

## ANNEX I

### *WILL/CHF Mission to Colombia, March-April 2006*

---

#### **COUNTRY AND CONTEXT: CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT**

---

The last 40 years in Colombia’s history has been marred by armed conflict. Ongoing violence and massive displacement has transformed parts of the country due to countless deaths and widespread loss of livelihoods undercutting the social fabric for millions of people, especially in rural areas. This is a struggle involving many actors, including the Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN)—two right-wing armed groups that have merged into one—the government and its military forces; and the narco-traffickers who have supported all sides at some level. Most of the people interviewed for this project come from a war-affected population, in that their lives have been transformed by violence, conflict and displacement and they are currently at varying stages of reintegration and resettlement in new and challenging environments.

It is important to note that there are several agencies implementing programs to assist displaced persons and vulnerable groups, only a sample of which are represented in the list of organizations interviewed. These include relevant government entities, the Social Action network (*Acción Social*) which manages a nationwide assistance network for displaced families who are registered with it and whose psychosocial programs are largely managed by CHF, and the Colombian Institute for Family Wellbeing, (*Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar de la Familia, ICBF*). International agencies include UNHCR (lead agency in the UN for the displaced), World Food Program, UNDP, UNICEF, IOM, OCHA, etc., all of whom have programs targeted to the internally displaced people (IDP). In addition, Catholic and Protestant churches receive government and international funds to offer relief services to an extensive network of war affected Colombians. The ICRC and a number of the major international NGOs work alone or with Colombian partners to buttress livelihoods threatened by war, to receive those who flee, and to support IDP integration and training in the communities where they settle. That a large number of agencies is engaged, however, does not translate into adequate support and assistance for the millions of Colombians affected by conflict and economic decline. Women, who are disproportionately represented among the displaced and vulnerable, have been and remain at risk, exploited, and under served.

Although Colombians accuse themselves of widespread indifference towards the poor and victims of violence, there is, in fact, a rich, varied and committed civil society. Organized citizens support causes across the political spectrum from pro-ecology to anti-abortion. However, the most relevant for this discussion are the numerous entities working to promote human rights, including women’s rights, and devoting resources to support and sustain victims of violence. The inability of formal political actors to achieve peace has led to the creation of citizen’s groups across society and throughout the country dedicated to preserving communities and in opposition to all sides in the fighting. Colombian NGOs have created and supported programs and projects to specifically support indigenous and Afro-Colombian beneficiaries whose societies have been undermined by the conflict as well as those involving women and youth; have supported small-scale economic development; documented the suffering caused by forced migration; and mobilized for and against the US, the UN and other international entities.

---

#### **WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP**

---

Women in the middle and upper classes of Colombian society are visible as political, economic, social and cultural leaders. Education is—or used to be—widely available to boys and girls alike in almost all areas of the country. That being said, female political leadership is proportionately low. Few females currently serve in Parliament or even local government and the numbers of females elected to legislative bodies have declined in the past years. In rural areas girls leave school earlier than boys, and few among the displaced population have gone beyond the primary grades. Women seem to predominate in social service organizations, as is the case in many western countries. Colombia appears to have an active feminist movement although, to be sure, this observation is colored by the fact that interviews were

focused on agencies self-described as having feminist agendas. Those who do describe themselves as feminist activists assert that they are stigmatized and caricatured in the general society and their efforts are often ignored by men whose decision making power is greater than theirs.

Without question, women’s groups have been at the forefront of the peace movement in Colombia. There are 350 women’s organizations in the *Ruta Pacifica*, a nationwide network of pro-peace women. In November 2002 a national network called *Iniciativas Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz* (Colombian Women’s Initiative for Peace) comprised of 26 women’s organizations from all over the country brought together 243 women leaders to draft an Agenda of Women for Peace. The Initiative publishes regular bulletins and organizes frequent events. By all accounts, the peace movement in its many different manifestations has been a major mobilizing force among women from all classes and regions.

---

## POLITICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT

---

Colombia has national legislation that forbids discrimination on gender or racial grounds, and this legislation has been essential in defending women’s rights. Additionally, the courts have upheld the rights of women and the displaced and ordered the government to improve its practices. A Law of Quotas for public sector trade unions calls for 30 percent of the leadership posts to be female but, reportedly, it is neither upheld nor enforced. The municipality of the capital city of Bogotá has had a succession of mayors sympathetic to social issues and the current mayor, directly in response to pressure from women’s groups, has established a special office for Women and Gender Policies. It is not well funded and its continued existence depends on the good will of the particular mayor in office, but it has been able to support numerous initiatives on behalf of women and to promote women leaders. The most ambitious of these is a Plan of Equal Opportunity: For Gender Equity in the Capital District (2004-2016).

The Mayor has appointed 20 (largely ceremonial) “sub-mayors” serving in Bogotá districts, all of whom are women. The Department of Social Wellbeing (DABS) and the District Institute for Sports and Recreation (IDRD) cooperate with NGOs in providing poor women with temporary employment and training. Reportedly, there are similar projects outside of Bogotá but in several locations municipal authorities reportedly are hostile to such initiatives. The Colombian Institute for Family Wellbeing (ICBF), which is government run and national in scope, supports numerous female heads of family, especially among the displaced

The number of displaced is debated. At the upper end the estimate is just under three million, and includes persons registered with the government as well as those who have been displaced but are not registered. While figures vary, the common assertion is that over half the displaced population is female and up to 80 percent are women and children.

---

## PROJECT INTERVIEWS (SEE ATTACHED SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS)

---

Due to security and time restraints, research for this project was done primarily in or near the capital city of Bogotá. Interviews were also held with groups representing three assistance agencies in the southern city of Neiva and one agency in the northern coastal city of Monteria. (See attached list of interviews.)

Bogotá receives more displaced persons than any other city, but obviously conditions and opportunities for jobs and assistance are different there than in other parts of the country. The capital is a vast city of some eight million people and has not directly experienced conflict. Nevertheless, in areas where displaced families have concentrated—adjacent to but administratively separate from Bogotá itself—the armed factions are very much present and constitute a disruptive force among the vast displaced population. Bogotá is usually not the first stop for families who have been displaced, but the place to which they come after being forced from their homes and initially seeking refuge in smaller towns in their own regions. Neiva and Monteria are among the towns that receive people directly from areas where fighting, death threats, fumigation and forced land seizures have caused people to flee. In these places, the conflict is close at hand. Even when families are temporarily stable thanks to income-generation projects or land made available to them, there is widespread fear regarding the future.

Over a period of nine days, the researcher—with the assistance of a young professional contracted by CHF/Colombia and with support from members of the CHF staff—collected literature, brochures and training material used in women related projects, and held interviews with:

- CHF staff. Five individuals associated with CHF, three of whom have managed projects relevant to WILL:
  - the “Making Cities Work” project in Soacha;
  - a disaster recovery project;
  - youth projects in Soacha and Cali; and
  - family attention components of government IDP assistance.
- Colombian NGOs outside of CHF engaged in:
  - public work with social orientation and empowerment training;
  - leadership training in defense of women’s rights; and
  - microcredit projects including training and support (majority women)
- Labor union activist for female teachers
- Municipal office on women and gender affairs
- Religion-based productive collective, comprised primarily of women
- Individual activists/experts in political organizations and health promotion
- Beneficiaries: Group interviews with beneficiaries/participants of CHF projects in Altos de Cazucá, Soacha; Covalhuila (Cooperative of Volunteers of Huila) and APAC (Association of Alternative Community Projects) in Huila; in depth interviews with beneficiaries/participants of Corporación Casa de la Mujer and Fundación Maria Cano of Monteria.

The projects visited for this research are funded locally and internationally to operate programs with somewhat different objectives and approaches:

- Agencies that define their focus as assistance to displaced and marginal populations but in which women usually constitute a majority.  
Donors, including USAID and CHF as well as most of the UN organizations, offer emergency assistance programs for the displaced that take into account the preponderance of females and female heads of family. These programs are designed to encompass family units in a manner that assures women will fully participate in the benefits and opportunities.
- Agencies that specifically target women among the poor and vulnerable.  
The agencies specifically targeted to promote women’s empowerment go several steps further in terms of promoting women’s leadership than those whose mandate is more general. They consciously promote participation of women as subjects rather than objects of assistance and try to prepare women to take active roles in decision-making that affects their own lives. Whereas the humanitarian assistance programs strive for greater gender equality, some of the woman-focused NGOs aim specifically to encourage women’s political and economic leadership. As one agency director noted, speaking in terms similar to all, “men assume they will be leaders, women do not. They need to be supported.”
- Agencies that work to foster economic independence through credit programs, microenterprise projects and similar efforts.  
NGO and agency programs offering micro credits and income generating projects fall somewhere in between. Because they give privileged attention to the special needs of women heads of households and help them to overcome the obstacles in the way of becoming economically more self sufficient, they may be vehicles for leadership in some cases. But the goal is to enhance income generation capacity for individuals and family units. It is therefore difficult to specify whether and how the methods they use are relevant to promoting leadership *per se*.

The activities of the three categories overlap to a considerable degree. In all three categories most participants and beneficiaries are from families who have been forcibly displaced directly or indirectly as a

result of the conflict, and programs of all three include components of psychosocial support and training in democratic values.

Given the thrust of the WILL project, the interviews primarily focused on those agencies specifically targeting women. The majority of the interviewees were agency directors (nearly all female) working with and on behalf of women and with selected, mainly female, beneficiaries who are served by these agencies. Among the latter set, most were people who had been displaced. They had survived unthinkable tragedies, lost immediate family members, been physically abused, and seen their land, possessions and properties seized. They have been and continue to be exploited in any number of ways and their domestic situations tend to be fragile.

