1 Case Study Albania – Networking across Party Lines for Inclusive Policies and Local Development

Presenter: Valbona Karakaçi   **Organisation**: HELVETAS

Local Development and Decentralization Program started in 2011 in in Northern Albania supported by SDC and implemented though HELVETAS.

Objective of the project: The Local Development and Decentralization Program aimed to enhance inclusive, quality service delivery to citizens (men and women) and strengthen the capacities of local government units in Northern Albania and contributing to a conducive legal framework. This included supporting the Women in Politics Network since its recognition as a key agent of change.

Key takeaway: This case points out that women's political empowerment is multifactored and occurs on different levels. Long-term skills building and coaching women are key empowerment strategies. Furthermore, collaboration with existing political parties and hidden

powerful actors is important. This requires the use of formal and informal spaces. The media play a critical role, especially during electoral campaigns. Additionally, the international recognition of future female politicians is a steppingstone for successful political engagement.

Find the complete key take away as a padlet here.

4. Open exchange and discussion

The last point of the event was an open exchange and lively discussion. The discussion was mostly around factors which foster or hinder women's political engagement. On one side, the women's movement has a positive impact on women's political empowerment at different levels; on the other side, women must use formal spaces, which means they have to build alliances with already existing political players. Strategically navigating within the political system is important: building their own constituency at the grassroots level and influencing local agendas, while linking up to the national level and using formal as well informal networks and spaces. This requires strong leadership capacity and a clear vision for gender transformative change. Barriers to women's entry and sustained presence in the political sphere include women's high workload, which is linked with the prevailing patriarchal structures. They are mostly involved in paid work and unpaid care work; if they also have a political position, they carry a triple burden. In order to tackle this social change more systematically, an open discussion is needed with all those involved (women and men) about the dominant structures which have a negative impact on the political commitment of women.
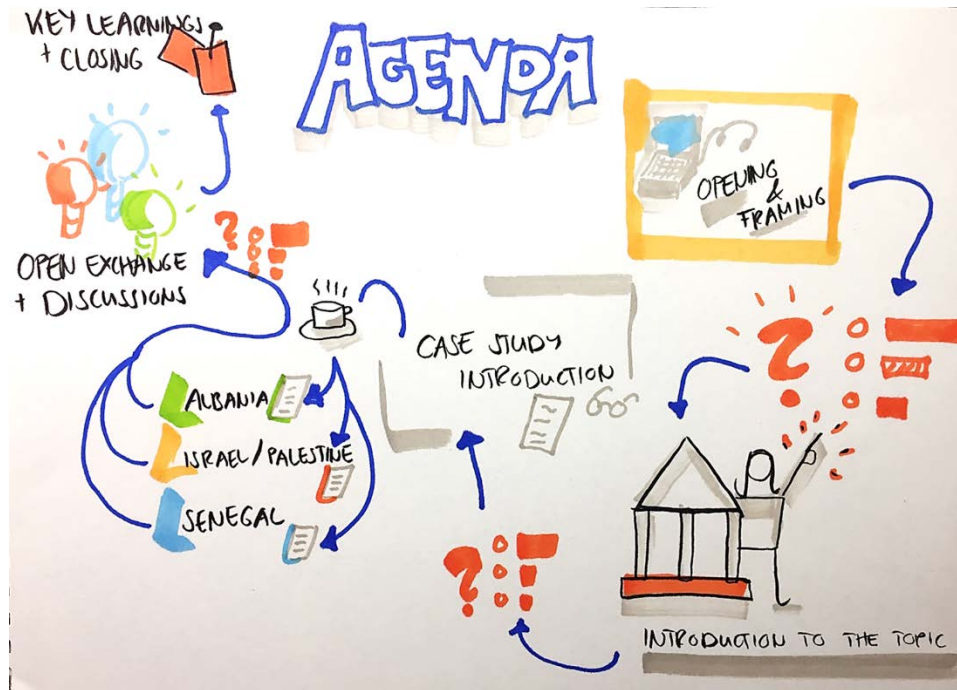
Find the complete key take away here.

5. Closing session

The successful event was closed by Corinne with a group picture of the some participants:
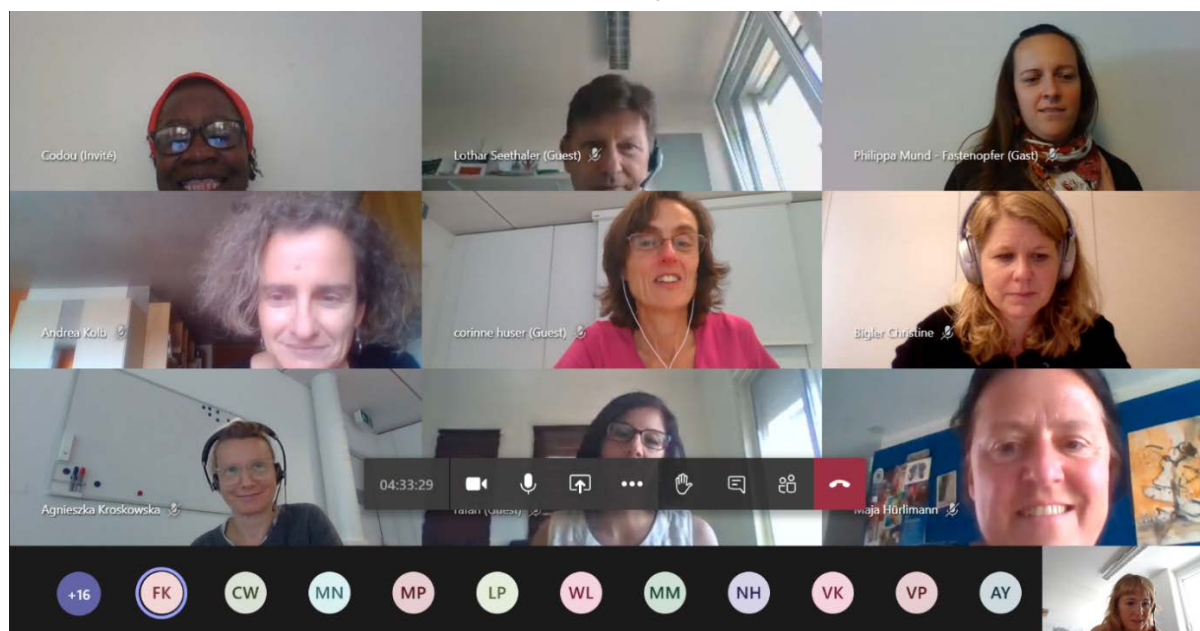
Annex 1: Agenda of the Gender Learning Day

Annex 2: Polls and Chat

The event was designed to be interactive – participants had the opportunity to ask questions or give feedback throughout via the chat function. This was also actively used. In between the individual thematic blocks, the participants had the opportunity to answer questions that were voted on via polls. See below an example of a poll and a snapshot of the chat conversation: