



## Women's Needs Assessment

### Introduction

The commencement of the Women's Needs Assessment in 2010 initiated a worldwide survey of women within the Khoja Ithna Asheri Community aged between 16 and 65. This was carried out through an on line survey as well as feedback received through various focus groups, workshops and road shows. The main participants of this study were from Jamaats within CoEJ, NASIMCO and AFED.

### Goals

At the WF Conference in May 2011 the Needs Assessment Paper was endorsed based on recommendations from the assessment. Further to this, an Action Plan was put together focussing on five main areas:

1. Marriage/Marital Issues
2. Health
3. Education
4. Political Inclusion
5. Social Interaction for women

### Achievements

#### 1. The Council of European Jamaats (CoEJ)

##### 1. Marriage

###### A. Facilitation & Mediation:

- I. The MCB Facilitation programme had had 4 females undertaking this programme in 2014.
- II. The initial finding for the mediation structure under CoEJ shows that there is a lack of understanding of what mediation sound like. Therefore some internal guidance is being developed to share with member Jamaats, in order to raise awareness of mediation and conflict management. CoEJ is also in the process of being drawn up to identify up to 12 potential mediators, to undergo 40 hours of accredited mediation training by the end of 2014.

**B. Counselling:** CoEJ/WF Pre-engagement seminars helps individuals identify when they are ready for marriage and what the key qualities they are looking for in a future spouse. Similar work is being rolled out to University AbSocs, and now we are looking at avoiding duplication. The matrimonial board is also looking at running post-marriage seminars focussing on issues of concern with starting a family, and post marriage stresses. These will be limited due to a limited number of facilitators who can run this.

**C. Khulla:** CoEJ works with the European Committee for Islamic Divorce which assists with such matters.





**D. Welfare:** These cases are regularly reviewed and all information is handled on a need to know basis

## 2. Education

**A. Leadership Development Programme:** This year's LDP had 19 out of 30 participants being female. The Capacity Building board have also held 2 taster sessions, delivering similar content to smaller groups primarily focussing on existing madrasah teachers – the majority of which are female.

**B. Education programmes:** Women who have had a career break and are looking to re-enter the world of work or simply improve skills.

**C. Spiritual workshops:** CoEJ is looking at arranging a Ma'rifah type event to promote spiritual development for the women in Europe.

**3. Health:** The Health Improvement Board encompasses these areas. No changes have been made to this strategy and they continue to look at both genders needs.

**4. Political:** CoEJ constitution already ensures a minimum of 2 female councillors. At present CoEJ has 3, as well as one as the 5 delegates for WF. Through this we are role modelling to our member Jamaats. We also have 4 out of 9 of our boards being led by a female, demonstrating equal opportunities. The CoEJ constitution is currently under review and requests have been made to ensure that all member Jamaats have provisions for female voting rights. At present, 4 Jamaats have either part or full voting rights for women and many others are considering changes to their constitutions.

**5. Social:** CoEJ facilitates inter-jamaat networking through their events like women's retreat, MAMT and various courses throughout the year.

## 2. Organization of North American Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities (NASIMCO)



A historical constitutional amendment was tabled and successfully adopted at the 33rd Annual NASIMCO Conference in Los Angeles, California ensuring voting rights for women in its new applicant jamaats by requiring them to amend their constitutions (if necessary) to reflect the right for women to vote and to hold office in any capacity in the organization.

As is the case in the crucial stages of the turn of any major political change, much of the complex groundwork has been occurring at a grassroots level and during informal discussions with key executive members.

Over the course of the past year, strong and ongoing efforts have been made to encourage, support and persuade several jamaats in NASIMCO's existing membership to amend their constitutions to accord voting rights for women. At present, procedural and technical issues have delayed the process for at least one such jamaat while another jamaat is slated to debate the historical amendment at their upcoming General Meeting in April, 2014.



If successful, this will set the framework to table a new amendment requiring all existing and new membership under NASIMCO to grant women the right to cast their own vote and to hold office in any capacity in the organization.

### 3. Africa Federation (AFED)



1. **Facilitation & Mediation:** 2 members from Africa Federation's Women Board (AFWB) attended a Mental Health First Aid training, which was facilitated by CBG.
2. **Education:** Sessions on Purposeful Speaking were conducted with the intention to groom the women of our community in Public Speaking. It consisted of a training and a speech delivery session where participants were told to give a 3 minutes speech in the presence of an audience.
3. **Health:** A Health Fair was held for one and a half day where several health issues such as depression, family planning, physical exercise, acupuncture, Chinese medicine, healthy eating as recommended in Islam and menstrual problems. A few ladies gave their personal, first-hand experience of undergoing a terminal illness (cancer) and how they recovered from it. Additionally, Ultrasound, breast cancer and cervical cancer screening facilities were made available at subsidised rates. The ladies diagnosed with abnormal results were referred to seek further medical advice. Demonstrations on healthy cooking and physiotherapy exercises were also conducted.
4. **Economical Upliftment:** Lady Khadija Grant Scheme is a joint programme between the World Federation and Africa Federation that provides a grant of up to \$2500 towards assisting ladies of the community who have small businesses that do not earn more than \$20,000 per year. The small business could be in any field, whether earning from home by stitching, catering or women who have small shops that sell food items, clothes etc.
5. **Workshops:** Seminars on the following have been organised:
  - Communication and problems encountered in relationships.
  - Men's Brains VS Women's Brains. What each one means & what s/he says.
  - Discussions on relationships, substance abuse, media, technology, etc.
  - Child Abuse
  - Knowing your personality
  - Health and relationship

### Areas of Improvement:

In the course of three years of running of this project jointly with the regional representatives, we experienced delays and resistance in some areas as well as lack of human resources in others. It is my view that the most effective way of delivering such project is to incorporate the Action Plan within the regional agenda and promote its delivery through their respective boards.