The interviewees acknowledged that men are no less traumatized than the women and, perhaps, even more so because they find themselves with even fewer options after displacement. Generally, the women can find work as domestic servants, in restaurants, laundries or other service industry sectors. As exploitative as these jobs tend to be, the women who take them are doing tasks to which they are well accustomed. The men who worked as farmers or owned small enterprises in their places of origin are faced with the need to accept work—if they can find it at all—that does not correspond to their previous experience and which they perceive to be demeaning. Very few men were interviewed for this report. Those with whom the researchers were able to speak at length were among a small number of men associated with the organizations whose beneficiary population was largely female. They shared the “feminist” agenda of the agency or at least saw the advantages of participating in the programs.

Amidst their multiple disadvantages, women who have been displaced have something of an edge in relation to finding jobs and attention from outside agencies and NGOs. Many husbands and partners have become economically dependent on the income from the women in their households. In point of fact, women are more likely than the men to seek outside assistance—largely because of their anxieties concerning their children and/or the elderly people who inevitably are left in their care. The fact that women are perceived to have better access to opportunities and support networks can be painful for the men to accept. As will be described below, some men prefer to make do with fewer resources than to accept a role reversal in the family.

---

## METHODS FOR WORKING WITH WOMEN

---

Most local NGOs use similar methodologies to orient the women who come to their attention and to assist them in overcoming their traumatized state. These include conducting workshops, seminars, and group discussions to foster self-esteem, self-expression and what is generally called “empowerment.” These trainings are providing the women with practical information for coping in their new environments, enhancing their skills for eventual employment, and applying rights-based approaches to solving problems. In addition, the NGOs provide concrete assistance to the women for navigating the bureaucracy of obtaining those services that they are due under Colombian law. Organizers of these programs, as well as participants and former participants, speak of methods that emphasize democratic and cooperative ways of improving their lives, methods designed to produce more solidarity and less violence, more collective action and less authoritarian forms of leadership. Most of the NGOs work with self selected individual women, but one, the *Corporación de la Mujer* identifies community-wide projects run by women that fill needs, are viable and sustainable, and to which the project organizers are likely to be committed over time. The budget for this is small.

From *Corporación Casa de la Mujer (Pies de Vuelta*, p. 10, trans: PWF)

*The principles underlying this methodology are: creativity at the service of ‘learning by doing,’ dialogue based on learning from experiences; participation without exclusion and physical recuperation.*

*The methodology facilitates and strengthens the participation of all, thereby giving everyone the opportunity to express herself or himself freely and with no strings attached. Such participation*

*should never be forced...[the methods] imply orienting experiences of life, reflections and knowledge in the interest of transforming realities.*

*The shared knowledge of the participants, their affirmation, confidence and interpersonal communications open the door to new realities such as cooperation and conflict resolution in more creative ways. The participants’ knowledge about each other is one of the first steps in their formation as a group...*

Among specific empowerment techniques used are the followed:

- Women are asked to write down their goals and their plans for attaining them. These are discussed in groups.
- Women are offered employment, usually menial, but are brought together for workshops and self improvement sessions to prepare them for self-sufficiency and collective actions.
- Workshops held over the course of a few days focus on political and social themes and opportunities for female political involvement.
- Women are brought into existing networks, where they are exposed to role models who become mentors and friends. (The latter are volunteers.)
- In discussions about leadership, “positive” i.e. democratic forms of leadership are compared to the “negative,” i.e. authoritarian forms.
- Women are encouraged to formulate ideas first among each other, then in broader spaces where men and women are acting together.
- Women in communities formulate project ideas and are helped to plan implementation and resource mobilization strategies. The plans cover about four years on average.
- Organizers mobilize cooperation from local universities whose faculty members participate in workshops and short courses on human rights, law and other subjects.

Key to the success of these services is 1) their collective approach, and 2) a long-term commitment on the part of the NGOs working with them. The women who participate, especially those from the rural areas, often have heretofore led isolated lives within the confines of their families and subject to the decisions of male heads of household. After displacement or the departure of their male partners, they lack the resources to care for their children and seek help from available projects and programs. In the process, they find themselves among others in similar circumstances. Their isolation ends, and they derive courage from new friends. Among these new female friends, they learn to speak out, acquire skills and share information. It is a slow process by all accounts. Women leaders interviewed in Soacha/Altos de Cazucá where the displaced are concentrated noted that among the many NGOs from which they had received assistance, CHF was the one that had stayed the longest in the community and therefore had earned trust from the residents.

Bonding occurs between and among women whose political past may have linked them with one or another of the parties in the Colombian conflict. The fact that, as a consequence of the bonding, they come to see themselves as victims of the conflict itself rather than victims of a particular faction, drives many of them to devote themselves to the peace initiatives noted above. The fact that they bond with other women and find support for the issues that affect them as women, makes it easier for them to find some degree of independence from male dominance within their individual families. Women receive encouragement to be independent and to take care of their own needs. These messages came through in virtually all the interviews.

Using these techniques, the WILL researcher conducted in-depth interviews with participants who had used the skills they obtained through the programs and had become leaders. As recounted below, many founded organizations of their own, mobilized other women, undertook educating themselves in management as well as in law and human rights and, not uncommonly, replaced the men who previously had led the organizations to which they were affiliated. The interviews were with the women who had successfully become leaders, but there are no studies of the long term outcomes for the totality of women who passed through the programs in question. Project managers had kept up with a number of such women who had gone on to leadership roles. The head of a project that combined finding temporary work

for women in Bogotá’s park system with agency-based psychosocial support described individual women who had formed and were leading community organizations, factory committees and social services. She and the other project directors committed to promoting women to political leadership believed they had been successful, and regretted that they lacked resources for follow-up studies to prove it.

The CHF projects (e.g. Making Cities Work, rebuilding after floods) are different in focus. They may serve a clientele that is primarily female, but the projects are meant to help the victims of poverty, conflict or natural disaster to recover and achieve self-sufficiency. For example, CHF provides seed grants to youth organizations in areas where young people are deeply scarred by violence and have few options for employment. In a recent relief effort in a flooded area, CHF worked with neighborhoods and community organizations, helping the residents to come together, determine their goals and how they would work together to achieve these goals, then provide loans to actualize the plans. In such instances, the CHF staff is diligent about including women (or girls) at all stages of planning and implementation, and takes appropriate measures to facilitate the women’s ability to participate (such as accommodating for child care, for example). CHF staff works with existing organizations and existing leaders—far more often men than women—to bring women into the process. As existing leaders are generally willing and able workers and mid-level managers, only rarely during the project do they replace the men already in leadership positions. Nevertheless, CHF staff report, the men with whom they work see their value and treat them with respect. It is not clear whether these experiences eventually open the way to women’s leadership in the community organizations. Nor is it clear what happens after the projects end.

The largest project in which CHF is involved entails providing assistance through local partners to displaced persons, under the government’s humanitarian program for IDPs. In this program, CHF works to design psychosocial assistance to ensure that the entire family unit is part of the process. All family members are asked to verbally create a life plan for their future in their new location so as to help them find a path from the familiar scenes of the past to the possibilities of the present. The importance, here, according to CHF staff, is that there be a life plan for each of the family members—men, women and children—and a future direction on which they can agree. A major goal is keeping the family unit together and able to support each other.

*We understand social fabric to refer to the internal dynamic of the community, which is constituted by the roles and relations each of its members assume in coming together and constructing alternative solutions to the problems facing the community...The strength of the social fabric depends...on the quality of the ties established by the people and groups in the community.*

(from CHF Orientation Guide to Psycho-Social Accompaniment for the Population of Displaced Persons, pp. 16-17) trans: PWF

CHF usually offers its assistance to internally displaced persons for periods that extend beyond the government-prescribed three months of assistance to new and registered IDPs, but the period nevertheless is short. It is not known what becomes of the family units once the psychosocial therapy is over. CHF staff is consciously striving to promote gender equality in its projects. However, because the projects themselves do not call for CHF to report on its success in achieving that goal, the agency has not established indicators to measure it or follow up activities to gauge gender related impacts.

---

## WOMEN LEADERS DEFINING LEADERSHIP

---

Views from the field:

*To be a leader, or a democratic leader, is to promote and form teams, to guide and propose, and not to impose one’s own proposals. The leader shares and transmits experience and knowledge; contributes to the process of defining goals, processes, rules of the game; gathers opinions...; he or she delegates, acts on the basis of what has been agreed by those who support him or*

her...The leader does not speak for the others or represent them without previously having consulted them, ...and is committed to sharing power....

