



Empowering Voices, Enabling Change: Bringing Government Employees One Step Closer to Gender Equality in the Workplace

“Before the gender audit, we didn’t have privacy as women in the workplace and our representation in several departments was low due to social perceptions determining the division of work among men and women,” recalls Ms. Sumaya Al Zoubi, an employee at the Department of Employment of Persons with Disabilities in the Ministry of Labor. Women like Sumaya face daily challenges carrying out their work in the public sector due to the lack of guidelines to ensure that women and men have equal access to opportunities in the workplace.

Despite the progress of gender equality in government institutions, the Jordanian public sector’s commitment to gender equity and equal opportunity has room for improvement. Government institutions still face challenges in incorporating gender equity into long-term strategies, budgets, and short-term plans. Due to the vital importance of institutional commitment towards gender equity and equal opportunity, USAID Takamol has adopted a three-phase participatory gender audit approach to support the government in addressing gender issues and provide a framework for Jordanian public institutions. This approach empowers employees to assess the state of gender equity and equality in the workplace and contribute to the development of strategies to improve it.

As one of the participants in the first phase of the gender audit program, Sumaya took part in various training sessions to help her identify and address the gender-related challenges she and her fellow employees face in the workplace. “Through the training program, we were able to meet employees from across the kingdom and learn about the challenges they faced and, most importantly, how to address them,” reflects Sumaya. 41 employees from seven different government institutions (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Ministry of Planning and International Development, the Income and Sales Tax Department and Higher Council for Affairs of Persons with Disabilities) took part in the trainings, which aimed to build skills such as research, communication, and report writing, as well as to increase their understanding of gender concepts, providing them with the necessary tools to facilitate gender equity and equal opportunity in the workplace.

Sumaya and her colleagues in the ministries drew on these skills to take part in the gender audit process. The gender audit process began with the aim of identifying gender-related issues in the workplace. Using research tools such as questionnaires, focus group discussions, and interviews, the gender audit teams developed six Gender Audit Reports. Each report was tailored to each of the seven partner organizations with specifically trained internal gender teams supported by USAID Takamol.

Sumaya and her gender audit team, alongside teams from other ministries, presented their reports’ findings to the relevant ministers and ministry officials. Findings including significant gaps in women’s access to leadership and professional opportunities and benefits, as well as different expectations of men and women’s work due to widespread misconceptions about women’s capacity to lead. Following the presentation of the gender audit reports, USAID Takamol put forth recommendations to ensure the institutional commitment to mainstream a gender perspective at policy, program, and organizational levels.

“[Following our presentation], ministry officials responded positively and enthusiastically, and changes were made to improve women’s participation in leadership roles and the representation of women in certain departments,” remarks Sumaya. Current outcomes of gender audit reports are promising, with thirty-seven actions having been taken by targeted institutions to mainstream gender equity principles.

The gender audit process was repeated in phase two in October 2016, with employees from the Social Security Corporation and the Ministry of Social Development. While phase two is still underway, USAID Takamol has partnered with the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the project. The Jordanian National Commission for Women will take part in policy sessions reflecting on lessons learned from phases one and two and will also be a part of the proposed third phase of the gender audit. Sharing knowledge with the Commission will allow it to conduct gender audit trainings and pave the way for more women like Sumaya to benefit from the program.

Following the two-year technical assistance and capacity building program of phase one, 93.5% of targeted government staff reported increased level of knowledge and understanding of gender mainstreaming principles. Furthermore, almost all participating institutions have now endorsed their respective gender audit report and have demonstrated their commitment to the recommendations put forth based on Sumaya’s and her colleagues’ work by increasing the number of women in leadership roles. All this brings Sumaya and her team one step closer to achieving gender equity and equal opportunity in the workplace.