



Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Report

Expert group meeting on gender intersectionality in the Arab region Beirut, 25-26 July 2018

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) Centre for Women (ECW) organized an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on gender intersectionality in the Arab region in Beirut on 25 and 26 July 2018.

Entitled “Leaving No Women Behind: Addressing Gender Intersectionality in the Arab region”, the EGM aimed to move the debate on intersectionality from the theoretical and academic spheres to the practical and operational arena, with in-depth discussions to determine how to apply the intersectionality approach to reduce gender inequalities and enhance the overall development process. The meeting brought together international and regional experts on gender intersectionality and related topics applicable in the region including violence against women, refugees, economic development and conflict and post-conflict issues.

The meeting concluded with an agreement on the main guiding principles that will enable development practitioners and researchers to operationalize the concept of intersectionality in a way that helps address gender inequalities in the region. These recommendations will also feed into a technical paper that ECW intends to provide guidance on how to operationalize the concept of gender intersectionality for the Arab region.

This report summarizes the meeting discussions and presents the main conclusions and recommendations.

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) Centre for Women (ECW) organized an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on gender intersectionality in the Arab region in Beirut on 25-26 July 2018.
2. Entitled “Leaving No Women Behind: Addressing Gender Intersectionality in the Arab region”, the EGM aimed to move the debate on intersectionality from the theoretical and academic spheres to the practical operational arena, with in-depth discussions to determine how to apply the intersectionality approach to reduce gender inequalities and enhance the overall development process. The meeting brought together international and regional experts on gender intersectionality and related topics applicable in the region including violence against women, refugees, economic development and conflict and post-conflict issues.
3. The ultimate objective was to gather a body of knowledge that would help advise countries in the Arab region on how their national policies can benefit from the analysis of intersectionality and in turn, advance the realization of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

4. The participating experts agreed on guiding principles for a framework to operationalize gender intersectionality in the Arab region to be used by development practitioners and researchers as analytical tool to address inequalities. The participants also agreed on an outline for a planned technical paper that will be prepared on the topic.
5. The key guiding principles proposed for an intersectionality framework in the Arab region are to:
 - (a) Follow a bottom-up approach for gender equality initiatives;
 - (b) Build solidarity among different groups and intersections to support rights advancement;
 - (c) Enrich and strengthen the application of gender mainstreaming;
 - (d) Develop a comprehensive framework;
 - (e) Put inequalities in a historical context to understand their origins, unpack categorical thinking, and address structural inequalities.
6. It was agreed the outline for the technical paper on the issue will include the main following elements:
 - (a) Concept and rationale;
 - (b) International perspective;
 - (c) Multiple inequalities faced by women in the Arab region;
 - (d) Proposed guiding principles for addressing conceptualizing gender intersectionality in the Arab region.

II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

A. THE INTERSECTIONALITY APPROACH AND RATIONALE FOR USE IN THE ARAB REGION

7. The first session set the stage for the two-day discussion by presenting the situation of women in the Arab region, posing arguments why intersectionality is relevant for the region and framing intersectionality within international human rights instruments, specifically the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

8. Ms. Mehrnaz Elwady, Director of the ESCWA Centre for Women, presented the situation of women in the Arab region, noting that women's rights and gender equality have been high on the development agenda in the Arab countries since the adoption of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PfA) in 1995. While significant progress has been made, the Arab region was lagging behind the rest of the world and the progress made has been slow. Many Arab States had committed to CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) but had not yet fully operationalized these commitments. At the institutional level, National Women's Machineries have been established and yielded positive results in most countries. At the legislative level, while most constitutions in many Arab States had some reference to equal rights for all citizens as a guiding principle, it was without any clear obligation from the State. Personal status laws rarely adhered to gender equality principles and generally were inherently discriminatory. Although criminalization of domestic violence was gaining momentum in the region, the legal reforms had not yet met expectations and remained inadequate to ensure the protection of all women. And even though Arab States have developed and adopted a myriad of policies and strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women, the gender gap remained the largest in the world, including in terms of economic and political participation.