From the Corporación Casa de la Mujer, *Liderazgos: Participación de Mujeres y Representación en el Poder Local, Bogotá 2004*, p. 79 trans: pwf

Anita: “I am a ‘hard’ leader, one of those who stays with the organization and continues working when other women have given up.” (Organized a cooperative of domestic servants)

Graciela: “The women who work with me have the same drive I do. We got support ...We have come to believe in our own capacities thanks the course in leadership and empowerment.” (Organized a women’s cooperative affiliated with *Casa de Mujeres Trabajadores*)

Maria: “A leader is a volunteer who will come when called. She is responsible, respectful of the opinions of others. She takes initiatives and wants to move forward.” (Community leader working with CHF projects)

Cindy: “A leader gives support to the community, is ready to listen to others, to develop and to achieve. She figures out how to make things happen.” (A highschool student in Soacha)

Marta: “I talk to my companions about why they should do more work for the community and how what we are doing is good. I am like a stone in their shoe, pushing...” (Works on the community education committee in Soacha, supported by international NGOs)

Myriam: “To be a leader you have to know about life, to have suffered what others have suffered.” (Community organizer in Soacha)

Esperanza: “Leaders are spokespersons for others; they know where to go and how to speak and to manage processes. They defend others who are in their situation. A leader is trained. A leader is one who makes leaders of others.” (A leader of displaced persons organization)

Volunteers in a meeting with the Corporation of Volunteers of Huila, Covahuila:

“Leadership means working for the community not oneself. We have to overcome egoism. This takes work.”

“Women may be leaders of their families, groups and communities. Women are more socially oriented than men...Among the 30 organizations working with Covahuila, only two are headed by men.”

---

## TRAJECTORIES TOWARD LEADERSHIP

---

Below are some sample stories of women’s trajectory towards leadership. The names of the women have been withheld.

1. For twenty years she has worked in Bogotá and at the national level in the Commission on Issues of Women Educators, which she helped to create. She has devoted her life’s work to promoting non-sexist education and for equal treatment for women who constitute some 80 percent of teachers in primary and secondary education. The Commission was needed, she says, because the trade union for educators has been and continues to be dominated by males and sold to politicians, who want women members as voters, not leaders. At first, the union supported the work of the Commission, but as it gained recruits among women and took positions independently, the union leaders claimed they no longer had resources to donate. With some support from UNIFEM, she has organized meetings, seminars, and short courses on gender, under university auspices. Although she came from a politically active family, her personal trajectory into political leadership came as a result of frustrated efforts to improve the situation for her fellow teachers and to introduce more gender sensitive teaching content. She expresses

disappointment in the reluctance of women who have been through the gender courses to change either themselves or their teaching.

2. The government agency INCORA turned over a sizeable plot of land to a group of 110 displaced families, giving each family approximately eight hectares. The government paid 70 percent of the market value of the land, leaving the new settlers with a debt of 30 percent to be paid off over the course of ten years. The land was formerly used for cattle grazing and is not good for productive agriculture; access is difficult, the settlers lack credit and have received no compensation for the land and properties taken from them when they were forcibly displaced from their original homes. They are fearful that they will not be able to pay their debt and will eventually lose the land. The community, as nearly all displaced persons communities, organized itself into an entity that could negotiate on behalf of the people residing there. Women were in the organization but excluded from its leadership. The male leadership was focused on solving a serious lack of housing, for which they were unable to mobilize resources. Some of the women wished to address a broader range of issues, including finding economically viable projects, improving roads and gaining schools for the children. The women were discouraged from speaking out and decided to form their own organization. The interviewee was introduced to the Maria Cano Corporation (an NGO), which offered help in the form of support (largely from international NGOs) for mixed agriculture, dairy and ecology projects. Additionally, the women received training in empowerment, management and skills needed for the projects. The men were furious, but the women persevered. There are now two organized entities in the cooperative, one is the formal entity that deals with the government and is still largely concerned with housing and other infrastructure, and the other is the still continuing women’s group. Women now dominate the leadership of the formal entity from which they had initially separated. However, while there is an income flow, the economic status of the settlement is still precarious and few of the problems have been addressed.
3. The interviewee and other women who had been displaced from rural areas were living in marginal neighborhoods and barely eking out a living. She had previously lived with her husband and farmed. She had little formal education. The women, who were from different places and had not previously known each other, decided to organize themselves into a cooperative and to find land on which to live and farm. With the help, again, of Maria Cano, the 27 women negotiated with the government agency, INCORA, and obtained a small plot of land. The interviewee received training so as to be able to manage the legal and bureaucratic issues involved in incorporating their cooperative and settling the land. She is now the formal legal representative of the cooperative and, informally, a guide to other women’s cooperatives and associations in the region. As in the previous example, the settlers remain in debt for the 30 percent they owe of the initial land price.
4. She came from a rural coastal town, had 12 children and devoted herself to household tasks. The town became the scene of fighting, threats and massacres and most of the inhabitants fled. Her husband, however, did not want to leave, so she and the children left without him. She found menial work and survived. But having gained access to training and support, she embarked on completing her education. Although still employed in menial work she now has gone through primary and secondary school classes and is headed for a university course to become a social worker. She says her training in rights and self esteem has helped her to become a leader and to overcome the trauma of her displacement.
5. She and her husband ran a restaurant in a small town. When the armed conflict reached the town, both members of the FARC and the illegally armed groups came into the restaurant, and each side threatened the owners against serving the other. Amidst threats she, her two children and her mother fled. Her husband was wounded, captured, then released, but did not follow his wife into displacement. After several stops, she eventually made her way to Bogotá. She describes living in terror that she was still being pursued and of fear for her own and her children’s survival. Eventually she found work, first in a restaurant and later in a laundry. Working conditions in both are substandard and pay is minimal. She cannot afford to pay for her mother’s

health care. She managed with difficulty to register the family in the Government program for internally displaced which entitled her to humanitarian assistance. The assistance took over a year to come because she could not prove her identity. The assistance lasted, as per law, only three months. A different kind of help came from the Association of Displaced Persons for Progress (ADESCOP), the local organization representing IDPs. Through ADESCOP, she was introduced to the *Corporación Casa de la Mujer*, and later became an activist in *Ruta Pacífica*, the women’s peace network. These entities provided practical information to orient her in the city, built her self-esteem, advocacy skills, and, above all, gave her companionship and shared experiences with other women. She is on the board of directors in ADESCOP.

6. The above interviewee’s close friend was married to a cattle rancher from one of the most remote areas of Colombia. The area was not only subject to conflict, but to coca cultivation as well, hence to the fumigation campaign that has both destroyed the crop and displaced large segments of the population. The family did not grow coca but sold meat to those living from drug money. She participated in the butchers’ union, but held no leadership positions. She reached a point where she could no longer bear life under the crossfire and threats and was determined to leave. Her husband wanted to stay, and did so until some time later when he was driven out, joined his wife briefly and died soon after. Before that he had managed to earn money and help the family but, for the most part, she was on her own. She worked selling things in the street, worked in a household where her daughter was raped, and eventually was able to register with the government program for the displaced. Her help, as in the previous case, came from ADESCOP and the *Corporación Casa de la Mujer*. Through the latter, she was able to participate in a six month outreach program run by the Javeriana University. She describes a trajectory toward leadership that was made possible through learning about rights, understanding the nature of the conflict and the fumigation that had changed her life, and finding herself adept at speaking out and helping other women. She is now the Treasurer of ADESCOP and is one of four women and two men who direct the organization. She continues taking courses in law and order to help her and her community defend their rights.
7. When she came to Soacha from Medellín six years ago, she was a housewife. She saw needs for improving infrastructure and helping the vulnerable—children and the elderly. She participated in a World Food Program food-for-work program to improve drainage in the community, then came in contact with CHF. For two years now, she has worked as a liaison for CHF with three youth groups in the community, in planning for a community library now under construction, and in a project to allocate new roofing to houses. Through CHF she received technical training which has helped her work as an organizer.
8. She devotes her time to community work, in education and with government programs to enhance community relations. She helps two or three of the international NGOs to manage their projects in the community, and she is a member of the community organization. In addition she is a housewife and a mother and there are always tensions regarding her many commitments. Her husband thinks she should look for paid work and contribute to the family well being, but she values her unpaid work and, especially, the companionship of sharing common goals. Her husband has now decided to cease supporting her, although he does support the children. They live apart. She has paid a price for being a leader.

---

## THE PRICE OF LEADERSHIP

---

By means of group therapy, technical training and large amounts of encouragement, the NGOs that work specifically with women have helped their clients overcome obstacles to leadership that women commonly experience. These include: lack of confidence, difficulty in making decisions independently, unwillingness to speak out, and acceptance of injustice. The women interviewed, whether as directors, staff and volunteers in the women’s NGOs, or as the beneficiaries of the services these NGOs provide, celebrate the virtues that women have (sensitivity, tolerance, democratic inclinations, concern for others, etc.). By and large they are critical of what they see as typical male characteristics, by which they mean the characteristics of the dominant men in their lives who have made things difficult for them. As noted,

there are a few male beneficiaries in even the most feminist-minded programs observed and some male members of the staff, whose work is much appreciated. The women now in leadership positions in community organizations and IDP organizations serve side by side with male members, with whom they reportedly (now) work in harmony, having finally won the latter’s respect.

The majority of the women interviewed are anxious about the well-being of their children, who live in a context of violence and aggression, and are often at risk of being recruited into one or another armed bands. They acknowledge that leadership among women is made difficult by such concerns about children as well as by the multitude of household tasks the women are obliged to fill. The interview sample by and large consisted of women who presently are single. Some are single because their partners are no longer alive, but most live alone because their family relations have fallen apart. The trajectory to leadership seems to have been either cause or consequence of this phenomenon.

The inevitable, albeit simplistic, conclusion is that women can learn to rise from humility and exploitation to confidence and leadership if they receive adequate support and accompaniment; but it is difficult to do so in ways that do not threaten family unity. The projects that aim to help distressed families, while gently encouraging gender and youth participation, usually perpetuate male leadership. At best they produce male leadership that is more open and accountable, and willing to see women as close partners. (Perhaps this is not so in the long run, but there are no follow up studies to ascertain whether this is so.)

