

“Freedom” Poem
I don’t want to think about the past
I won’t forget what happened
I won’t say I’m a victim
But I’m a strong woman
I want to live freely
Previous sufferings are enough
I’ve beaten fear and broken vacant rules
I want to live freely
I won’t accept to be lonely and forgotten
I don’t want to think about the past

*Kareema Kareema AlRejaji
As facilitated by Hanan Kwinana
And recorded Kareema Ben Jeloun
18 December 2015, Rabat*



**Final Evaluation of the AMAL
Programme: “Supporting Women’s
Transformative Leadership at
Changing Times in the MENA
Region”**

**Final Report – Executive Summary
April 2016**

By

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Title: AMAL: Supporting Women's Transformative Leadership in the MENA Region in Changing Times

Countries: Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, OPT

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Duration: 3 years, 01 October 2012 – 31 January 2016

Partners: ATMDAS, ADFM, FLDDF and Ennakhil in Morocco, AFTURD, ATFD and LET in Tunisia, WNC and YWU in Yemen, MIFTAH, WCLAC, PWWSD, and WAC in the OPT

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0 Summary

AMAL, meaning 'hope' in Arabic, was born of hope in a time of hope, but was a project implemented in a period where that hope in many of the original Arab Spring countries was becoming increasingly threadbare. The challenge for AMAL has been how to continue to push for women's advancement in the region, through improving and transforming women's leadership, despite the considerably more difficult times now being experienced. Four countries have been involved: Tunisia, Morocco, the OPT and Yemen.

Project and Evaluation Aims

The overall aim of AMAL has been 'to promote active participation and leadership of women in the MENA region, including the poorest and most marginalised women, in local, national and regional governance structures and decision-making processes, therefore, ensuring that they have a say in formulation and/or their needs and priorities are reflected in socio-economic policies and practice at all levels'.¹ There have been four objectives around increasing women and girls awareness of their political and social economic rights, and their ability to play leadership roles; capacity building of a diversity of women's organisations; changing attitudes of decision makers and opinion formers, in order to change policies too; and generating and sharing learning, to strengthen women's participation and leadership across the region.

This final evaluation itself has had multiple aims in terms of: identifying the achievements and impact so far of AMAL and ways this may be sustained; sharing good practices and lessons based on the challenges experienced; verifying the effective and efficient use of donor and Oxfam funds; identifying Oxfam's added value to project partners and stakeholders in the design and implementation of the project; and identifying the added value of having a regional/multi-country programme as opposed to single country projects.

Methodology

Endline surveys immediately preceded this evaluation – or in the case of Morocco was conducted simultaneously – and thus the methods we used focused on the qualitative exploration of the types of changes that had taken place through the project. The methods used in each country were based around interviews and focus group discussions, two with partner beneficiaries and one with AIF participants. For Yemen, a single FGD with REFLECT group participants was held via skype.² In addition, a series of case stories were also collected. In each country, the main researcher was supported by a national research assistant, who helped with the understanding of context, and supported the documentation of FGDs, interviews and case studies. Most meetings were conducted in Arabic, the common language between the researchers and all involved. Subsequently each of the two researchers produced a draft report from their country visits in English, responding to the detailed questions set out in the original TOR.

¹ Full Grant Application for 'AMAL: Supporting Women's Transformative Leadership in Changing Times in Middle East and North Africa', Oxfam, September 2012

² The main method used for working with women leaders in Yemen was via mixed REFLECT groups.

For the regional component, a series of Skype meetings were held with representatives from each of the three Oxfam affiliates that had been involved in AMAL – GB, Intermon and Novib. Then meetings were held in Beirut with the regional team members; some of these took the form more of extended discussions, rather than being interviews per se. This gave much more opportunity to explore management, organisational and programmatic issues in depth. AMAL has been a complex project, with fractured participation and diverse perspectives. No one person has been involved in the project from design initiation to completion. Accordingly our challenge has been to triangulate these different perspectives in order to attain an account of AMAL that goes some way to representing and reconciling the varied experiences of the project from poor rural women through partners to past and present Oxfam staff. It has been a complex enterprise; AMAL has been an accretory, layered project and no-one understands it the same way.