9. The presentation of Ms. Sara Salem, Lecturer at Warwick University, highlighted the importance of using an intersectionality approach when addressing women's rights and gender equality issues in the Arab region, underscoring the core tenets which argue that women who were oppressed were not oppressed in the same fashion everywhere. Intersectionality encouraged the examination of women's positions in the global economy and within nation States. Different and intersecting types of inequalities created different and shifting lived experiences. Intersectionality now appeared in several disciplines, although there was substantial debate on how to use it. It allowed for a complex analysis of lived experiences, taking different marginal positions or groups into account, and drew attention to categories or groups of people that may have been excluded from the analysis. In the Arab region specifically, an intersectional perspective could help overcome colonial analytical norms, such a narrow focus on culture and religion, ignoring more complex realities of socioeconomic status. It could also be used to critically examine the links between neoliberalism and development, for example, how economic changes benefit those who were already advantaged. More empirical research was needed on marginalization in the Arab context to reveal previously excluded categories. The speaker noted there was a historical legacy of feminists seeking to address inequalities in a broad sense in the Arab region, including examining the intersections issues of gender, nation, class or religion, which became clear during the 2011 Arab uprisings.

10. In her presentation, Ms. Nada Darwazeh, Chief of the Gender Equality Section, ESCWA Centre for Women, framed the intersectionality approach within the international human rights system, focusing on CEDAW. She highlighted the progressive inclusion of an intersectional approach in CEDAW, notably through the follow-up on the application of Article 5 which addressed stereotyping and prejudice on the basis of sex and Article 14 on the needs of rural women, which had expanded CEDAW's scope to address multiple forms of discrimination. In recent years, the Committee had started to introduce subheadings covering disadvantaged groups of women, acknowledging the multi-faceted experiences of discrimination. Treaty bodies were open to receive reports from NGOs and individuals, incorporating diverse perspectives. Special procedures existed as a way to broaden the scope of the specific focus of human rights frameworks (of which there were 44 special mandates, such as for the elderly, indigenous people, etc.), using country visits, engagement with victims of violations and other stakeholders to examine combined discrimination against particular groups. And while

the engagement with the concept of intersectionality remained limited, she noted in conclusion that the human rights system was adapting and opening up to understanding multiple experiences.

11. In the discussions that followed, it was noted that the intersectionality approach argues that categories were socially constructed to justify systems of oppression. Other approaches sought to identify violations of the rights of certain groups without interrogating the various factors and drivers of discrimination. In these cases, the structures of power and oppression were not challenged, preventing change or transformation. The discussions also highlighted the relevance not only of the notion of intersecting identities, but also examination of the construction of such identities. It was clarified that intersectionality was not about merely adding subgroups to the analysis, which might not lead to meaningful change on the ground, but about delineating them and understanding their formation. Identity was such a complex issue that issues that concerned specific groups could be highlighted through an intersectional approach. This was particularly important in conflict and post-conflict settings, as differences between communities and group identities could be used to divide people. A better understanding of peoples' identities along with their lived realities was required.

B. MULTIPLE DISCRIMINATION FACED BY WOMEN IN THE ARAB REGION: GENDER AND IDENTITIES

12. The second session shed light on the several layers of inequalities faced by the women in the Arab region. Two presentations demonstrated how social norms, power structures and legal systems impacted or were influenced by identities and intensified gender inequalities. The presentations also explained how crisis and conflict-affected contexts exacerbated recurrent gender-related inequalities and fostered the emergence of new ones.

13. Mr. Anthony Keedi, a psychologist and gender specialist with the Lebanese non-governmental organization ABAAD, addressed the theme of masculinity in the Arab region. Among the issues he highlighted was that men could also be victims of sexual and gender-based violence. The behavior of men was the product of a larger system and they should not be treated as a homogeneous group. He noted it was necessary to highlight men's privileges as well as discuss how they could use gender equality principles to their benefit. Some of the issues of concern related the stress associated with the increased financial demands on men. There was a need to promote solutions that are gender-equitable for all, with benefits all. The speaker noted the pattern of patriarchy stemmed from capitalism, creating hierarchies (such as the military, which promotes a hegemonic masculinity) that socialize men to be in a situation of "power over". Men have been taught to perpetrate violence. Hence, when working with men, it was important to consider how their privileges have impacted women's vulnerability.

14. Mr. Mohamad El Agati, Director of the Arab Forum for Alternatives, highlighted issues of concern for women in the region, including low social protection coverage. In the absence the State in this role, women often turned to their tribes to find some sort of social protection. He argued that women were oppressed in different ways depending on whether they were inside or outside of their communities. Cultural and social factors increased discrimination as women serve symbols of identity in society. For example, if a woman's identity was strongly linked to her tribe, a woman member of parliament might raise issues that were against the cause of women but were beneficial to their tribe or religious group. He underscored the importance of putting more effort into understanding women's different identities, given how scarce research is in this field. He gave the example of the research data available on the Nubian desert population in Egypt, but lack of information on the rights of Nubian women, or on women belonging to other tribes or groups.