It should not be the case that women need to pay the price of family unity in order to achieve leadership. Nor should it be the case that men remain dominant in leadership positions even when the majority of people in the agency or organization they lead are female (as the Educators’ trade union, noted above). Among the vulnerable population consisting largely of displaced persons—the focus of this project—both men and women have suffered greatly, and the loss of family unity is a serious blow for all concerned. In most cases, the women operating the NGOs that assist other women lament that they cannot reach out to men and women together. They claim their resources are too limited to work with and encourage the traumatized men, although they readily agree that doing so would very likely reduce the men’s hostilities and resentments, and thereby make it easier for the women to live with them. Among the many donors and NGOs in Europe and America lending modest support to the agencies working on behalf of women and promoting women’s leadership, some should consider targeting appropriate interventions that help men overcome their traumas as well.

The information in this report is based on observations of a small number of agencies and organizations and their ongoing work. Will the work produce lasting impacts and, if so, what will they be? It is regrettable that none of the agencies has been able to follow the people they have served systematically. Once the projects are over, once the beneficiaries and participants move on, there are no records. In this situation, it is difficult to know the degree of success or which methods are most useful over the long term.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá DC, *Política pública de mujer y géneros, Plan de Igualdad de Oportunidades para la equidad de género en el Distrito Capital, 2004’2016*. Bogotá 2005

Casa de la Mujer, Naciones Alto Comisionado para los Refugiaos, *Pies de vuelta, tejedoras de presente*. Bogotá 2002.

CHF Internacional, *Guía de orientaciones para el acompañamiento psicosocial a población en situación de desplazamiento*, Versión 2, psychology advisors: Stella Sacipa, Claudia Toval and Luisa Fernanda Galindo, Bogotá 2005. (funding from the Office of Population, Refugees and Migration, US Department of State.)

Corporación Casa de la Mujer and Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, *Liderazgo. Participación de mujeres y representación en el poder local, formación de líderes en las localidades de Suba, Santa Fe Usaquen*. Bogotá 2004.

Corporación Casa de la Mujer, Asamblea Permanente de la Sociedad Civil por la Paz, *Una realidad oculta:El desplazamiento forzado de las mujeres en la ciudad de Bogotá*, Bogotá 2005

Iniciativa de Mujeres, *Mesa Nacional de Incidencia, “ por el derecho a la Verdad, la Justicia y la reparación con Perspectiva de Género”*, Bogotá July 2005

Boletín de la Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz, *Agenda de las Mujeres por la Paz, Constituyente Emancipatoria de Mujeres*, May 2003

## ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED

- > *Alcaldía de Bogotá, Política de Mujer y Género*
- > *Asociación de Educadores del Distrito, Comisión de Asuntos de la Mujer*
- > *Asociación de Proyectos Alternativos. Comunitarios APAC*
- > CHF International
- > *Coordinación de Voluntariados de Huila, COVOLHUILA, (Neiva, Huila)*
  - o *Programa Fondo Rotatorio de Créditos para Mujeres Empresarias*
- > *Corporación de la Mujer*
- > *Fundación María Cano (Montería, Córdoba)*

## ANNEX II

### *WILL/CHF Mission to Serbia, May 2006*

Serbia is a country experiencing major political, economic and geographic transformations. The end of violent conflict in the region brought about a push for democratization, open markets, and referendums on self determination. While these transitions concern both men and women, in a country where a traditional patriarchal system is still tangible women have been uniquely affected. There is a new openness in Serbia, which CHF and other international and local NGOs are harnessing to give women the necessary tools to claim leadership positions. While barriers to women’s leadership and participation in Serbia remain, positive conditions are being created that enable women to lead and actively participate in civil, political and professional spheres.

---

#### FIELDWORK: PROJECT INTERVIEWS

---

In May 2006, the Georgetown research team conducted interviews in twelve locations along Serbia’s Corridor X, including: Zaječar, Knjaževac, Vranje, Bujanovac, Preševo, Niš, Dimitrovgrad, Svrlijig, Aleksinac, Sokobanja, Vlasotince, and Pirot. These communities are all located within CHF/Serbia’s Area of Responsibility (AOR), which varies widely both ethnically and economically. Although researchers interviewed other INGOs and international actors that are present and active in a few villages, CHF/Serbia is clearly the dominant development agency in southeastern Serbia.

The research team interviewed women and men, both individually and in groups, who had been selected by CHF/Serbia staff to participate in the WILL project (please see attached list). All of the interviewees, barring the few representatives of international programs, were either directly involved in CHF-administered projects, or had received program funding or individual grants from CHF/Serbia. In a period of seven days, researchers interviewed over 50 individuals of various ethnic and economic backgrounds, including:

- Local and international development and advocacy NGO staff;
- CHF’s Community Development Councils (CDCs) members;
- Municipality officials;
- Female recipients of the CHF Kick Start Program (KSP) or Sustainable Business Development (SBD) grants;
- CHF’s Enabling Economic Environment (EEE) Working Group members;
- CHF/Serbia staff.

Researchers were accompanied by two highly capable CHF/Serbia staff members, who assisted as interpreters of language and culture. In CHF Headquarters and in each of the CHF field offices, other members of the CHF staff assisted the project in significant ways.

---

#### CHF/SERBIA

---

In partnership with USAID, CHF/Serbia is currently implementing its Community Revitalization through Democratic Action (CRDA) program, which concentrates CHF efforts on local economic and social development. Throughout the interviewing process, the research team met with women and men involved in CRDA program components, including Community Development Councils (CDCs), Enabling Economic Environment Working Groups (EEE WGs), the Kick Start Program (KSP) and the Sustainable Business Development (SBD) Program. These components promote community participation and entrepreneurship, and seek to bolster local development.

The CRDA program operates at the municipal level; however, each CDC drives the program at the community level. Communities are selected to participate in the CRDA program through a process that involves a staff presentation of program goals to municipal authorities, selection of approximately 10 to 15 communities within a municipality, and a CHF staff field visit followed by an evaluation and assessment. Once community selection has been finalized, CHF organizes a general community meeting to explain the program and to set up a CDC. Community meetings are judged successful when at least fifty community members, of which one third are women, attend. On average, twenty out of the fifty community members in attendance seek a position on the CDC, and of those, ten to fifteen people (three to four women) are elected. The CDC is responsible for identifying the main developmental needs of the community, and, with the help of CHF staff, for developing, proposing and implementing projects.

Similarly, the EEE WG promotes community-based participation in local economic development. The EEE WG provides a forum in which municipality and community business leaders may interface. The optimal membership of EEE WGs is twenty members, and within this membership 30 percent must be representatives of the municipality and 70 percent must represent local businesses. The SBD Program and the KSP also support CHF’s economic development goals. Through the SBD program, CHF promotes local enterprise development that will create employment opportunities for the community by providing workshops and training, business development support and technical assistance. CHF also awards individuals with superior business ideas small start-up grants through the KSP.

CHF/Serbia endeavors to promote the inclusion of women in its participatory programs, and in the local NGOs with which it partners through the use of a quota system. CHF guidelines mandate that 30 percent of all CDC and EEE WG members are women. CHF staff work closely with CDCs and EEE WGs to ensure that the 30 percent quota is met throughout the life of the programs. Additionally, any local NGO to which CHF grants funds must also be able to show that women comprise 30 percent of its leadership. Although women are not specifically targeted for the SBD program or KSP grants, researchers found that women have participated in these programs, as well.

---

## **FINDINGS: WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN SERBIA**

---

The transition to democratic governance has been difficult for all Serbs. As one respondent noted, during the past 50 years, Serbs were forced to be obedient to undemocratic leaders and not to be leaders themselves. It can be said that obedience has been even more internalized among women. Their high employment rates in factories during the communist and socialist regimes did not translate into changes in traditional notions about gender roles and responsibilities. Though there remain many barriers to women’s leadership and active participation today, women are more likely now than in the past to take risks as opportunities for leadership are opened.

### **Barriers to Women’s Leadership and Participation**

In present day Serbia, CHF and other international and local NGOs have implemented programs that seek to carve out roles for women and men to actively participate in local and national spheres. Women in Serbia meet particular barriers in their struggle for agency as they must labor under an entrenched dual patriarchy. The barriers to women’s full participation and leadership are institutionalized in both the state apparatus, as well as in traditional education and norms.

The state has addressed gender equity through the enactment of a quota system, which requires 30 percent of those on political party lists be women. If the government’s quota system functioned properly, which it does not, women might have access to many leadership opportunities in local and national public institutions. One interviewee explained that positions in public institutions are divided up and filled by the incumbent political party, and to obtain a leadership position one must instigate and endure power struggles within the party. This system is reported to be a political carry over from former regimes. Therefore, by and large, women do not have access to leadership positions in state institutions because – as researchers heard from many respondents – women rarely seek membership in political parties. Moreover, those who do are unlikely to be chosen for actual service in the Parliament or municipal

councils. Researchers were told about a proposed new gender equity law that would require that 30 percent of those serving in the Parliament be women to raise women’s political participation.

Traditional patriarchal norms are also a barrier to women’s leadership and participation in social, political and professional fields. One interviewee said: *“Today, one does not see huge obstacles to women’s leadership; however, traditional education in the family is the main barrier for women. Women are not expected to have any leadership, and it is acceptable for women to work and stay at home.”* Women are not always devoid of choice in whether they stay at home with children or go to work. However, according to many of the respondents, the largest obstacle today to women’s leadership and active participation is their responsibility to family and home. Women who devote themselves to taking care of the home and raising children have little time to dedicate to extra-household positions. Furthermore, researchers were told that even after children grow up and leave the house it is difficult for women to rejoin society.

