



Success Story

Improving the Quality of Gender-Sensitive Research in Jordan

USAID Takamol, a USAID funded program implemented by IREX, launched a Research Consortium aiming to bring the capabilities of Jordanian research centers up to international standards.

Dr. Ghada Al Bandak, Assistant Professor of Nutrition and Science and Head of Nutrition and Dietetics at the American University of Madaba, had wanted to conduct research which would highlight the intersection between gender and nutrition, and how the latter can be influenced by the former. “As I was conducting my research... it was challenging to communicate my questions to most women,” even though in most Jordanian households, women are the primary preparers of food and tend to be the decision-makers regarding nutrition. However, Dr. Ghada’s struggle reflected a larger issue: the lack of a gender lens when conducting research in Jordanian institutions, regardless of the topic.

Empowering researchers in producing gender-sensitive research

As a part of USAID Takamol, the Research Consortium, composed of 22 institutions, was developed to empower researchers to shed light on gender-sensitive issues and enable them to produce high quality and ethical research. Beginning in the summer of 2016, Dr. Ghada along with over 160 researchers from different universities, civil society organizations, and government bodies, attended a series of workshops, seminars, and panel discussions that focused on providing a full understanding of the importance of prioritizing gender needs and gaps, as well as how to effectively wield the tools needed to collect and analyze data for high-quality, gender-sensitive research.

Research as a tool for gender advocacy

Using the knowledge and skills gained through the training sessions as well as being the recipient of a grant from Takamol, Dr. Ghada was able to design, plan, and then effectively conduct her research. According to Dr. Ghada, the importance of her work lies in the widespread misconceptions surrounding healthy eating habits: “For example, some women believed that ‘healthy’ food was equivalent to ‘food that is cleaned well.’” Yet some women in rural areas, as Dr. Ghada mentions, recognize that there were dietary questions issues related to weight loss, breastfeeding and pregnancy, and were searching for answers. By applying a gender-sensitive lens when conducting her research, Dr. Ghada also found that dietary decisions in rural families are heavily influenced by the breadwinner of the

family, who is usually the husband or another male member of the family. “Women end up cooking what their husbands and families want to eat, consuming the main meal in the evening after their husbands return home from work. There are no gyms in these areas, or any spaces to walk,” states Dr. Ghada. Because of the lack of exercise equipment in these areas, many households can adopt de facto unhealthy behaviors, especially if the head-of-household prefers to eat unhealthy meals. These findings clearly demonstrate the importance of qualitative research and gender-sensitivity in research in general as it captures women’s experiences and can ultimately serve as a tool for advocacy and relevant policy recommendations.

Dr. Ghada hopes to publish her research in a scientific journal: she is currently finalizing her research paper after receiving feedback on the first draft from USAID Takamol as part of the continued technical assistance provided to members of its Research Consortium. She is also working on a campaign in which she plans to bring in women from rural Madaba, where the university is located, to attend one-day lectures to spread awareness about healthy diets and answer their questions. “Women need to be empowered, they need to be able to choose what to eat, because an unhealthy diet would not only affect the women’s health, but also the rest of the family’s health,” adds Dr. Ghada.



Enabling positive social change

The Research Consortium has created an avenue to enable researchers from different fields in Jordan to network, share knowledge, and provide support to each other and ultimately improve the quality of gender-sensitive qualitative research produced, allowing research to be used more effectively in the areas of women’s empowerment and mainstreaming gender. As Dr. Ghada points out “[through the Research Consortium] I gained a deeper understanding of the concept of women’s empowerment. I understood that when it comes to nutrition, empowerment means choice, to be able to choose what you want to eat”. Dr. Ghada’s research is proof of the importance of gender-sensitive research in providing a better understanding of problems and ultimately serving as a tool for positive social change.



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