Analysis of Findings

Relevance. AMAL was conceived as an ambitious, progressive project that would work with ‘new’ women’s organisations post the 2011-12 Arab uprisings. In practice, the actual design was tempered down in part because the country offices wanted to continue existing partnerships, but also because of (changing) contextual circumstances. Altogether, the design and implemented strategy for AMAL was relevant to its four diverse contexts; a few limitations are noted. There were inevitable challenges through the project’s implementation in achieving a degree of coherency and connectedness across countries, and between the main project and the smaller AMAL Innovation Fund (AIF) component, given the diverse nature of the inter-affiliate management model, and the inevitable differences between implementing partners. Despite this, through the six meetings held with all partners, mutual relationships were developed and agreement reached, for instance, on a regional advocacy strategy. The final end of project meeting held in Tunisia in January 2016, which was the first time the AIF grantees had been included in a meeting with the other grantees, acted as a celebration of what had been hard won across the three years, both in terms of relationship building and strategic achievements. This emphasises our major concern, that AMAL exists only as a single, three year regional initiative that does not have a fully planned and funded follow up. To realise the full potential of the relationships and connections established in this first phase, especially with the new organisations brought in through the AIF grants, the one component where a range of new women’s organisations were supported, and the benefit of the regional dimension, it would be highly desirable to turn AMAL into a longer running programme.

Effectiveness. In spite of some of the initial constraints encountered, and the concerns expressed at the end of the first year of AMAL’s implementation by the slow start up and low burn rate, the project was effective in achieving its stated aims in the second and third years of implementation. This was achieved owing to changes in the steering committee, improved communications between the regional team and the country offices, the growing familiarity of the programme manager with the demands of the project, the improvement of HQ support, the eventual recruitment of an advocacy coordinator, and a successful end of year one joint planning meeting that helped bring all the country and regional actors involved much more on the same page. With the roll out of capacity building and leadership development activities, the project team and partners gradually grew in confidence in terms of understanding the concept of women’s transformational leadership, and what it required to achieve, aided by the ongoing learning and sharing meetings. In the final year of the project, the leadership development and advocacy initiatives began to show more results, especially with the successful focus on increasing the number of elected women in local and national elections in Morocco and Tunisia. Effective final year activities included the activities of the nine AIF grantees and the regional ‘Time to Lead’ advocacy campaign.

Efficiency. Whilst the AMAL project could have been implemented more efficiently, many of the factors involved lie in the new Oxfam federated structure, and were beyond the control of the direct project management. The new OI structure shows a tension between the desire of the confederation to be democratic and the requirements of management efficiency and the demands of the project highlighted this tension. In the circumstances the regional project management team did the best that could have been done in difficult circumstances. It is however inefficient to manage a single project like AMAL with such indirect lines of management. This was exacerbated by unfilled staff positions, especially the regional MEAL advisor positions, and the lack in Morocco of a full time project coordinator. Given these constraints it is remarkable what the project did achieve.

Participation and Empowerment. Issues around the participation and empowerment of various women's groups included within AMAL was one of the subjects of ongoing debate in the project, particularly in terms of what it takes to encourage poor and marginalised women to become more effective leaders within their homes and communities. Within the project different ways were identified in which such women can benefit economically through an activity that is more focused on civil and political rights. For instance if they are able to access free or subsidised services to which they are entitled but currently have denied rights, such as the advocacy to receive the health cards they are entitled in Tunisia, or organise to advance their labour rights (minimum wages, and the right to unionise), as in the OPT. In this way, the measures taken by women leaders benefiting from the capacity building of AMAL partner organisations have often had an economic focus to them, and this has helped the inclusion of poorer groups of women. Many of the labour rights issues also serve to redress some of the marginalisation of women, or specific groups of women workers. What many of the case examples below show is also the ripple effects of the leadership development work. Several women, from small beginnings, have started initiatives that have begun to include larger numbers of women. This role of emerging women champions is one of the interesting features of AMAL, and it would have been good to consolidate approaches around this so that this approach can be pursued more in the future.