It is important to note that researchers heard similar concerns reflected in the views of the male participants who also have multiple responsibilities, and felt that their voluntary activities with CHF programs had to come after work and family. Both men and women reported a decline in attendance and participation due to frustration about the long discussions and lack of progress that sometimes accompanies, in particular, the CDC process. Also, it was mentioned that in some cases meetings were held at inconvenient times for women and men with family responsibilities, and often participation in CDCs or EEE WGs suffered.

Prevailing patriarchal norms also at times left willing female participants without a voice. In the most egregious case, researchers heard about an EEE WG in which the men gathered ahead of the meeting and made all of the decisions, leaving the women without a say in the deliberations. (Interestingly, these women said that they would generally have agreed with the decisions reached but felt betrayed by having been left out of the process.)

Other barriers to women’s leadership and active participation, which are related to both the bias of the state and traditional norms, are access to education, the local economic situation, and whether or not the region is urban or rural in composition. In general, researchers found that in urban centers, where one can expect to find a stronger economy and better access to education for females, women are more likely to have the capacity and will to lead and actively participate in civil society. While this statement serves as a general guide for all females, there are stark differences between opportunities for women of different ethnicities to seek access to education and the economy.

While it should be noted that not all ethnically Serb females have equal access to education opportunities, evidence from the interviews reveals that as compared to females in the ethnic Albanian and Roma populations, ethnically Serb females have greater access to education. For ethnic Albanians living close to the Kosovo border, this is especially true as regards higher education. In Preševo, researchers heard about limited opportunities for secondary education in professions and trades that are sought by Albanian women in particular, requiring some to go to Priština for such education. Furthermore, the marginalization of the Roma population within Serbia has severely affected the education levels of both women and men. Researchers were told that 13 percent of Roma have had a primary education, 7 percent have had some high school education, 0.3 percent have had some university level education, and 70 percent have had no schooling and are illiterate. Moreover, the patriarchal system supports the education of men over women, and therefore these percentages are far more likely to be representative of Roma male education levels.

Economic independence is an important factor in whether a woman becomes a leader or active participant in society. Researchers were repeatedly told that women in Serbia cannot be effective leaders or participate fully in local society without first gaining economic independence. While some groups in Serbia are attempting to invigorate the economy with small business incubator projects, many women are not able to take advantage of such opportunities. Women seem to lack practical training on how to start a business, how to negotiate registration and other legal forms, how to write a proposal or create a feasible business plan. And, although this information is important as regards women’s capacity for local

leadership roles, it should be noted that men most likely face similar barriers in terms of entrepreneurial knowledge and training.

Finally, although researchers were not able to interview many members of the Roma community, there is no question that Roma women face much higher barriers to leadership roles than their ethnically Serb and Albanian counterparts. These obstacles are specific to their community and its relation to the Serbian government. Roma women belong to an 800,000-strong population in Serbia, in which (male) leaders are not elected. We heard from one Roma: *“The barriers to women’s leadership and participation in the Roma community are very specific. Women have external and internal barriers. The Roma carry the mentality that it is better not to be very exposed, therefore they do not seek to achieve a higher, more visible profession.”* Additionally, researchers visited the Salvatore camp, which houses 400 Roma IDPs from Kosovo. The living conditions were dire, and it was clear that the Roma IDPs as a group were not assisted by the government. The leader of these Roma said that CHF – which ran a business development program in the camp and awarded seven KSP grants to Roma entrepreneurs – was the only NGO still working with the displaced Roma.

### Women, Leadership and Credibility

One female interviewee told researchers, *“Leaders in general can be defined by their good ideas and **credibility**. Leaders are innovative, they share their ideas, and they are the ones people trust.”* An effective female leader was described in contrast to a male leader as having persistence, the ability to communicate, and realistic goals.

The notion that a leader’s credibility is dependent upon her trustworthiness was a typical comment. In fact, researchers heard from one female municipal official that women’s leadership or participation is sometimes preferred to that of men, as women are regarded as uncorrupted by the prior regime. In Zaječar, an unusually large percentage of women are involved in the municipal sector and are represented in the cabinet of the president (e.g., the Manager of the Municipality, Expert for Ecology and Planning, Chiefs of Protocol and Municipal Assembly are all women), as well as in many lower positions. This is due in part to the activities of the male president of the municipality, who is in charge of appointing assistants and employees in public institutions throughout the municipality. After the Milošević regime, the municipality president turned to “uncorrupt” women to lead local government. The female municipality employee also mentioned that women earn these positions through hard work and experience.

Researchers found that many of the women who have become members or leaders of local NGOs, CDCs and EEE WGs were recognized as leaders by their communities before their elections. They were professional women (e.g., teachers, doctors, lawyers, and engineers), entrepreneurs, or municipal government officials who were known to the community. In most cases, their leadership in the community was informal and *ad hoc*. While becoming a member of the CDCs and EEE WGs gave women a platform for exercising their leadership talents, most of those interviewed regarded their election to positions of responsibility as largely due to CHF’s requirement of 30 percent female participation in its programs. The men interviewed expressed approval of growing female participation and leadership in municipal affairs, but anecdotal evidence confirmed that not all men are in favor of women leaving the home and taking up positions in society or politics.

Women cannot count on widespread support for their leadership among other women. According to one Roma interviewee, *“Education within the family teaches women to question the leadership of other women.”* Some women who are successful business women and leaders in their local communities expressed a real concern about the lack of support women receive from one another. They felt that while male leaders are able to rely upon a support network, female leaders are not.

On the other hand, while almost all of the local NGOs we interviewed were aware of CHF’s requirement for 30 percent of a partner organization’s leadership to be women, respondents indicated that this rule was *not* a strong factor in the favorable gender distribution of their leadership or membership. It should be noted that almost all of the NGO groups interviewed were women-led groups, organizations headed by both men and women, or associations dedicated to women’s advocacy. One interviewee summed up her

positive views on women and leadership: “Since 2001, people accept women making decisions much more. Women are now more aware of the opportunities available to them and their abilities. Before, women were always aware of their rights, but not of their abilities.”

**Examples of Female Leaders:**

1. A number of female entrepreneurs with whom researchers met have built sustainable businesses with support from CHF. Examples are a bookkeeping business which now has more than 40 clients and 3 full time employees (in addition to the female owner), a dairy which makes ice cream and another dairy that makes cheese, which also employ other workers. Each of the owners stated unequivocally that she would never have been able to begin the business without the help of CHF. In some cases, they had tried to get credit from a bank to purchase equipment but were refused until CHF helped them. The help was much more than financial – it was also training and assistance in running a small business and getting the needed permits and credit. In fact, these non-tangible contributions were often cited as the more important help received from CHF.
2. Researchers interviewed two women-led traditional crafts societies that have been supported by CHF grants. One woman leader said that before the women came to her weaving association, they were unskilled and anonymous. (On the other hand, in another organization, women were all unemployed professionals, including a nurse, secretary, engineer, and accountant.) Female participants in the association gained in two distinct respects: increased self-confidence and economic viability. Their membership in a supportive environment nurtured their self-esteem, gave them access to exhibitions, as well as the opportunity to travel and sell their goods. One woman who was a participant in a weaving society has gone on to exhibit her products in a museum.
3. Researchers met with many CHF-supported local NGOs in Serbia that are both led by women and focus their program initiatives on women. In other groups, women were equal partners with men on the NGO board of directors, having won the position through a process of democratic election. One NGO in particular, established in 1997, ensures that each project implemented by the club includes women at every level (implementers, workers/volunteers, and beneficiaries). Some of the programs they have implemented include: Women have the Right, Education of Women Entrepreneurs, and a project on trafficking. This club also supports a CHF-sponsored business incubator by inviting consultants to teach women about market research, cash flow, feasibility studies, creating business plan and how to start a new business. Currently there are 9 members in the incubator, of which a third are women.

---

ASSESSING PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

---

Researchers were told by members of Pirogos, an NGO in Pirot and the only local NGO assisting CHF in implementing the CRDA program, that during the Milošević regime it was difficult to organize communities. The fall of the regime coincided with the initiation of CHF’s programs in Serbia and since then it has reportedly been much easier to organize civil society. In the view of the Pirogos interviewee, CHF community projects were having an important impact: “It’s totally different than in communities where CHF didn’t go.” In places where CHF doesn’t work, he maintained, civil society remains largely inactive.

Researchers heard from CHF staff that in most cases where there is 30 percent participation by women, CDCs run better and there is often a change in opinion and attitude. Male members of CDCs mainly focus on the common development problems of the community, such as employment, business activities, training, infrastructural problems, and water supply. However, female CDC members tend to propose projects that are easier to implement and that involve the improvement of education and healthcare (in addition to community development needs). For example, in one CDC women members – without the help or persuasion of CHF staff – suggested building a kindergarten and a garbage dump.

In terms of opportunities for women to develop leadership skills, women who participate in local NGOs, CHF’s CDCs or EEE WGs gain training, respect and self-esteem. They learn how to speak out in front of a crowd of women and men, and also begin to understand that their opinions are valid and respected in the community. It is clear that low self-esteem is a serious stumbling block to women’s leadership and

active participation. By providing and supporting forums in which women have the opportunity to speak out, CHF is helping to create an environment in which women have the opportunity to gain skills and become leaders and participants in local society.

