

Methodology

This project involved a partnership between **CHF International**, a non-governmental organization (NGO) and the **Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM)**, a Georgetown University-based research center. The pairing presented advantages as well as challenges. The study drew on the strengths of each partner: CHF contributed its knowledge of field level conditions in each site as well as its expertise in community-based development and extensive programmatic experience. ISIM contributed its research expertise in conflict-affected countries, taking the lead in the development of the methodology, literature review, and analysis. Interviews were conducted jointly by staff of the two organizations.

The principal challenge was to ensure the integrity of the research when one of the partners, CHF, was assessing its own programs. The research team purposefully sought to identify particularly effective policies and programs that could be replicated throughout the CHF network and other agencies. Rather than instruct CHF offices to choose interviewees on a random basis, and run the risk of a biased sample, the research team instead asked our local partners to identify respondents who could describe successes as well as potential pitfalls. In this sense, this study does not purport to be an objective evaluation. Instead, the methodology was designed to elicit best practices and policies to increase women’s participation and leadership. The WILL project hence sought to identify factors that may contribute to sustainable female leadership.

Literature Review

The researchers at Georgetown University reviewed materials made available by CHF relating to its programs in Colombia, Serbia, and Iraq. Additionally, researchers consulted numerous institutional and academic sources for relevant information. Of particular interest were discussions on the current conditions and challenges confronting the countries, concepts of gender equity generally and in the specific country contexts, precedents for leadership development, and models for promoting active female participation in political, civic and economic affairs.

Field Interviews

It was decided at the onset to use an open-ended interview format in order for the researchers to gain a more nuanced understanding of each interviewee’s situation and perspectives. Separate protocols were prepared for interviews with women, men, and organizations engaged in promoting women’s leadership and participation. The questions overlapped to a large degree. In the majority of instances, the interviewees were encouraged to speak about themselves and their experiences rather than to follow a fixed order of question and answer. While not every interview covered every question, some of the questions elicited in-depth answers highly relevant to the objectives of the study.

The location of the interviews and the particular people to be interviewed were determined prior to the arrival of the research teams by CHF field offices in the three countries. CHF offices sent questionnaires to NGOs and community groups to gather information about the kinds of programs they offered and thereby identify the most productive interview sites. Selection guidelines were elaborated through consultations between and among Georgetown University, CHF Headquarters in Silver Spring, and the CHF offices in the field. In each case, interviews were arranged with:

1. Women participants in CHF programs or the programs of other entities
2. Men who worked with women leaders or facilitated women’s participation
3. CHF staff in the capital city and other locations
4. NGO, International Organization (IO) and government personnel who promoted female participation and economic self sufficiency.

In the case of Serbia, the research teams were comprised of three Georgetown University researchers, supported by two Belgrade-based CHF staff members. The latter accompanied researchers on all

appointments. In each locality, the group divided into two teams for simultaneous interviews. In the case of Colombia, one Georgetown University staff member conducted all interviews, usually accompanied by a research assistant contracted locally by the CHF office in Bogotá. In Iraq, the CHF staff contracted an independent Iraqi consultant who conducted the interviews. To enhance consistency, the Iraq team and Georgetown/CHF staff discussed the tasks and compared notes in three telephone conferences and one video conference.

Two caveats pertaining to the methodology should be noted. First, the research team was constrained by the security situation in two of our sites: Colombia and Iraq. In the case of Colombia, interviews were carried out in contexts in and near Bogotá or in other towns that were deemed accessible and safe. In the case of Iraq, the research was carried out by local researchers because it was deemed too dangerous for the Washington-based team members to conduct the interviews. Second, the research teams devoted about ten days to field work in each country, which allowed a limited sample of interviewees and no sustained contact with the groups or individuals following the interviews. The interviews were held almost exclusively with persons currently involved in CHF or other projects, or having only recently completed these projects. Hence, the research was unable to determine the long-term impacts of the initiatives aimed at enhancing women’s leadership and participation, as this was beyond the scope of the project.

In each case, the research team conducted a debriefing at the close of the mission. The research team in Colombia reported on findings and issues to the CHF staff in Bogotá, and received comments. In Serbia the CHF staff organized a debriefing with local NGOs who discussed the findings. In Iraq, the researchers discussed their findings by telephone with Georgetown and CHF staff.

Preparation of Country Reports

The three countries selected represent disparate political and economic conditions and quite different cultures, as noted in the introduction. The interviews conducted encompassed different segments of the societies, and the kinds of programs CHF has supported have been different in the three settings. The case studies appended to this report in Annexes I, II, and III discuss each case more fully.

Major Findings

Conditions Favoring Leadership

Although the women leaders interviewed were proud of their achievements, they stated that men, and especially women in their societies, still had a bias against women leaders. But, they thought, the bias could be and is being gradually overcome by various factors, particularly: education and the existence of programs specifically designed to give women leadership roles in local communities.

Education and Economic Independence

Education and economic independence have been key elements in establishing women’s authority and credibility in the three countries. Women with educational credentials have a decided advantage in gaining leadership positions as do women who pursue professions or have successful businesses. In Serbia, the majority of the women elected to the Community Development Councils (CDCs) that CHF established were already respected for their educational achievements or economic successes. Iraqi respondents mentioned both educational credentials and family connections as virtual pre-requisites to female



Education and economic opportunities for women from poor families are limited, which contributes further to their exclusion from leadership roles. This CHF training program in Palestine includes basic literacy in order to attract participants from poorer segments of society.

leadership positions. In Iraq today, both women and men are inclined to avoid visible forms of leadership because leaders of both genders and their families become more likely targets for assassination. In Colombia, there are few barriers to professional success for women from affluent and well-respected families who have advanced educational degrees.