15. The discussions that followed focused on the formation of identities and ways to use intersectionality to address inequalities, given that men and women did not form homogenous groups. The relevance of power and social structures was raised along with the importance of understanding people's capabilities in these structures. Discussants agreed on the necessity of avoiding classifying people in predefined categories that disregarded their power and ability to change power relations, particularly since the tendency was to fall back on gender stereotypes and work with men and women separately. Men were known to influence women's

empowerment, but the role of mothers in raising men was equally important. Discussants agreed that despite the transitions and the steps taken towards gender equality in the region, in many cases allegiance to tribe and tribal codes still took precedence. In an effort to reach out to those most discriminated against, an intersectional approach could challenge the political construction of identities.

16. In her presentation Ms. Fatima Zahra' Langi, Chief Executive Officer, Libyan Women's Platform for Peace, drew on the Libyan experience to highlight opportunities for women at the local level. Libya's conflict is ongoing and, lacking a central government able to provide services to all its members who were now divided into many factions, was considered a failed state. In such context, local governance could present opportunities for women and membership in a particular minority group could present some privileges. She cited the example of the national political process which was characterized by an overall marginalization of women, in which the Amazigh and Tuareg women were left out at the national level but were involved at local levels. She stressed the importance of decentralized local governance and empowering women on the local level. She also warned against considering women from ethnic minorities as homogeneous groups since women's status varied depending on their cultural group. She reiterated the necessity of considering ethnic minority as an identity factor conjointly along with other facets such as religion and socioeconomic status.

17. Mr. Henri Myrntinen, Head of Gender and Peacebuilding at International Alert, provided a presentation on the situation of women in conflict settings. He argued that conflict created opportunities for change that could contest power differentials. However, it also heightened risks so it was important that it be resolved peacefully. At the end of a conflict, inequalities were often still in place and power differentials could provoke further violence. In other words, gender inequalities that occurred pre-conflict were exacerbated during conflict and could often extend long after the conflict was resolved. As the experiences of refugees attest, fleeing a conflict situation does not necessarily end discrimination: this has been seen in the persistence of discrimination based on gender, disability (mental and physical), nationality (such as migrant workers) and the multiply-displaced (such as Palestinian refugees). He explained that in the post-conflict phase, there were clamp-downs on identity as people feared talking about them and many issues, especially gender equality, were put on the backburner amidst fears of rising sectarianism. In conclusion, he highlighted the importance of moving away from predetermined log frames to not lose sight of structures of oppression. He also recommended intersectionality be kept as a dynamic tool to analyse structures and to disentangle vulnerability from identity.

18. The ensuing discussions underlined the importance of the intersectional analysis of the causes of conflict. Given that people in the real world do not lead their lives based on just a single issue or simple identity, not taking an intersectional approach was not an option. There was a general tendency to minimize the importance of gender equality during conflict and to address gender inequalities in isolation in emergencies and post-conflict settings. This tendency had to be redressed to ensure the inclusion of all in existing structures that otherwise may exclude some groups. Discussants agreed there was a resistance to and an attempt to ignore intersectionality in the post-conflict period from national and international actors. This stemmed from the general belief that intersectionality intensified already existing sectarian divides within a society and from the desire to avoid further complexity. They highlighted the relevance of overcoming this push-back by building on post-conflict mechanisms and introducing reforms in areas such as the security sector, transitional justice, resettlement, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. They noted that if not addressed, the lack of inclusion could lead to another conflict. The example of women's involvement in the Syrian peace process was a case in point: the participation of women in the peace processes had been discredited since the group, limited to elite women living outside of the country, was not considered inclusive.

C. MULTIPLE DISCRIMINATION FOR WOMEN IN THE ARAB REGION: GENDER AND STATUS

19. The third session focused on how the intersection between status and other elements of identity could generate and intensify gender inequalities.