Participation in a social group, in and of itself, is insufficient to give women the necessary skills to participate in politics at the local and national levels. In every location, the research team met or heard about women who had first entered the public sphere through participation in the reform movements during the Milošević period. It appears that some women acquired skills in these political opposition actions that helped them later on to become leaders and members of political parties. Women interviewees presently involved in politics expressed interest in a range of objectives, from the strategic development of the municipality and region to concerns over education.

---

## **CONCLUSIONS**

---

1. The requirement that 30 percent of CDC and EEE WG members be women has had a positive impact in promoting gender equity and may well contribute to women’s leadership. Establishing a floor on women’s participation appears to be a necessary although not sufficient strategy to achieve gender equity in Serbia. We heard repeatedly that it would have been unlikely that as many CDC or EEE WG members or recipients of grants would have been women in the absence of the policy framework that required a minimum level of female participation. However, barriers still exist to full female participation and leadership.
2. The need and impact for the 30 percent rule varied by three major factors: the educational level of the community members, whether communities were urban or rural in composition, and to which ethnic group the women belonged. Not surprisingly, women in urban areas and professional women tended to feel more confident in their ability to access resources and participate in decision making than women in rural areas and those with more limited educational opportunities. Ethnic Serbian women were also more familiar with outside employment and professional activities than Albanian and Roma women. Educational opportunities for Albanian and Roma women were more limited, contributing to a lack of experience and confidence. The researchers frequently heard that poor levels of education, combined with a lack of confidence in their own abilities, impeded women’s leadership potential.
3. The presence of women on the CDCs and EEE WGs has been beneficial not only for enhancing gender equity concerns; it has also been useful in bringing substantive attention to a range of issues that may not have been considered without female participation.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Civic Library Pirog. *Promotion of European Integrations by Forming Euro Clubs in Pirot District*. European Integration Fund.

CHF International. *Community Initiative Development Program in Southern Serbia: March 2001-June 2004*. United States Agency for International Development.

CHF International. *Community Revitalization through Democratic Action (CRDA) Semi-Annual Report*. Reporting Period: October 1, 2002 through March 31, 2003.

CHF International. *Economic Now Opportunities: CRDA*. United States Agency for International Development.

---

## LIST OF INTERVIEWS

---

1. Member, CHF Enabling Economic Environment Working Group (EEE WG), Zajecar (Female)
2. Recipient, CHF Sustainable Business Development (SBD) investment, Zajecar
3. Resurs Center, local NGO, Zajecar
4. Recipient, CHF Community Development Council (CDC) Kick Start Program (KSP), Zajecar (Female)
5. Timocki Klub, local NGO, Knjazevac
6. Coordinator, EEE Working Group, Knjazevac (Female)
7. Recipient, KSP, Knjazevac (Female)
8. ABC Center, local NGO, Vranje
9. Director, Agricultural Institute in Vranje (Female)
10. Manager, Life Aid; she was nominated for “Woman of the Year” in Vranje
11. Member, EEE Bujanovac, and Director, Bujanovac cultural center (Female)
12. Center for Social Affairs, Bujanovac (Male)
13. Financial Directory, Razvitak, CDC Bujanovac
14. Nansen Dialogue Center, local NGO, Bujanovac
15. OEBS, Bujanovac, (3 Males, 2 Females)
16. CHF CDC Reljane, Preševo
17. Members, EEE Preševo (4 Females)
18. Center for New Visions, local NGO, Preševo
19. Green World, local NGO, Preševo (Male)
20. Coordinator, Junior Achievement, Preševo (Male)
21. Team Preševo, European Union Monitoring Mission (2 Males)
22. Pirog, local NGO, Pirot (2 Males, 1 Female)
23. Grlica, Association for the Preservation of Old Crafts, Pirot
24. CHF CDC Dimitrovgrad (2 Males, 2 Females)
25. CHF CDC Svrlijig (10 Males, 3 Females)
26. Business Leader and Recipient, KSP grant and SBD investment, Aleksinac (Female)
27. Recipient, SBD investment, Sokobanja (Female)
28. Mreza, local NGO, Nis
29. CHF CDC Niska Banja, Nis
30. Marketing Advisor, CDC Niska Banja, and EEE Member, Nis (Female)
31. Women’s Center, local NGO, Leskovac
32. CHF CDC Grdelica
33. Municipality Vice President, Leskovac (Female)
34. Recipient, CHF IDP CDC Pecenjevce KSP grant, Leskovac (Female)
35. SOS for Women and Children, local NGO, Vlasotince
36. Director of Communal Service and Member, EEE Working Group, Vlasotince (Female)

## ANNEX III

### WILL/CHF Mission to Iraq, July 2006

---

#### BACKGROUND: COUNTRY AND CONTEXT

---

From the 1960s to the 1980s, Iraq was considered to be a secular, liberal country. For women, particularly those who lived in large cities, this meant that they were afforded some freedoms and were able to participate to a limited extent in cultural and political activities. Women’s professional role in urban society was limited primarily to employment in government jobs. In contrast, women in rural areas did not enjoy the same rights and freedoms. They made up the major agricultural work force in the country, and carried out tasks associated with agriculture in addition to their domestic duties.

During the era of Ba’ath party control in 1963 and from 1968 to 1990, women who were politically active were just as likely as their male counterparts to suffer from imprisonment, torture, rape, and execution. While women’s rights were not denied by the Ba’ath party, all possible opposition to the regime was targeted. Both male and female political activists disappeared, fled the country, and in a few cases were forced to declare loyalty to the regime. At that time, the only political organization representing women was the General Iraqi Women’s Union, which was composed of female Ba’ath party members who attempted to market the party’s ideologies to women. To achieve this aim, the organization held illiteracy, vocational training, and ideological campaigns.

Iraqi women were also adversely affected by the Iran-Iraq war, during which hundreds of thousands of Iraqi men died or were disabled. The war created a large number of widows and wives with disabled husbands. It also decreased the male to female ratio, which resulted in a high number of unmarried women.

The employment of women in industry increased from 13 percent in 1987 to 21 percent in 1993. In the same year, female employees constituted 79 percent of the service sector, 43.9 percent of the professional and technical sectors, and 12.7 percent in administrative and organizational posts.<sup>4</sup> During the period of UN sanctions from 1991 to 2003, the economic situation deteriorated dramatically and impacted all segments of Iraqi society. The Ba’ath party shifted to socially conservative policies that focused on increased religiosity and tribalism. These policies had a serious impact on women’s rights. For example, many women charged with prostitution were executed by sword without a fair trial.

Currently, despite the fact that women constitute 25 percent of the new parliament, they have neither the capacity to become actively involved in politics, nor the strength to advocate for change on issues that involve their status as women. This is attributed to the fact that most of the female parliamentarians were nominated by the religious parties, which won the majority in parliament. Due to pressure from these parties, female parliamentarians play a limited role in the current government. Additionally, instability in the country, a lack of basic services, fuel shortages, and high unemployment all have an impact on women and men alike.

---

#### FIELD INTERVIEWS

---

In July 2006, field interviews were conducted in Hilla, Karbala and Najaf. Najaf and Karbala are particularly important for their roles as Shi’a shrine cities dedicated to the martyrs Imam Ali and Imam Hussein. They are conservative, religious cities that have experienced increased religiosity after 2003 when Shi’a religious clerics and parties gained the freedom to operate. There is also substantial Iranian

---

<sup>4</sup> *Women in Iraq: Background and Issues for U.S. Policy*. CRS Report for Congress.

influence in these cities. Sources in Iraq perceive this region to be particularly restrictive toward women’s rights.

The interviews were conducted by a CHF-contracted independent consultant. Because the Georgetown research team was not able to conduct the interviews in Iraq, the CHF/Iraq team and Georgetown/CHF staff discussed the interview protocols and process in three telephone conferences and one video conference to enhance consistency. The independent consultant interviewed leaders and members of local and international development and advocacy NGOs, CHF/Iraq staff, respected religious figures, and members of CHF’s 12-member community-elected Community Actions Groups (CAGs). More than 50 women and men, in both individual and group settings, were interviewed.

Several recurring themes emerged during the interviews, which point to the specific challenges facing female leaders in Iraq today:

- **Traditions and Customs:**

In Iraq there are customs and traditions that female leaders find restrain their ambitions and potential. Their mobility and actions must occur within these constraints and they cannot neglect them. If they do, these women will be considered a bad example for the community and may be boycotted. For example, many women are willing to attend conferences, workshops, and trainings in other cities or countries, but they are required to take a family member with them or not attend. This cultural constraint prevented the WILL Iraq research team from attending trainings in Serbia.

- **Security Situation:**

All leaders, including women, are targeted by the ever-increasing number of terrorists in Iraq. Women and their families avoid any activity that may link them with leadership positions as it will make them a target for assassination or abduction. As reported by one website, the Iraqi Woman’s Freedom Organization has registered at least 2,000 cases of abducted women since 2003<sup>5</sup>. This is also related to the previous point regarding customs and traditions. A woman’s honor and virginity are considered virtues of high importance in Arab communities, and any abducted woman is always looked at by the community as having lost this virtue. This inevitably brings suffering and disgrace upon the woman and her family.

- **Misinterpretation of Religion:**

Many men who prevent women from taking a leading role in the community twist the meaning of religious commands and Quranic verses to support their position. They are often supported by clergymen who preach that a woman’s role is to take care of her husband, her home, and her children.