Impact. It takes time to piece together what AMAL is as a project, because of its very indirect nature, with activities being implemented by local partners across four countries, with only very dotted lines of authority and reporting running between the partners and the country offices, to the regional programme team. The key activities undertaken by the partners involve forms of capacity building, advocacy work, and some, mostly belated, MEAL activities. Yet despite this, AMAL has resulted in achievements that have quietly begun to add up, particularly in the last year of implementation. There are three major impacts that have been achieved. One is the progress made with the actual achievement of promoting women's transformational leadership, for which a range of small cases have been presented. Of these, the most significant in terms of scale is the number of women that have been elected to roles of political leadership for the first time, particularly in Morocco and Tunisia. Second, is the strengthening of partner organisations as WTL capacity builders, with several innovative methods having been explored. And third, is the growing, significant role that collective advocacy efforts have played at country and regional levels, in securing policy changes and arguing the justice of promoting women's leadership within the Arab world.

Sustainability. Although AMAL has been described as a programme, the current lack of broader programme resources and a clear, contextualised framework within which AMAL is contributing, does raise concerns about the sustainability of AMAL's promising initiatives and relationships, achieved during the latter half of the project. When it was proposed at the final AMAL regional meeting in Tunisia that the 30 country partner organisations, including the AIF grantees, form a

regional network, they favoured the idea, but without a clear sense on how to initiate it. To establish such a network would likely require initially an INGO. Similarly, whilst country partner organisations were keen to continue the capacity building and advocacy activities they had been conducting, and would not necessarily require large ongoing resourcing levels, the Oxfam COs themselves, saw the acquisition of further programmatic resources as being essential for them to continue to support the initiatives. Those women leaders who have indeed experienced the benefits of transformation will likely continue what they are doing, but there is promise in what AMAL has achieved so far, and it would be unfortunate if Oxfam were not able to follow up on this. Some activities that are likely to be continued are at the level of establishing a regional advocacy platform, though a first commitment would need to be to the building of a platform that supports Arabic.

Oxfam Added Value. Although it took time to generate some form of overall coherency to AMAL, with the complexity of the project, its management and oversight arrangements, the delays in start up, including the two month delay in recruiting the programme manager, and then the time it took the manager to understand more fully how to operate within the complex structure, Oxfam nevertheless did deliver value. This became clearer in the last two years of the project, once greater clarity around resource management was established, the AIF became operational, and the regional advocacy component was planned. Overall, Oxfam added value through the creation of local and regional platforms to advocate, network, share experiences and challenges, and the lessons learned between and regionally across partners in the four countries. This was particularly the case by the final year of implementation, when relationship building was most thriving, and the Time for Women to Lead advocacy campaign had added something of substance to the regional dimension. Again though, it should be reiterated that this ‘added value’ can be diminished quickly, if there are not clear plans to consolidate and sustain key gains that have been made, since there is not yet evidence that the activities initiated by AMAL can be sustained of themselves given that the time period has been so short. This is particularly with respect to the regional role of connecting, supporting additional capacity building, and platform building.

Overall Lessons Learned

The AMAL project has provided a rich learning experience for all those involved, and for OGB in particular, managing the first regional initiative of this type within the context of the new Oxfam International arrangements, there has been a steep learning curve. A strength of the project was its inculcation of a reflective learning approach. This allowed many of the range of lessons that the collective experience was producing to be acted upon during the project’s three years.