20. During her intervention, University of California Professor, Ms. Suad Joseph, examined the problems related to the concepts of categorical thinking and intersectionality. She explained how the concept of categorical thinking could be addressed or challenged by intersectionality. She clarified that categorical thinking was a basic human process: categories were created and given value. They tended to rank differences in social use, which intensified exclusion. Categorical thinking made binaries possible: West versus East, civilized versus non-civilized, Muslim versus Christians, etc. It invented identities and mobilized these identities for political purposes, thus creating a base for war and conflict. States as well as religious institutions were propagators of categorical thinking. Categorical thinking reduced complexity and the diversity, which have in fact been the reality of human history. As a tool of power, it facilitated the work of authoritarianism and fascism because social justice requires taking differences into account. Therefore, she recommended looking at the context and history to understand the rationale behind categorization. The categories of “women” and “men” were not universal as some societies do not necessarily categorically distinguish between men and women. Nor were categories of class or gender stable. Categorical thinking was thus an invention by itself that could become convention. She stated that intersectionality, which by its nature was anti-categorical, could challenge exclusion, since it was about diversity and inclusion. Intersectionality was also about making the invisible visible, the silent heard and the marginalized central.

21. The discussions that followed pointed out the risks in being selective when considering some categories: disallowing or countering categorical thinking in a context of discrimination may be misleading as it may seem as belittling some categories. Countering categorical thinking in a context of racial discrimination may appear to be dismissing the importance of race. Discussants acknowledged the endless societal struggle against categorical thinking. They agreed on the necessity to address dangerous categories, to be aware of how categories are created and to constantly challenge and test categories to figure out how they can be used.

22. Ms. Islah Gad, Associate Professor, Women’s Studies Institute, Bir Zeit University, presented a thorough review of the unfavourable socioeconomic situation of women in the Arab region despite the significant efforts for improvement. She questioned the political will of the Arab States to introduce changes. She explained that the lack of political will minimized the impact of gender-related initiatives, including gender mainstreaming efforts. Governments have responded to the significant pressure from international organizations to promote gender equality. While they have publicly adopted gender equality to ensure their legitimacy, in actual practice they have in fact worked against the changes that international organizations have advocated, using their stated commitment to progress on gender equality as a way of obscuring social oppression. This raised the question of whether one should work from inside or outside the State’s structure. She recommended using the intersectionality approach to examine how to work on changing the overarching structure, not just changing the people. She mentioned that National Women’s Machineries have been underutilized and minimally funded, heightening the need to work with the State and capitalize on the different windows of opportunity to generate the required changes.

23. The ensuing discussions focused on promoting an intersectionality approach to reduce inequalities in the contexts where the State impedes significant changes. Given institutional weaknesses at several levels, discussants stressed the need for strengthening the role of the National Women’s Machineries, creating more space for civil society and investing in and building the capacities of civil society organizations to meet the needs of different groups on the ground. The discussions also focused on gender mainstreaming and limitations in its application. Reviewing how gender mainstreaming was being carried out was an important step towards inducing changes in the way States formulated gender-sensitive policies. In the development context, gender mainstreaming considered women as a concern or a group without considering their multiple identities or categories they fit into. This was the major difference between gender mainstreaming and intersectionality. Discussants flagged that the gender mainstreaming theoretical framework was intersectional: gender did not stand alone but was intertwined with other social and economic factors. However, at times this concept was lost: for example, an economic project that mainstreamed gender issues would aim to boost economic growth not only for the empowerment of women and girls, but also to ensure their contribution to the economy as lift the economy as a whole and for all.

D. INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

24. The fourth session shed light on selected experiences and insights from the international and regional levels.

25. Professor of Political Science at University of Stellenbosch, Ms. Amanda Gouws presented on the experience of intersectionality in South Africa. Highlighting a key issue intersectionality, she noted the importance of relationship between power and agency to resist and change oppression. Intersectionality was not a static intersection of various inequalities, it was dynamic and changing and inequalities shift over time. She used a “matrix of domination” to explain how lived identities, structural systems of power, sites of marginalization and modes of resistance intersected in dynamic and shifting ways. She presented the complexity of South African identities and how they came into play during a campaign to end rape culture in the country. Race, sexuality and class were the three intersecting elements in his campaign. Rape culture was influenced by the colonial understanding of sexuality that tended to see men and white women as non-affected and non-concerned group. She underlined the importance of investigating the opportunities for solidarity.

26. Ms. Rania Al-Jazairi, First Social Affairs Officer, Social Justice section at ESCWA presented the findings of the ESCWA Social Development Report that studied the links between equality and autonomy. The report focused on three types of inequality – inequality of outcome, inequality of opportunity and inequality of autonomy – and examined various parameters including race, ethnicity, religion and geographical location. According to the report, although Arab youth experienced less control over their lives compared to the older persons, there had been a recent rise in their self-expression. Self-expression translated into more social tolerance and a preference for equality, while life control translated into more political involvement. Education in the Arab region showed a lower emancipative effect of on self-expression when compared to other regions. Such correlations were largest among the youth and the educated persons. The region witnessed progress towards some progressive values, such as support for gender equality and civic involvement. Women in all Arab countries were much more pro-gender than men. She concluded by noting that the Arab society was divided between younger generations with aspirations for change but no power over events and older generations who have the power and the ability to influence events, but no desire to do so.