- **Economic Situation:**

Interviewees reported having met women who were leaders by instinct, but their poor economic situation had prevented them from assuming leadership roles.

- **Lack of Education:**

Women in Iraq have less access to education than do men. Many women are not allowed to continue their education beyond primary school and are forced to stay at home after acquiring only a basic education.<sup>6</sup> In many areas it is rare to see women learning how to use a computer or going to internet cafes.

- **Child Care:**

In Iraqi society, women are responsible for child care, and men do not share this responsibility. The lack of daycare and kindergarten facilities therefore greatly increases the burden on female leaders with children.

---

<sup>5</sup> Non-official Iraqi news website <http://www.rezqar.com/debat/show.art.asp?aid=72279> (in Arabic).

<sup>6</sup> Female primary school net attendance ratio 72 percent, secondary school 22 percent (1996-2004). [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iraq\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iraq_statistics.html)

---

## FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN IRAQ

---

As reported during the interviews, female leaders have become more accepted, increased their good reputation, and are seen as credible leaders who work hard and achieve results. Female leaders normally work in areas related to politics, human rights, or provide leadership in a particular environment like the office. Very rarely do women in Iraq take the lead in business. Additionally, among the Shi’a in Iraq, there are female religious preachers called Mullahs. These women have considerable influence among other women in the community and are highly respected and listened to.

Effective female leaders are seen by interviewees as those who are able to provide services to the community that men cannot. Those interviewed also place value on female leaders who are able to take their needs to decision-makers. A female leader is seen as having a strong personality, being effective in the community, having educational credentials, and as someone who has goals and fights for them. As an example, most of the interviewees mentioned Ms. Jinan Al Obaidy, who is a member of the Iraqi parliament. She was described as a brave and fearless woman because she was raising many sensitive and realistic issues during televised parliament sessions. Male parliament members were not perceived as being brave enough to tackle such issues openly.

If females in leadership positions do not work to achieve results, they are perceived to be like any other politician who makes promises and never delivers. Unlike the positive support given to Ms. Al Obaidy, interviewees reported that public attitude towards most of the women who were elected into the parliament is negative. They are seen solely as a fulfillment of the required quota. Most female parliamentarians are seen as not having the necessary skills to be where they are, and are believed to have been selected by religious parties because they are not qualified. Both women and men who were interviewed expressed this opinion.

While interviewees noted that in general the public attitude toward female leaders has improved, based on anecdotal evidence, support for females in leadership positions is inconsistent. Reportedly, some Iraqi women accept having women as leaders while others prefer men. Interviewers noticed that female leaders in organizations that are concerned with women’s rights tend to mentor women in the community within the context of their mission (health, women’s rights, literacy, vocational, etc.). Interviewers also discovered that because women’s acceptance of female leadership is not very high, very few women mentor males or females outside of the NGO context.

Men generally do not prefer the participation of women in community activities or leadership in any position. Most male interviewees reported that they do not accept the idea of having women as their leaders even if they have the required characteristics and skills. Some male interviewees claimed that if there was a competition between a less qualified man and a better qualified woman that they would still prefer a man. Based on the interview results, the general acceptance of female leaders by the community depends on their respect of tradition, what a woman can contribute to the community, and her public speaking skills.

---

## CONDITIONS THAT CULTIVATE FEMALE LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

---

According to those interviewed, the success of female leaders is dependent on their education level, position and title within the environment, reputation in the community, political connections, and performance. In other cases, their family name, or the husband or father’s social, religious, or governmental position provides additional opportunities. Recently, the activities of local and international NGOs in the region have also helped to develop an environment that is receptive to female leadership and participation. However, it must be noted that while there are conditions that tend to support or cultivate female leadership, attaining leadership roles remains difficult for many women.

Interviewees noted that one of the largest successes for women’s leadership in Iraq was the setting of a quota that required 25 percent of all Parliament members to be women. Reportedly, this achievement is due in large part to the organized activities by Iraqi women to advocate for this aim. According to Iraqi CHF staff members, this quota and other pending measures may provide excellent opportunities for women to assume leadership roles. Although it is noted above that female parliamentarians are for the most part not regarded as effective leaders, Iraqi CHF staff members expect that this attitude will change over time. They consider that for now, just having a high number of women in the parliament remains a positive achievement.

Recent trainings and workshops implemented by international NGOs including RTI, ADF, NDI, NED and CHF, directly or through other local NGOs, have had a substantial effect on creating awareness among women regarding issues like women’s rights, advocacy, and civil laws. These initiatives have resulted in Iraqi women who are far more eager to attain leadership positions than in the past. Additionally, programs that help to create women’s organizations, cooperatives, and income generation schemes have been successful in cultivating opportunities for women. Regardless of the different types of programs, the common denominator was always that the activity was exclusively for women. Additionally, most international NGOs in Iraq, including CHF, have hired and trained successful local female staff members. These women have gained leadership skills and are potential leaders for the future.

The techniques found to be most successful during the recent period of NGO intervention include the setting of quotas for female participation in CHF’s CAGs and creating greater awareness of religious and cultural sensitivities. For example, CHF in its third year in Iraq has set a quota for its 12-member community-elected CAG that requires 30 percent of the members to be female. CAGs are tasked with planning and implementing projects related to a common community, social, or economic interest; therefore, the quota ensures female participation in important community decision-making bodies. While it is expected that in certain communities the male and female CAG members will meet in adjacent rooms, there is always a female community facilitator present to interact with the female section of the CAG. CHF staff in Iraq report that sometimes this method is more useful, as women tend to express their ideas freely when men are not present. However, it is reported that in some cases the male and female CAG participants have decided to meet together in order to avoid a protracted communications process.

Both women and men who have been involved in CHF CAGs have within the last few years established several vibrant local NGOs. Many of these organizations focus their activities on issues affecting women, such as women’s rights, female literacy and poverty alleviation. These organizations include (see section on Description of Interviewed Organizations for further details):

- Um Al-Banein Women’s Organization in Najaf
- The Anwar Al-Zahra Women’s Cultural Center in Najaf
- The Bright Tomorrow Organization in Karbala
- The National Organization for Development

Most successful local organizations were found to have religious activities or names with religious meanings. As previously noted, the religious approach is used either because these organizations were affiliated with religious groups or leaders, or because organizations use this as a cover to achieve greater acceptance in a conservative community. One of the organization leaders admitted that she had to use this tactic in order to get women to participate in her organization. Since there are specific religious ceremonies that are attended by women, she used these as a way to facilitate women’s acceptance of attending her organization. After gaining acceptance and a good reputation she started educating women on issues related to her mission while continuing religious ceremonies. This may well be the easiest way to approach women in the Shi’a dominant area, but would certainly be more complicated in mixed religious and ethnic areas of Iraq. Currently, even in Shi’a areas loyalty to different Shi’a groups can impose particular requirements during the ceremonies. Trying to stay neutral is becoming increasingly difficult for local NGOs, but sticking to general religious ceremonies and adding community-specific messages is usually effective.

In the Sunni regions the situation of women is not extremely different from the Shi’a regions. Women have been forced of late to wear the veil and have lost most of their freedom to expanding religious domination. They may even have less chance than Shi’a women to leave home and communicate with other women, as they tend not to participate in religious occasions except mosque prayers. Their excursions might be limited to family visits accompanied by men. However, women working in governmental departments, education, and the service sector are still continuing their work. Religious and ethnic separation is growing in the country and mistrust between groups is increasing. There are still some secular groups, but they are usually in city centers like Baghdad and are made up of the country’s educated elites.

---

## CHF/IRAQ STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

---

Among CHF/Iraq staff, several recommendations for programming to support women’s participation and leadership were offered. For example, providing ongoing educational opportunities for women is seen by staff to have high importance due to the essential role of education in providing women with leadership opportunities.

Economic opportunities for women were found to be very limited in the areas where CHF/Iraq operates. Even if women are working they are still employed only in traditional fields like agriculture and animal husbandry in rural areas and government work or the private sector in urban areas. CHF/Iraq staff suggested that targeting these sectors could provide women with leadership opportunities. A prototypical example comes from the 1960s, when a farming cooperative that was run solely by women was established in Iraq. Side by side with these developments should be the promotion of daycare and kindergarten facilities to help employed women with children.

The young generation should be targeted by campaigns about women’s rights and roles in the public sphere. The use of Quranic verses and the example of women leaders from the Islamic era could be highlighted to conquer obstacles to opportunities for women. Religious symbolism and ceremonies could be used to attain other goals; however, these ideas should not be regressive or radical. Instead, they should help to cultivate an environment that encourages female leaders in a new Iraq.<sup>7</sup>

Advocating for imposing a quota for women in leading positions in the government, service, and education sectors will also provide women with opportunities to assume leadership positions. Finally, it was suggested that an exchange program between women in leadership positions in Iraq and women from other countries can also be helpful in transferring experiences.

---

## LIST OF INTERVIEWS

---

### ***Um Al-Banien Organization, Najaf:***

1. Director (Female).
2. Social Affairs (Female).
3. Media & IT (Female).
4. M&E (Female).
5. Deputy Director (Female).
6. Human Resources (Female).

### ***Women’s Educational and Cultural Center, Najaf:***

7. Media (Female).
8. Deputy Director (Female).
9. Acting Director (Male - Director is a female on Travel).
10. Sports center manger (Female).
11. Kindergarten manger (Female).

---

<sup>7</sup> This was a matter of a long debate between the CHF/Iraq team members. Some preferred not to use it at all while some recommended using it under tight control.