Building a programme. By the end of the AMAL project, OGB had gone through a range of approaches towards building a regional gender justice programme. This had started from having a charismatic leader of the regional hub with her own clear ideas as to how the hub should evolve, to having a much wider and participatory meeting in November 2015 that sought buy in from different affiliate members into a regional proposal. This strategy still needs to develop a clear vision for the future that would incorporate and build on the gains made by AMAL.³ The AMAL experience has been rich and by the end, largely positive and can contribute to the development of a rich, experiential regional programme ToC, which it would be hoped can still evolve.

Managing a regional project (or programme) and lines of authority. ‘If you want to involve country people, there has to be some direct authority established, as otherwise, it is a matter of constant

³ Interview with SIDA portfolio manager for AMAL, January 2016.

negotiation. This depends very much on the personalities of the people.’⁴ Regional projects are never easy to manage because of the almost inevitable matrix management structures that evolve. With Oxfam International’s new democratic, inter-affiliate model, the structure for AMAL was not even a matrix but even more indirect, and whilst these indirect lines of authority are as a result of good intentions rooted in Oxfam International’s new confederate model, they are at odds with principles of good management practice, and the kinds of resource management efficiencies that a donor expects.⁵ There is a tension here, and OGB struggled to find the right balance for AMAL between one set of (democratic) rules for a federated organisation, and then a traditional, hierarchal set of donor accountabilities. It is understood that Oxfam International will be establishing regional managers in the future, to try and simplify some of these lines of authority. Whilst there are naturally different perspectives on the AMAL experience, all that is important here is that the lesson to be learned is that no regional project should be managed this way again.

Oversight and Role of the Steering Committee. The first Steering Committee for AMAL consisted largely of representatives from each of the Oxfam affiliates involved, but apart from one country with a representative who was not part of the line management of the Country Offices involved. This model was revised after the first year so that the Country Directors were now included in the committee, rather than the affiliate HQ representatives. The SC subsequently worked more effectively, since it now included at least the people responsible for the overall accountability of resources allocated to their country offices. Nevertheless, they were not the staff persons most directly involved in AMAL activities in each country, and thus had a view of strategy, performance and challenges still at some remove. Partners also had no representative on the overall steering committee, and at the country level, participants had no representation on the country equivalent. .

Advocacy planning and campaigning. There were several key lessons to be learned from the advocacy component. First, at the country level, some of the early struggles and conflicts (owing to competition between and different priorities of partners), suggests that planning for such work should begin early, and requires strong leadership and support. In a regional gender justice theory of change, advocacy necessarily needs to loom large, since as shown in Morocco and Tunisia it provides the pathway to leveraging women’s rights and providing the space for women’s transformational leadership, at scale. At the regional level, the final year advocacy initiative, the ‘Time for Women to Lead’ campaign achieved considerable success in terms of the publicity it garnered, with its plus 900,000 site hits, and conventional media exposure. This was thanks in no small way to the role of Marcel Khalife, the famous (in the region) Lebanese composer and musician, as a celebrity ambassador, and his free giving of considerable time and energy (and willingness to provide further support if required). A priority for Oxfam is the establishment of an Arabic social media platform. At the moment the organisation is still yet to embrace what it needs to do to be effective as a regional gender justice player in the Middle East, if indeed that remains an ambition.

Defining and empowering women as transformational leaders. It is intriguing that a single word, ‘transformational’ had such an indelible impact on AMAL. Inserting the word in the middle of two others, ‘women’s leadership’, turned a term everyone is familiar with (even if not widely practiced in the MENA region), into one that required considerable ongoing debate in order to define and understand. This debate was extremely healthy to AMAL, and played a significant role in terms of the level of innovation that occurred within the project. It caused all partners, including the AIF grantees, to look at the familiar words, ‘women’s leadership’ through new lenses, and thus to

⁴ AMAL Programme Manager Discussions, Beirut, January 2016.

⁵ Interview with SIDA portfolio manager for AMAL, January 2016.

develop some less familiar ways of encouraging and nurturing women to become leaders in ways that would truly challenge patriarchy and lead to some fresh opportunities for fulfilling women's rights through advancing their political leadership.