27. The discussions that followed revolved around the interconnectedness of identities and power and the centrality of lived experiences and realities. It was agreed it is necessary to understand each other’s experiences as people tend to assess the reality of others through their own experience. Discussants agreed on the need to create and maintain spaces for dialogue and discussion to listen and understand each other’s experiences. They also agreed that gender is also a cultural issue, not just an economic and social factor in the Arab region, and must be addressed as such.

E. LEAVING NO WOMEN BEHIND: AN INTERSECTIONALITY APPROACH TO BOOST THE REALIZATION OF GOAL 5

28. The fifth session discussed why and how the intersectionality approach has been developed and debated in the spheres of research and academia and how it can be applied to boost the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 5.

29. Ms. Leslie McCall, Professor of Sociology and Political Science at the City University of New York, together with Ms. Salem, framed the debate by sharing examples which were not necessarily applicable to the Arab region but potentially useful in thinking about how to implement a programme and guiding principles for gender intersectionality in the region. The Arab region was experiencing a proliferation of identities which could shift attention away from the previously dominant focus on economy and class inequalities. Progressive movements in the West had focused primarily on class issues which have been seen as distinct from identity politics, meaning gender, racial, sexual identities and movements. Often there was also a distinction between vertical inequality, or class inequality, and the horizontal inequality, or inequality of gender, race, sexuality, etc. According to the presenters, this binary had now been broken: the fact that identity has been becoming so

prominent created an opportunity to merge these inequalities. While this was the positive side of the new emphasis on identity, the negative side was that identity politics raises criticisms of fragmentation, divisiveness and not being redistributive. There is a current opening for an intersectional approach can bring. Empirical research showed that people, when given information about class inequality, became more sympathetic about structural barriers to women and racial minorities inequalities. The presenters concluded by highlighting that fixed identities and divisiveness could be changed by political imagination, framing and discourse. They also underscored the role of a narrative that was rooted in truth and research to identify the gaps in knowledge. Social movements and civil society could be instrumental to develop bridges.

30. The discussions that followed focused on the fact that the intersectionality approach and its quest for equality and rights were chiefly about the redistribution of public resources. If intersectionality arguments were followed through and accepted by policy instruments, not only would attitudes change but the redistributive dimension of a society would be significantly affected as well. That was why solid and convincing arguments targeting governments to consider the approach were needed. Of utmost importance was the question of the position of the people who potentially stood to lose the most. For example, what would be the position of the poor working class in the United States of America regarding any redistribution towards black Americans? To counter potential opposition, discussants pointed out the role knowledge and data could play in relation to addressing the different forms of inequality in societies. They also agreed that solidarity and mutual recognition among activists, including collaboration and coordination, would be a positive step across the board in the process of advancing change for all identities and rights defenders.

F. LEAVING NO WOMEN BEHIND: WAY FORWARD FOR GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON GENDER INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE ARAB REGION

31. The last session discussed the foundation and major components for creating a future regional framework on gender intersectionality. The guiding principles proposed were expected to assist development practitioners to better address multiple and compounded gender-related inequalities in the region by operationalizing the concept of gender intersectionality.

32. The concluding discussions stressed the need to address gender as it intersects with various elements, including class, race, religion, etc., and to address both inequalities and the sources to fight the power structures at fault. Intersectionality was used differently in different fields: in the legal field, elements of intersectionality and its underlying principles were important to examine a case while in empirical research intersectionality was used more as a methodological tool. Discussants agreed that while the definition was important, the elements of inherent in intersectionality and the commitment to understand diversities were more so. They also agreed on the relevance of using a framework that was ‘popular’ as a lens because it was grounded in the lives of the most vulnerable. The framework should not be seen as a tool to map all inequalities because inequalities evolve and shift. Therefore, the intersectionality approach must be contextual and transformative. The framework should not aim to answer all thorny regional questions and debates. Discussants agreed that progress in terms of gender equality so far was not up to expectations and that over years the same strategies were being replicated and gender mainstreaming had not proven to be sufficiently effective. Following the Arab uprisings of 2010-2011, identities re-emerged in the Arab region and efforts to address intersecting inequalities failed and the institutions in place, including human rights institutions, were not sufficient. Discussants agreed that the forthcoming technical paper would be the bedrock for continuing deliberations and discussions. They also agreed on a set of guiding principles for an intersectionality framework as follows:

(a) *Building solidarity among different groups and intersections*: Creating solidarity to support rights advancement is a necessity. Empirical research based on the intersectionality approach that sheds light on multiple inequalities facilitates the creation of solidarity among defenders of various rights and around groups suffering discrimination. Some critiques suggest that the intersectionality approach is divisive and might strengthen sectarian and identity related divides particularly in post-conflict contexts. Therefore, data to raise awareness and inform decision-makers on the status of inequalities is critical in research on intersectionality.

Ensuring the involvement of local women’s organizations is also important to build solidarity among different groups and intersections;

(b) *Deepening the scope of gender mainstreaming*: Applying gender mainstreaming in a narrow perspective that simply looks at policies, programmes and budgets and their implications on women, might be in contradiction with the intersectionality approach. This narrow perspective is rather categorical and does not allow the consideration of multiple inequalities or intersections, and important aspect of the application of the gender mainstreaming theoretical framework as initially perceived. It is therefore recommended to conduct gender mainstreaming that is based on an inclusive perspective whereby women are an integral part of a policy, programme or budget and whereby gender mainstreaming contributes to the achievement of the intended objective. This perspective includes intersectionality;

(c) *Developing a comprehensive framework*: A comprehensive framework can articulate the complexity of a given context and support the provisions of recommendations and avoid overlooking the differences among women. It is advised that the foreseen intersectionality framework is not rigid. It would benefit from some flexibility in looking at inequalities;

(d) *Following a bottom-up approach*: It is advised that the empirical context drive the definition of various social categories, issues and their intersections. Since inequalities are multi-faceted and operate at different levels, it is necessary to build on people’s experiences and develop a framework that can be used practically to include all excluded groups at both national and subnational levels;

(e) *Historicizing inequalities and understanding their origins, unpacking categorical thinking, and addressing structural inequalities*: This will look at how inequalities are produced historically and structurally, in order to better understand how to address them in the present. It will also look at the notion of categorical thinking, and how this can be operationalized.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE

33. The Expert Group Meeting on “Leaving no women behind: addressing gender intersectionality in the Arab region” was held on 25 and 26 July 2018 at in Beirut.

B. OPENING

34. Director of the ESCWA Centre for Women, Ms. Mehrnaz Elawady, gave an opening speech to welcome the participants, briefly presenting the work of ECW and clarifying the objective of the meeting. She pointed to the level of progress in advancing gender equality specifically in the Arab region and questioned the approach used so far that considers women, most often, as a homogenous group. This has translated into standardized policies that target all women similarly. She stated that this expert group meeting aimed to discuss the relevance of the intersectionality approach to address this issue outside of the academic sphere. She also explained that the meeting aimed to initiate a discussion of a framework to apply the intersectionality approach in the development field.

C. PARTICIPANTS

35. A total of 20 international and regional experts from Egypt, Ireland, Kuwait, Libya, The Netherlands, the State of Palestine, the Republic of South Africa, United Kingdom and United States of America participated in the meeting.

D. AGENDA

36. Presentations and discussions were made over eight sessions. The agenda of the meeting is summarized below:

- (a) Opening session;
- (b) Intersectionality approach and the rationale behind advocating for its use in the Arab region;
- (c) Multiple discrimination faced by women in the Arab region: gender and identities;
- (d) Multiple discrimination faced by women in the Arab region: gender and status;
- (e) International and regional perspectives;
- (f) Leaving no women behind: an intersectionality approach to boost the realization of Goal 5;
- (g) Leaving no women behind: way forward for a framework on gender intersectionality in the Arab region;
- (h) Closing session.

E. EVALUATION

37. A questionnaire was provided to participants to assess the quality, effectiveness and relevance of the meeting. The feedback received was positive with 100 per cent of respondents rating the overall quality of the meeting as very good to excellent. Approximately 95 per cent of the respondents found that the meeting provided a good opportunity to share information and experiences and to establish new useful contacts in the field. Almost 90 per cent of the respondents found the presentations provided during the meeting to be clear and the length of the meeting to be appropriate. For follow-up actions, responses included offers to peer review the paper and participate in related activities in the future.

Annex*

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