That said, educational and economic opportunities for women from poor families and families that have been displaced by conflict are limited. Even where public education was available on an equal basis to men and women, as in both Colombia and Serbia, girls were more likely than boys to be kept home if resources were tight. Ultimately, greater access to adult education and training should be built in to regional programs that propose to attract poorer segments of the population. And, along with the obvious need for economic opportunities, the universal problem faced by women everywhere is how to arrange for childcare. In the case of Iraq and Colombia, mothers worry not only about the care of their children but also for their physical safety in contexts of violence.

Programs to Promote Women’s Leadership

International NGOs and the local NGOs that are supported with international funding have reached out to women in Iraq, Colombia and Serbia. Internationally funded support groups seem to have had significant impacts on women, supporting women’s health and education, disseminating information about rights and protection, and funding income-generation and-micro enterprise projects. In Colombia most participants in the programs examined were rural women who had had minimal schooling but, thanks to their involvement in local NGOs that supported them, they were now orienting newcomers to the city, holding down responsible jobs and raising their children. A few were taking university classes as well. In Serbia, one of the NGO leaders noted that he saw a significant positive impact in every community where CHF was working on establishing participatory civil society organizations and their ability to sustain themselves. Unfortunately, in Serbia as well as in Colombia and Iraq, the fragility of successes in the economic realm sometimes negates the achievements of the organizational and service realms.

Country Contexts

As noted earlier, the three countries selected represent different political and economic conditions, as well as dissimilar cultural landscapes. This section lays out the context for each country as a backdrop for the WILL project’s research.

> Colombia:

For forty years, Colombians have struggled with ongoing violent conflict between and among insurgencies, illegally armed groups, and government armed forces, the effects of which have been felt primarily in rural areas. Over the last decade, the impact of the conflict has intensified as narco-traffickers have funded the adversaries in order to secure land rights and security for their own activities. The conflict has spread from marginal sparsely populated areas to more heavily populated zones, with serious consequences for the Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations in particular. The extent of displacement has been enormous, with an estimated two to three million displaced people (the estimates vary primarily due to differing definitions of eligibility for benefits).² Nearly all international organizations and donor-funded humanitarian programs include components on behalf of these internally displaced persons (IDPs).

CHF has operated an extensive program in Colombia, which is supported by the Colombian Government agency Acción Social, USAID, and the State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM). The program has provided psychosocial support, humanitarian assistance, training and skills development, and has channeled male and female IDPs to employment. In addition, CHF supports

² UNHCR. “The State of the World’s Refugees: Human Displacement in the New Millennium,” April 2006.

several local organizations that work with poor and displaced families. Some of these organizations target their programs exclusively for women, some manage micro-credit programs in which the majority of recipients are women, and some focus on community projects to help vulnerable groups, including youth, to break out of cycles of poverty and crime. Because the CHF projects are aimed at categories of “families,” “youth” and “IDPs,” they do not program specifically to generate women’s leadership. While CHF champions this as a desirable effect, the projects do not include indicators against which such an outcome could be measured. The interviewers focused instead on several local projects receiving CHF support which are specifically targeted to enhance female leadership.

The interviews were conducted with all categories of CHF programs and women’s support groups. As in the other two countries, the interviewees were primarily service providers and staff members, but there were also interviews with a significant number of the IDP and other vulnerable women who had been supported by these projects. Most of the interviews were conducted in Bogotá which, as described in the following section, is exceptional in its gender policies—as well as in the fact that the capital city has experienced very little violent conflict, in contrast to most other parts of the country.

CHF, and virtually every other international body working in Colombia, has devoted resources to responding to the human impacts of war and displacement. The ongoing conflict has transformed the lives of Colombia’s former rural population, with profound impacts for men, women and relations between them. All are deeply concerned about the future of youth and children. Family stability is fragile both because of displacement and the difficulties achieving economic stability. Men who find themselves unable to support their families are reportedly more aggressive and more likely to abandon responsibilities they cannot fulfill. This pattern leaves the women to bear family burdens alone. It also has led the women who were interviewed to take advantage of national and international programs and opportunities that brought them together and fostered their management and leadership abilities.



CHF’s national IDP program in Colombia, which targets displaced families, ensures participation of women by creating forums that allow them to bring their children.

Women are present at all levels of government, but represent only 10 percent of the elected members of Parliament. Bogotá, where most of the interviews took place, is exceptional – women’s rights activists are organized in labor unions, community groups and professional associations have been mobilizing on several fronts for years. The current Mayor of Bogotá has fulfilled a campaign promise to support gender equity and has created an Office for Women and Gender Policies. The Office has been active in combating violence, expanding the reach of health and educational services, opening public venues to women’s participation and action, and attempting to improve economic conditions for the most vulnerable. This office, however, is local, not national; its resources are modest, and its continuation depends on the will of the current Mayor. Bogotá is divided into localities, each of which has a “sub-Mayor,” and all the current sub-Mayors are women. The posts are largely ceremonial but, for purposes of mobilization and leadership, they are important. Only a few other Colombian cities have similar structures. In Neiva and Montería where interviews were also conducted, municipal authorities were not especially helpful to gender equity initiatives.

Among its tragic effects, the decades-long conflict in Colombia has left about three million people displaced from their homes and communities, and created numerous widows. The inability of formal political actors to achieve peace has, therefore, led to the creation of citizen’s groups across society and throughout the country with women serving both in leadership and overall membership roles within these movements. There are some 350 women’s groups nationwide, forming a network called the Pacific