Collective approaches to capacity building. It is always a challenge for a project like AMAL to deal with anything other than small handfuls of women, because of the challenges involved in implementing complex activities at any form of scale (and particularly in terms of such a short time period). The numbers were still often small, but in Tunisia and Morocco especially, working with women at local community levels in groups, aided the breadth of women reached by awareness raising activities, which in turn facilitated more potentially far reaching achievements than might have been expected in the project's short time frame. The working with groups, plus the focus on forms of leadership that could challenge cultural boundaries, did help with the creation of ripple effects, even if mostly still of a limited nature.

Debates on strategies and approaches for poor and marginalised women's empowerment and leadership. We have commented on the debate about the respective roles and sequencing of activities focused respectively on the civil and political, and on the economic empowerment of poor (and marginalised) women. In any theory of change for the empowerment of poor women, their economic empowerment will feature large, and loom large in their own minds. It might be possible to focus only on indirect strategies of economic empowerment, but the issue cannot be ignored, since political empowerment is hard to achieve amongst those with neither voice nor income, and so some form of complementary or indirect initiatives focused on social rights and protection measures, are likely to be required. A further debate was on how best to involve men (and boys) within such a leadership initiative, in order to gain their support, and reduce patriarchal resistance, to the forms of cultural and institutional change that are required.

Key Recommendations

The recommendations laid out in this section follow from some of the most important of the lessons learned, set out above, with these lessons also acting as conclusions about the project and its operation.

- *Incorporating AMAL learning in the development of a regional gender justice programme*

This is important for the future of the regional gender justice programme, but will prove more difficult now that many of AMAL's regionally based staff have already left Oxfam, or will do so shortly, since there is much 'know-how' or implicit knowledge they have learned during the implementation of AMAL that cannot be easily documented.

- *Ongoing reflection and learning around regional (and country) gender justice ToCs*

Reflective learning played an important role in the relative success of the AMAL project and should play an ongoing role in ToC development and evolution, where the ToC and results chain are revisited for coherence, testing and validating sets of assumptions, developing or updating a risk register, and in developing necessary modifications in response to changing country contexts, whether political, social, or economic.⁶

- *Programme versus project management*

OGB has reorganised the structure of the regional gender justice programme twice since the start of AMAL. It would be preferable for the future that the overall regional gender justice strategy is

⁶ Morocco and OPT Country Report, February 2016.

managed by a person with strong programmatic experience, whilst specific projects, like AMAL, should be managed by a project manager, reporting to the regional programme manager. This will make the lines of accountability and responsibility clearer, and also ensure that the levels of experience of the respective positions are appropriate. It should also resolve some of the confusions that occurred with the management of AMAL.

- *Continuity of activities*

It will require a longer term effort on the part of the partners if women are to become more effective in fulfilling their rights in this respect, and be able to play a more significant role as transformational leaders in public life. The number of women who have taken up or become more confident in their leadership positions since the start of AMAL, suggests this can happen. It is likely though that many of the specific groups and individuals involved will still need support. In Morocco alone, AMAL has played a significant role in helping nearly 3,000 women be elected as councillors or parliamentarians. This has been a huge success for the project, but it also provides a responsibility not to abandon the women at a time when many are still very inexperienced and vulnerable as new political leaders, and hence still requiring support.

- *Documenting good capacity building and leadership development practices and guides*

Training and capacity building activities across partners and countries appeared particularistic, perhaps partly because partners saw the training services they could provide as part of their business model, and were reluctant to share with other partners. However, for a project like AMAL it would be helpful to document good practices and guides for these, where they are identified. For instance, as the project sought largely an indirect approach to the economic empowerment of poor women, one area that did benefit them in this regard, as well as advance their political leadership skills development were the few instances where advocacy work was conducted on women's social service rights. An example was the campaign around women's access to health cards in Tunisia. This type of right and other social service and protection rights of women, are something that the project could have pursued more systematically, with clearly guidance being developed on how to undertake the work methodologically. Another issue that proved effective of this type, particularly in OPT, but also to some extent in Tunisia and Morocco, was a focus on women's labour rights.

