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Report on the Gender Awareness Sessions For the Customs Department Staff

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Report on the Gender Awareness Session

For the Customs Department Staff

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RATIONALE

The USAID Customs Modernization Program has worked to develop the facilities and infrastructure of three customs centers in the areas of Zarqa, Sahab and Queen Alia Airport.

As a continuation to this effort, and in order to support the integration of women employees in those three centers, the USAID Customs Modernization Program requested from USAID Jordan Economic Development Program (SABEQ) delivering two gender awareness sessions targeting current employees at the three customs centers, and a group of women customs employees working at the headquarters in Amman.

The objectives of these sessions were:

1. Raise Jordan customs employees' awareness of the importance of creating an enabling environment for women working in the customs offices in Zarqa, Sahab and the Airport.
2. Generate interest of women employees to work in the three centers.
3. Identify next steps for creating an enabling environment for women working in the customs offices in Zarqa, Sahab and the Airport.

AGENDA

Session One was designed to raise the awareness of the targeted customs centers' staff on the importance of integrating women in customs centers and to identify driving and impeding factors affecting their integration. This session targeted the current directors and employees at the headquarters in addition to the Airport, Zarqa and Sahab Centers. There were a total of 25 participants; 22 of them from the customs centers (all men) and 3 members of customs gender committee (all women). The session was held at the Sheraton Hotel in Amman from 1 pm until 5 pm on November 12, 2008.

Session Two focused on generating interest among women working in the Customs Department headquarters (in Amman) to join the teams of the targeted centers in Zarqa, Sahab, and the Airport. This session targeted a group of potential women employees at the customs department. There were a total of 25 participants; 22 employees from the customs headquarters and centers and 3 members of customs gender committee. The session was held at Amrah Hotel in Amman from 10 am until 1 pm on November 16, 2008.

The agenda for the both sessions is shown below.

Subject	Duration
Introduction - Session objectives - Introduction of participants	10 minutes
Exercise 1: Each participant will identify, using flash cards, 1 reason why he/she thinks it is important for women to work in the centers, and 1 reason why they should not work in the centers	5 minutes
Exercise 2: 2 candidates will be selected to debate on the pros and cons of integrating women in the 3 centers, using the information on the flash cards mentioned in exercise 1.	25
Reflection on the debate by the big group	10 minutes
Role Plays	1 hours
Lunch Break	1 hour
Discussion and reflection on the role plays	20 minutes
Panel Discussion 5 female employees will present their success stories, followed by a discussion	20 minutes
Call to Action Brain storming on what to do in order to create an enabling environment for women in the customs centers	30 minutes

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

By the end of the two sessions, the participants gained a greater understanding of the importance of integrating women into the customs centers.

The following points were identified by participants as necessary for improving women's participation in the customs centers.

1. Create a decent work environment at the customs centers in which the female employees feel comfortable. This includes adequate infrastructure, work space and facilities.
2. Enhance customs centers employees' productivity so that women view customs centers as interesting places to work in.
3. Provide transportation for women to get to work from their areas of residence and back home.

On the other hand, the participants also identified the following constraints to women's employment in the customs centers:

1. Perceptions that women can be emotional when dealing with clients; some thing that would negatively affect the work.
2. Beliefs that women's physical capabilities limit their ability to serve in the centers.
3. Traditions do not allow women to stay away from their homes when working in remote centers.
4. Customs employees perceive transferring employees to customs centers as a punishment.
5. Centers lack the infrastructure for enabling women's participation.
6. Women customs employees lack the motivation to work in the field
7. Attitudes among men customs employees are not welcoming to women.
8. Lack of access to transportation makes it difficult for women to work in the field

Based on the discussions, participants provided the following recommendations to ensure an enabling work environment for women at the customs centers:

1. Support and recognition of women customs center employees by the upper management.
2. Share and publicize success stories of the successful women customs employees to attract more women to work in this field.
3. Conduct more gender awareness sessions targeting customs employees.
4. Ensure the infrastructure's readiness at the customs centers before transferring women to them.
5. Develop clear job descriptions for the women working at the customs centers to make sure that they will be assuming the responsibilities assigned to them by the management and not simple routine tasks that they might be asked to do in the centers.

6. Provide systematic training and coaching for employees working in the centers to ensure that they acquire the skills needed for good performance.

IMPACT

During the month following the awareness session, Jordan Customs hired seven new female employees in their remote centers, where six were placed in Sahab center and one in the Zarqa free zone center. This immediate impact was due to the leadership support at Customs Department, as well as the attendance of the Sahab center manager to the session held by the USAID Jordan Economic Development Program (SABEQ).

It is clear that the awareness sessions held by the Program were successful in creating momentum for hiring more females in remote customs centers. However, this momentum needs to be maintained and with proper follow up.

SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP

As a follow up on the two sessions mentioned above, the Program's Workforce and Gender Integration Specialist organized a meeting at the Customs Department with the Gender Committee at the Customs Department. It was noted at the meeting that the Gender Committee lacks the needed influence to be a decision maker when it comes to gender-integration initiatives. Another observation was that the Human Resources Department has little to no contact with employees in remote centers. Therefore, any gender integration efforts end once the employee is positioned in one of the centers and handed over to the site manager, which makes any follow up by the Human Resources Department almost non-existent.

Therefore, it is highly recommended that a mechanism is created and supported by upper management at Jordan Customs, not only to integrate female employees in the customs centers, but also to allow proactive and effective gender integration cooperatively led by the Human Resources Department and Gender Committee.

WFD & GI Team in collaboration with the Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist will conduct follow up meetings with Jordan Customs, in order to monitor and evaluate the impact after the first wave of hiring, and to provide needed insight on retaining females and growing their positions in the centers they were assigned to. The follow up and monitoring results will be reported quarterly and coaching will be provided through meetings with the gender committee and other concerned staff in the Customs Department. The coaching will start in March, 2009.

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