

## KCGS

ACTIVITIES IN THE  
LAST 3 MONTHS OF  
2016



### SEMINARS

RAISING AWARENESS  
ABOUT GENDER RELATED  
ISSUES



### TRAINING IS A KEY ACTIVITY OF KCGS



### GENDER INEQUALITY

KCGS IS SPREADING THESE  
MESSAGES

# NEWSLETTER

## About KCGS and its current problems

The Kurdistan Regional Government as part of its 2020 vision has made a commitment to improving and enhance the women contribution in politics, economic and social arena. Also, it has also made a commitment to combat violence against women through adopting a national strategy to end the violence. Such a national strategy requires the involvement of all KRG governmental institutions as well as advice from international organisations. Therefore, The High Council for Women Affairs, Ministries of Higher Education and Planning in partnership with UN-Women, UNDP and UNESCO have set-up Kurdistan Centre for Gender Studies (KCGS) hosted by Soran University.

Unfortunately, the proposed aim of KCGS has been hindered due to the second instalment of overall budget which never came through. The obvious reasons, of course, are the financial problems that KRG is facing; resulting in the UNDP to also withhold its part in funding the project, given that, it's partner KRG failed to provide promised funds.

It has to be emphasised that the Centre is an essential mechanism to achieve KRG 2020 vision. Not only because it will raise gender awareness via training and educating the public and private sector's employees; but also, through research findings, it aims to provide advice on setting new policies to combat gender inequities and violence.

## KCGS Future

It is sad that all collective efforts towards promoting gender equalities are coming to an end. Nevertheless, we sincerely thank UNDP, UN-WOMEN and High Council for Women Affairs in helping to establish this project. KCGS is a much-needed scheme for our society; it is only through education, research, training and academic debates where we can challenge the deeply rooted cultural prejudice against women rights. By setting up KCGS, such platform is established and we, therefore, will do all that is necessary to keep the project going. During the past two years, we have trained close to 500 public and private employees as well as carrying out seminars for more 1000 public members. The feedback on KCGS training has been positive, therefore, to stop it now is not an ideal option nor the way forward.

## Why KCGS project needs to stay?

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women (CEDAW) as an international bill, it explicitly urges us to recognise that women rights are inherent to social justice.

Amartya Sen, an economist Nobel Prize winner who is also an expert on 'human development', reminds us of a quote by H.G. Wells, saying that "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe". For Sen, the gender aspect of education is a direct link between ignorance and women's security.

Nobody argues about biological sex differences that men and women have, however, gender differences is constructed by society norms, tradition and deep-rooted beliefs that men are somehow superior while women are inferior.

In 2007, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) defined gender socialisation as "[T]he process by which people learn to behave in a certain way, as dictated by societal beliefs, values, attitudes and examples. Gender socialisation begins as early as when a woman becomes pregnant, and people start making judgments about the value of males over females. These stereotypes are perpetuated by family members, teachers and others by having different expectations for males and females."

### The 16 days of activism

November is a month in which NGOs and many social justice and equality all around the world prepare to campaign for end violence against women. 25th of November to 10th December marking the start of sixteen days activism to eliminate violence against women and girls. It commemorates Mirabal sisters who were assassinated on 25 November 1960 only because they stood up to the dictatorship of then Dominican Republic presidents Rafael Trujillo.

The sister's death became a symbol of resistance, particularly in the feminist movement. United Nations General Assembly on 17 November 1999, in honour of the Mirabal sisters the Assembly, designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The sixteen days of continent activism ends on 10th December which is, International Human Rights Day.

The reasons for ending activism on such a day speaks volumes itself - for the human rights does not only calls for oppressive regimes to respect and protect their citizens human rights but it also calls for the protection of the weak from the strong on community and family level.