- *Incorporating Men and Masculinities into the capacity building work*

More attention is needed with regard to the targeting of men, in order that they support more fully the aspiration of developing women's leadership, and understand the benefits this will provide to them and their families, rather than seeing it only as a threat to their masculine control. Such targeting of men in trainings related to gender, leadership skills and women and political participation was one of the needs identified in the final AMAL annual report, and a requirement noted by the evaluators too, during their country visits. This needs investment in building skills and capacities of local facilitators on men and masculinity, but may initially require the training of Arabic speaking trainers.⁷

- *Advocacy activities*

A recommendation for future advocacy work is that because of its large potential impact, it is given more attention, time and resources. Campaigning in a project or programme as large and complex as AMAL requires time to plan, to conduct policy and legal reviews, to develop media relations and tools, communication plans, and so on. Advocacy work planning should also begin as early as possible in order to build synergies and complementariness with other project activities, such as

⁷ AMAL Annual Narrative Report, Year 3, Final, December 2015.

capitalising on awareness raising sessions and youth networks to attract attention and visibility to advocacy work.

- *Partner Financial Reporting and Participation*

It is recommended that Oxfam should reduce and simplify the administrative procedures, such as the financial tools and procedures related to compiling and completing financial reports and related verification of expenditure documents, document translation, for local partner organisations. These consume considerable effort, time and resource of partners, whilst more simplified procedures can better meet the underlying objectives of accountability and reporting timeliness. This can be substituted by more frequent capacity building and spot check visits to mitigate risks. More time and resources should also be invested in ensuring partners and (intended) programme participants are able to play roles in all the different programme phases; specifically early design phase, activities design, and setting performance targets.⁸

Conclusion

The Arab Uprisings – or more colloquial Arab Spring – were a brief moment in time. It remains perhaps too soon to assess what difference they have really made in the aiding of greater levels of democracy and social justice in the MENA region, especially given the pessimism that (re-)engulfs the Middle East. In the Maghreb region, thus far the effect of the Uprisings has been more far reaching and durable. From inception to completion, the AMAL project for ‘Supporting Women’s Transformative Leadership at Changing Times in the MENA Region’ has certainly borne witness to temporal turbulence. There is less hope in the region now than when AMAL was conceived, yet conversely it makes an initiative such as this even more vital. There were seedlings of a more inclusive and equitable future planted during the eponymous spring of 2011 and even if they prove slow growing, they require nurturing. What AMAL has shown are both the opportunities that can be opened up if the seeds of change are nurtured, and the many challenges that remain to be faced in doing so.

AMAL was a project that experimented with a word, that of ‘transformational’, and what it meant to sandwich this work between two others, ‘women’s’ and ‘leadership’. As such it turns two familiar words into a question – yes, we understand ‘women’s leadership’ but what does ‘women’s transformation leadership’ mean? The thinking and learning that was generated from this debate helped spark off a capacity building and leadership development process that sought to be innovative and adaptive, rather than formulaic. Through AMAL, Oxfam have shown that they can play a role of value as a facilitator of this leadership journey, and that this role is more significant if it is performed across countries, rather than just within each country, separately. To continue and add to this work would therefore be of further value to women’s transformational leadership in the region. It would be a challenging commitment, however, and would require some rethinking of the best organisational mechanisms to deliver such programming within the new OI confederation.

If AMAL means hope and was born in a time of hope, then what the project has shown is that providing women with opportunities to engage in more transformational leadership can still produce hope, in a world that needs as much of this commodity as can be fostered.

⁸ Morocco and OPT Country Report, February 2016, and AMAL Annual Narrative Report, Year 3, Final, December 2015.