Although the regional feedback suggests positive progress for some regions in some pertinent areas, it doesn't reflect consistency across the globe. It appears that collectively we have still a lot to achieve which can only be accomplished with a cohesive vision and not just as a side project for women to address.

- Empowering of women to support the prevention of and response to gender based violence;
- Defining ways in which men can be engaged to promote gender equality and to contribute more to their own health and that of their families and communities; and
- Promoting women's participation and leadership.

As leaders, we cannot shun away from our responsibility for the victimisation of vulnerable individuals within our community and we should not be weary to address taboo topics and issues which continue to prevent many of our women from progressing.

## **Additional comments:**

It goes without saying that the development and the struggle to bring about the change in the community is best achieved when it is acknowledged and addressed collectively

### **1. The Council of European Jamaats (CoEJ)**

- CoEJ is intending to hold a week-long event focussing on the issues of domestic violence. Dates TBC but plans include requesting all Jamaat lectures to incorporate themes. Statistics to be gathered from Jamaats on DV and marital issues to tailor a strategy that looks at combatting it.
- CoEJ to suggest constitutional change to ensure all Jamaats enable women to vote both for chairlady and managing committee elections along with any other relevant meetings. The time scale we are looking at is 2/3 years for Jamaats to adopt these policies and 5 years within which this should be enshrined within their constitutions. We shall hopefully be presenting the resolution at our next conference, encouraging Jamaats to follow suit for their respective elections.
- CoEJ to look at support mechanisms to encourage female entrepreneurship/enterprise. We are considering holding a seminar to acknowledge prominent female role models, as well as allow those starting their business to network and gain advice. This should also enable us to recognise and identify any key support needs e.g. financial support, building websites, legal issues etc.

### **2. Organization of North American Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities (NASIMCO)**

- The next few months, therefore, remain a decidedly exciting and pivotal time for the issue of Political rights for women. The upcoming NASIMCO Conference



(June, 2014 in Vancouver, Canada) is slated to review the accompanying recommendation to the amendment that specifically asks existing membership to review their constitution to be in compliance of the amendment.

- It is envisioned and anticipated that NASIMCO's milestone achievement will serve as an example and impetus for member jamaats of all regions under World Federation to follow suit and to promote equity in voting rights and political participation for women across the globe.

## Recommendations:

### A. Domestic Violence

- Leaders to address the impact of domestic violence on individual and families and discourage such practice in their regions/jamaats;
- Promote awareness to children through Madrasah syllabus on impact of domestic violence;
- Pertinent issues surrounding domestic violence to be addressed at Jummah Sermons to raise awareness on this hidden crime;
- Statistics to be collated by the Matrimonial Committee/jamaat regionally to identify key findings relating to breakdown of marriages;
- Workshops to be set up for men and women to address these issues and monthly surgeries be set up to provide one to one confidential support/assistance; These should be carried out by trained Matrimonial team ensuring confidentiality is complied;
- A helpline to be set up (based on the needs identified by the region) to offer support to victims of Domestic Violence; and
- General awareness lectures incorporated in the month of Ramadhan and Muharram and on key events discouraging this intolerable practice.

### B. Voting Rights: Empowering women to be able to vote for their own leaders.

- Each Jamaat to incorporate in their constitution to promote democratic rights to women to elect/choose their own female representative/leaders by 2014;
- Regional bodies/Jamaats to empower their female members to vote both for chairlady and managing committee elections by incorporating in each Jamaats constitution by 2015; and
- WF and Regional board's constitution to emulate that of CoEJ which stipulates 'at least two female on executive council'.

### C. Khulla: Regions to actively consult and seek spiritual guidance to address Khulla matters to resolve marital breakdown timely. This is currently functioning well within the CoEJ region, other regions to improve robustness in this area to prevent unnecessary delay.



- D. Regional boards to form a matrimonial board to address the needs and issues pertaining Marriage/Matrimonial.
- E. Regional bodies to look at support mechanisms to encourage female entrepreneurship/enterprise. Seminars to encourage and identify any key support need e.g. financial support, building websites, legal issues etc.
- F. Regional bodies to continue promoting LDP programmes to their female members to encourage their interest and participation in the political arena.

#### **1. The Council of European Jamaats (CoEJ)**

- It has been difficult to work on the various strands when there is limited buy in from Jamaats and/or boards who feel that is a change or an imposition to their existing structures and workloads.
  - i. From this we have realised that the approach cannot be a top down approach but has to originate organically from the grassroots.
  - ii. A way of overcoming this would be to identify key female leaders from within the community who can work at a local level identifying and leading on key issues. CoEJ would then work in a supportive role rather than initiating any specific projects.
  - iii. Some of the larger work e.g. mediation would continue being led from the top, whilst building capacity and infrastructures at Jamaat level.

#### **2. Africa Federation**

- AFWB is looking into creating helpline facilities for ladies. Details of the facility to be looked into.
- Visits to small jamaats with the intention of encouraging communication and close-ties amongst women, and to facilitate sharing of best practices between women in all Jamaats.
- The matter of Khulla needs to be looked into.