*KCGS also was busy in planning and preparing for the campaign with its partners: the UNDP and High Council for Women Affairs to run a series of activities in Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaimaniya, supplemented with seminars, aimed at raising awareness about gender-based violence.*

*Despite having no funds, KCGS aims to continue doing its work*



*Education is the only viable way by which we can fight gender-based disparities*



Gender inequality is a byproduct of social norms and trends. The system of thinking that makes men see themselves as superior and the opposite other as inferior. We are all responsible for changing these beliefs and social norms; thus, KCGS is an essential mechanism for educating the public.

## November 2016 activities



the very reason that educators have a greater burden of informing the society and future generations to respect and never look down on one another on the basis of gender. Many participants welcomed such training as an essential element that everyone should know about. And those who have the opportunity such as teachers need to apply and refer to it whenever possible. With eager participation of all who took part, the training turned into an interesting exchange of ideas and debates. Most agreed that education is our best chance not only to eliminate violence against women but, also, a viable mechanism for more understanding and tolerance.

### Training for the Health Ministry: Dohuk

This time around, the training program was done for Ministries of Health and Education. KCGS and its partners made a decision to work together for a round of planned training activities, falling into sixteen days of activism.

KCGS trainer Najm Abdullah in Dohuk with help Salah Abdulrahman the

UNDP Community Solidarity Officer, held two days training for Ministry of Education and two days for the Ministry of Health.

The sessions of education were about “Mainstreaming Gender Dimensions in Health and Education Sectors to prevent and Address Violence Against Women” at the workplace. The events were well-organized, thanks to all those involved, and more crucially, satisfactory for the participants. Around 50 senior public servants from both ministries participated in the training all of which had a positive view of having learned a new perspective on which to look at when it comes to gender-based inequalities and violence.



### Training for the Education Ministry: Dohuk

The other training event was conducted for the teachers and senior staff of education ministry. Unlike any other training this one was more important; for



### Training in Sulaimani

Unfortunately, the planned training program which was meant to be conducted for both ministries and the city council did not take place. Despite the continued efforts of KCGS trainer Dr Rebwar Karim and UNDP representative Parez Abdullah as well as our official request to both ministries departments in Suliamaniya, we were not able to convince them to attend the training.

As we all know, the civil servants in the province were on strike due to wage delays and underpayment by the government. In response to our official requests, the line managers said that their staff turn up to work is very low and therefore, they are unable to gather enough people. Even those who come to work do not have the desire to sit for any training at a time when they are not getting salaries. For these set of reasons the proposed training plan was put-off until the situation normalises, and when the opportunity again, comes our way.

### Training for Education & Health departments: Erbil

One could not help but think that KRG has taken a significant stride in combating domestic violence against any family members. It has a particular law and police force designated to deal with domestic violence. The government efforts in trying to tackle such an important issue in society speak volumes in how deeply entrenched gender-based violence is. To this end, projects like KCGS and its training programs are another essential device by which we can inform people about gender inequality, wrong and traditional assumptions that are feeding into domestic violence.

KCGS trainers Dr Houshang Dara and Evan Jani; between them conducted two-day training sessions for both ministries of education and health staff in Erbil. Both pieces of training were successful in getting the message across whereby the factors as mentioned earlier were put into discussion.

Participants agreed that these educational sessions are necessary and could be more fruitful in the long term in combating gender-related prejudices.

Training, as a scheme to invoke the cultural bias against women, has time and again proved to be effective and welcoming by the participants; for - they keep telling us that we need more of it. It further, become more clear that indeed the level of cooperation and solidarity amongst men and women in training sessions underpins the effectiveness of such program. Again, the role of UNDP representative Mustafa Barzenji and his colleagues were commendable in getting the events organized.



