

National NGOs with Women

Transforming Communities through Education, Health, and Social Welfare

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The recent ban on women working by the De-facto authorities (DfA) has sparked widespread condemnation, marking a grim regression in women's rights and societal progress. Two years after initial promises of inclusivity and moderation, this policy exacerbates the challenges faced by women, particularly in sectors like education, healthcare, and community mobilization, where their contributions are indispensable. The decision not only undermines efforts to rebuild and stabilize communities but also deprives families and societies of the invaluable role women play as educators, caregivers, and advocates for change. This alarming development necessitates urgent global dialogue and advocacy to restore women's rights and entitlements.

The role of women in society has always been a cornerstone of community development and progress. Their inherent empathy, resilience, and ability to connect deeply with people make them indispensable agents of change, particularly in the domains of education, health, and other essential sectors. In the context of working with National Civil Society Organizations (NGOs), women bring a unique perspective that complements community mobilization efforts, particularly when grounded in cultural norms and the teachings of the Holy Qur'an.

Women and the Spirit of Community Mobilization

Community mobilization is the art of bringing people together to identify and solve issues that impact their lives. Women, especially when working through NGOs, act as bridges between institutional frameworks and grassroots realities. Their participation in NGOs has proven instrumental in addressing societal challenges and building sustainable solutions.

Women working with NGOs in education play a pivotal role in advocating for girls' education globally. Women educators and community workers are often the ones who visit homes, negotiate with families, and convince them to send their daughters to school. Female NGO workers contribute to the establishment of safe spaces where girls and boys alike can learn without fear. This is especially critical in regions where cultural sensitivities might discourage co-educational settings.

In the health sector, women working with NGOs have demonstrated extraordinary success in improving healthcare outcomes. Their contributions align closely with the principles of compassion and care emphasized in the Hadith and Qur'an. Programs like maternal health campaigns rely heavily on female health workers to educate mothers about prenatal and postnatal care, breastfeeding, and hygiene practices. Women's ability to communicate with other women in culturally sensitive ways ensures that these initiatives succeed where others may falter.

In alignment with Islamic teachings, which emphasise the sanctity of life and the importance of family, NGOs train women to advocate for reproductive health while respecting cultural norms and family structures. Women-led NGO initiatives have also been at the forefront of combating diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis. Community mobilization efforts by women have proven critical in creating awareness and distributing life-saving resources like mosquito nets and vaccines.

Women's engagement with NGOs extends beyond education and health. Their involvement in other critical sectors demonstrates their versatility and commitment to holistic community development.

Education, Livelihoods and Economic Empowerment: In countries like Afghanistan, where cultural norms limit women's mobility, NGOs like SSEOA (www.sseoaf.af) support women in creating community education centres, early childhood development, home-based businesses. Female community teachers & workers play a pivotal role in these programs by training and mentoring participants while respecting cultural constraints.

In regions affected by conflict, women working with NGOs contribute to peacebuilding efforts. They mediate disputes, support trauma healing, and ensure the inclusion of marginalized groups in dialogues.

Cultural Norms and Islamic Teachings

Arabic:

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ
(Surah At-Tawbah, 9:71) وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

Dari:

مردان مؤمن و زنان مؤمن دوستان و یاوران یکدیگرند. آنان امر به معروف می‌کنند و از منکر باز می‌دارند و نماز را برپا می‌دارند و زکات می‌دهند و از الله و پیامبرش اطاعت می‌کنند. آنان کسانی هستند که الله بر آنان رحم خواهد کرد. همانا الله توانا و حکیم است.

The verse (Surah At-Tawbah, 9:71) conveys a profound and universal message about the mutual responsibilities and relationships among believing men and women. Its accurate meaning is as follows:

"Believing men and believing women are protectors and allies of one another. They encourage and promote what is good and virtuous (ma'ruf) and prevent and discourage what is wrong and harmful (munkar). They establish regular prayer, give the obligatory charity (zakah), and obey Allah and His Messenger. It is these individuals upon whom Allah will bestow His mercy, for indeed, Allah is All-Mighty and All-Wise."

This verse highlights the equality of spiritual responsibility between men and women and underscores the importance of their active roles in supporting one another in building a morally upright and compassionate community. It emphasizes the collective commitment to faith, worship, and social justice as the foundation for Allah's mercy and blessings.

Women's work with NGOs embodies this principle, as they actively enjoin good and promote well-being in their communities.

Adhering to Cultural Sensitivities

Women working in NGOs often operate in regions where cultural norms dictate specific roles and behaviors. By respecting these norms, they build trust and acceptance among the communities they serve. Examples of this include:

- Dressing modestly and adhering to local customs to ensure their message is received without resistance.
- Collaborating with religious leaders to gain community support for initiatives.
- Using culturally appropriate language and analogies to communicate effectively.

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite their successes, women working with NGOs face significant challenges, including societal resistance, security risks, and limited resources. However, these challenges also present opportunities for growth and innovation.

1. **Capacity Building:** Investing in training programs for female community workers enhances their skills and confidence, enabling them to tackle challenges more effectively.
2. **Partnerships with Religious Institutions:** Collaborating with mosques and religious leaders can amplify the impact of women-led initiatives, as these partnerships lend credibility and foster community buy-in.
3. **Leveraging Technology:** Mobile phones and digital platforms can facilitate communication and resource sharing, making it easier for women to reach and mobilize communities.

The involvement of women in NGOs is not just an option but a necessity for achieving sustainable community development. Their contributions in education, health, and other critical sectors have transformed countless lives, proving that they are indispensable agents of change.

As we move forward, it is imperative to support and empower women in their roles within NGOs. This involves providing them with the resources, training, and protection they need to thrive while respecting cultural norms and Islamic teachings. By doing so, we honor their efforts and uphold the Qur'anic principle of collective responsibility, ensuring a brighter and more equitable future for all.

--KHARKA Ravi, PhD Research Scholar.