12. Literacy manager (Female).
13. Sewing manager (Female).
14. Hairdressing manger (Female).
15. Four female trainees.

***Iraqi Relief Organization, Najaf:***

16. Director (Male).

***Iraq Tomorrow organization, Najaf:***

17. Director (Male).

***Anwar Al-Zahra Women’s Cultural Center, Najaf:***

18. Director (Female).
19. Assistant Director (Male).
20. Administrative Manger (Male).

***Mesopotamia Daughter Center, Karbala:***

21. Director (Male).

***Euphrates Woman’s Cultural Center, Hilla:***

22. Director (Female).
23. Deputy Director (Female).
24. Six female members of the center.

***Bright Tomorrow Organization, Karbala:***

25. Deputy Director (Female).
26. Six female members of the organization.

***Humanitarian Cultural Association for Human Rights Activists, Karbala:***

27. Director (Male).
28. Monitoring Director (Male).

***National Organization for Development, Karbala:***

29. Director (Male).
30. Six female members of the organization.

***Men of Religion, Najaf:***

31. Shaikh (Male)
32. Shaikh (Male)

---

**DESCRIPTIONS OF INTERVIEWED ORGANIZATIONS**

---

***Um Al-Banein Women’s Organization in Najaf***

This is one of the most active organizations in Najaf. It is headed by an engineer and head of the CHF-organized community association that is located in the same area where Um Al-Banein operates. Um Al-Banein’s main goal is to increase the educational level of women from different educational, social, health indicators, and economic backgrounds.

The organization was founded on February 14, 2005 in order to help divorced and widowed women in rural and urban areas. Al-Banein has distributed clothes, foodstuffs, bolts of cloth and kitchen implements to these needy women. The organization also worked extensively to increase awareness about elections and the referendum on the permanent constitution. Members of Al-Banein also served as election observers at polling stations.

The Director has also authored a report on the state of divorced women in Iraqi society. Her findings were presented to the Iraqi Council of Ministers in an effort to secure higher wages and assistance for divorced women. It is worth noting that 80 percent of this organization is itself made up of divorced women.

The organization is currently working with CHF to build a working class market exclusively for women in Najaf.

### ***The Women’s Educational and Cultural Center in Najaf***

CHF helped to form this organization by assisting in the creation of a Community Association in the local area. The organization attempts to address problems in Iraqi society through a number of programs. Founded in 2004, the organization has completed a number of projects since it was opened. CHF has provided the materials for all of these trainings, which include:

1. 30 educational sessions were held in Najaf. 750 women have graduated from these classes at the time of this report.
2. 30 sessions in weaving have been held for 500 women.
3. 20 sessions in tailoring have been held and 200 women have received training.
4. The organization also runs a day care to watch the children of mothers who must work. 22 of these children have received instruction at the Center’s math department.
5. The Center has held educational meetings to spread awareness about law 39 which is the Personal Status Law. In particular, the trainings addressed the desire of some lawmakers to amend the law in order to limit the rights of women.

### ***The Iraqi Relief Organization in Najaf***

This organization is currently operating in Najaf. It focuses on increasing health care services for victims of war and others needing medical care. The organization was formed about a year and a half ago. Most of the organization’s work is focused on rural areas. The organization has received funding from IOM, UNAMI, NDI, IRD, and the British Consulate.

They have conducted a number of workshops aimed at encouraging women to enter into political campaigns. CHF and the Iraqi Relief Organization have worked together on an economic project to outfit an internet café, sewing workshops, and an English language learning lab.

There is only one woman on the Regional Council for the charity, as the head of the oversight council does not believe that women should hold positions men are able to hold.

### ***The Iraq Tomorrow organization in Najaf***

This organization was established on April 14, 2005. It aims to create a democratic and pluralistic Iraq in which rights and freedoms are respected by a democratically elected leadership. It also offers assistance to those suffering internally in the country. A regional council for this organization was established and has been aided by CHF since May of 2006. There is one female member of this council which has implemented several community projects with the collaboration of ADF, DFID, British Council, IOM, IRD and NDI.

This organization has also worked on improving participation in elections and voting for the constitution as well as in supporting and implementing plans for aiding other Iraqis. This organization also has a special division which promotes the increased participation of women in these projects.

### ***The Anwar Al-Zahra Women’s Cultural Center in Najaf***

The persons who established this center are members of a CHF community association which was established in 2004. This center’s goals include addressing illiteracy among women, raising women’s

levels of education and awareness regarding the proper raising of children and the development of women’s capabilities.

The president of the Community Council of this center is a woman and the Council includes two men who are council members.

This center was established in 2005 and focuses its work in rural areas. The president of the center won in a community council election in Nahiat Al-Abasia. She was elected by the people of this area and has helped them to receive work.

Widows have been employed in a joint CHF project involving sewing. The president also requested that CHF build a birthing room for pregnant women because of the large number of women who have died in labor. With CHF’s help the clinic was opened and is now serving women of the area.

### ***The Mesopotamia Daughter Center in Karbala***

This Center was formed in 2003 and is headed by a female lawyer. The organization helps to train female leadership groups, spreads democratic principles, and works to increase the economic and social level of women in the area.

The organization is funded by NDI, NED, IRC, and CHF. The project the Center completed with CHF involved the opening and equipping of a hair salon for women in order to help improve the economic situation in the area.

The Director gave many workshops about the Iraqi elections and the referendum on the constitution. She conducted these workshops in urban and rural areas. She claims that *“My work in teaching the people increased my own personal experience and self confidence and helped me to become the head of the regional council for the organization.”*

### ***The Euphrates Woman’s Cultural Center***

This organization was founded in 2005 and is led by the oldest female engineer working at the Hilla carpet weaving factory. Its main goals are increasing the educational level among women, supporting women in building capacity, and encouraging women to participate in political, economic, cultural, and social life equally with men. They also work to shed light on Iraqi laws that protect the rights of women by spreading awareness and putting pressure on decision-makers in the country.

The head of the organization has acquired funding from ADF, NDI, OTI, and USIP on programs that serve women and increase their cultural, social, and economic capacities. She claims that, *“the organization was founded to help complete the important work of the American lawyer Fern Holland who was one of the first American civilians killed in Iraq.”*

After Holland’s death the organization would have closed if not for the help of Farqad Al-Qizwini. He helped the organization get funding and a building to operate from with the help of the CPA in June 2004. *“We had to leave the office in November 2004 because of security issues,”* Al-Barak said. *“We are now in a new facility to keep working in honor of Fern.”*

### ***The Bright Tomorrow Organization in Karbala***

This organization was formed in 2004 as a CHF/Iraq community association, and then evolved to a local organization with the aim of increasing the social, economic, and cultural participation levels of women in Iraq. It also hopes to produce female leaders for the upcoming period in Iraq’s future. They have created a cultural center for women in Karbala that includes all NGOs in the city. They are also in the process of forming a center of cooperation for national dialogue. This center will include 25 organizations from Karbala alone. The goal of the project is to increase communication and improve execution on the part of the local governorate council.

The organization has helped young couples marry who do not have the means to do so by assisting them financially. They have worked to combat illiteracy and on increasing awareness about elections and new laws. The organization funds all projects by itself and has not accepted funding from any other group, including CHF.

### ***The Humanitarian Cultural Association for Human Rights Activists***

This organization was founded in 2003 by the head of the Iraqi network to end political violence headed by the American organization IFES. The organization receives funding from NED, NDI, IFES, and ADF and the Red Cross. The organization consists of a women’s legislative council, and the director of the organization is a woman. There is also a women’s rights committee within the organization.

The head of the organization believes that Iraqi women have still not taken the role that they need to in society. He explains that his wife leads other women in an effort to build leadership skills among Iraqi women. They focus on increasing self-esteem and helping them to develop leadership skills for the future. This is the kind of work he believes should be taking place among the women of Iraq.

### ***The National Organization for Development***

This organization is located in Karbala and is related to one of the community associations CHF worked with in 2004. CHF helped the community association to found this organization in May 2005. The organization is dedicated to increasing the quality of cultural and educational life for all Iraqis. It is also committed to carrying out development programs that benefit local residents.

The general committee is composed of 60 people, including 20 women. They have worked to build a bridge benefiting at least 300 families in Karbala, and provided money and support to 15 other organizations including Al-Zahra in Qadissia, and the Ahl Al-Beit organization in Samawa. The organization also consists of a research section headed by women, and an agricultural section led by women and men.

Members of the organization believe that women have a natural right to lead and be active in society. However, they have found that discrimination, cultural norms, and the inability of women to act outside of political parties or groups has made it hard for them to advance in leadership positions. From the point of view of the members of the organization this double standard is best expressed through an example: women in Iraq are encouraged to become school principals, but not judges or the head of the governorate council. This organization hopes to change this unfair double standard for Iraq’s women.

### ***Shaikh Muhammad Al-Laban and Shaikh Hayder Al-Tamaimi, Men of Religion***

These religious scholars are from Najaf. They have been consulted to see what their opinions are on how Islam views women in leadership positions. They have said that Islam is foremost among most religions in giving women a place in society. The Shaikhs noted that the inclusion of women in social issues is an essential part of Islam and that the interest of women in civic duties is essential to the foundation of good families and a good society. There are a number of verses in the Quran which explain the importance of women acting within society. One Sheikh explained that his wife is a local leader and she has the power to affect other women in their political and social views. Everyday for two hours she offers lectures and discussions to help and encourage women to believe in themselves.