### KRG delegation visit

On 29th November, a delegation from the Deputy Prime Minister Qubad Talabani Office with Head of High Council for Women Affairs Paxshan Zangana and Florin Gorgis came to visit KCGS. Dr Nehro Zagros and Salah Fatah welcomed them, appreciating their concerns for KCGS project to continue despite the financial difficulties. Florin played a vital role to make this meeting happen; her sincere efforts are as Dr Nehro said' instrumental in helping to make KCGS continue its activities. The delegation promised to do all they can to provide funds “anyhow possible” which has given the KCGS a hope and a lifeline.

### Seminars & forums

Seminars are another way by which KCGS reach out to public and private institutions members to provide the primary notions of what gender studies are about and why it is important. Henceforth, we continue in building public relations and educating people about gender-based inequality. To that end, on 5th December, Nishteman Othman, KCGS member delivered a seminar for Faculty of Law students, staff and lecturer on why women set themselves on fire as a last resort to end their life as result of family grief and disputes. Of course, there many reasons for such an act, as to why someone would end their life in such a painful way. She

emphasised, we can-not boil it down to few factors but rather a deep pondering that we all urgently need to rethink why these acts continue to occur among Kurdish women. Women themselves need to realise that, killing themselves, is not the only way forward in settling their social and family feuds. On the other hand, civil society organisations and the government needs to engage in a serious manner to prevent these tragedies by rigorous plans to find those women who need support, reassuring them that they are not alone in their personal struggle for more caring family life. Encouraging these women to come out and share their disheartening feelings which led them attempting suicide is perhaps, the most urgent action that needs to be taken.

As part of the campaign to stop violence against women, on 6th December KCGS in partnership with student unions at the faculty of law, organized a forum for all to get involved, expressing their views openly. Chief police officer Salar Tahsin provided statistics on violence against women in Soran and surrounding areas. Activist Ziba Taha and Dr Peshtivan Sreshmayi also provided some factors and reasons as to why the gender-based violence keep recurring; linking such acts to the misunderstanding of religion and cultural dogmatism.



KCGS director also informed the audiences about why KCGS exists and what it does to educate the general public. The forum was interactive as many participants expressed their views indicating the need for extra efforts in raising awareness about gender equality, why peace at home is essential for human family development and educating the public, being a key to achieving such goals.

On 8th December KCGS director delivered a seminar for private IT institution called Data Institute. As we have mentioned KCGS also builds relations with the private sector to make them aware of their duty in paying attention to gender equality. This event came about in partnership with Soran's anti-domestic violence police force, which we have close working relations. Chief Constable Salar Tahsin helped to organise the event; this was a well-received seminar in which students and academic staff paid

close attention. The subject of discussion was to introduce KCGS and what it does, while at the same time, students, as usual, were invited to come and visit the centre to learn about gender studies. We also discussed how gender-based inequality came about, how as a perpetuating process through patriarchy and socially constructed norms, it still exists. Examples of television movies and family way of raising kids were alluded to, this, in turn, stirred the debate and made people aware of why understanding these processes could be an essential element for a better social and tolerance life in family and community setting.

Nishtiman Othman with the help of students, on 12th December, organized yet another forum as part of KCGS activity of engaging the students and public members with gender-related issues. The subject of discussion this time around was "women between compassion and loyalty." Two students shared the platform for delivering a speech on why women are being subjected to violence and are viewed as inferior by the men; boiling it down to patriarchy societal norms



which are hard to break, often, women themselves being the barrier.

M. Omar, who also gives religious sermons on Friday's emphasised that societies in which religion and tradition plays a significant

role; the religious preachers bear a great responsibility to speak out for the rights of the women. KCGS director also talked about why women need to make a stand for their rights - because rights like freedom are not given but taken.

It is, therefore, the duty of women first to take their role in society seriously by education themselves and getting to know what rights they have and have not. Only then, they can command respect by their knowledge, competence and readiness to fight for their rights. For so long, despite, having favorable laws in place in Iraq and Kurdistan Region, women are yet, to see any significant progress with regards to their active role in decision making. Women are not aware that they have such rights enshrined in law let alone trying to making a change in them for better.

