WE4L Linking and Learning event 2018

What: Linking and learning event Women Empowered for Leadership (WE4L)
Where: Oegstgeest, the Netherlands
When: 1 - 2 October 2018
Who: Hivos WE4L team and partners[1] from Jordan, Lebanon, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe

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[1] Jordan: Ahel, Drabzeen Human Development, Jordanian National Council for Women (JNCW) | Lebanon: Lebanon Support, National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), Maharat | Malawi: Governance, Gender, Justice and Development Centre (GGJDC), Women's Legal Resources Centre (WOLREC), TOVWIRANE | Zambia: Non-governmental Organisation's Coordinating Council (NGOCC), Restless Development, Zambia National Women's Lobby (ZNWL) | Zimbabwe: Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe, Gender and Media Connect, Gender Links.

Introduction

For two intense days, 15 partners of Women Empowered for Leadership (WE4L) joined to take stock, inspire and learn from each other, and discuss how to move forward, after 2.5 years of dedicated program implementation. Despite the often challenging implementation contexts, WE4L partners succeeded in encouraging thousands of women to participate in decision-making, increasing their voice and agency, and creating a more enabling environment in their countries and regions. Truly inspiring results, as Hivos' executive director Edwin Huizing noted in his opening speech, highlighting the training of some 3,000 women to act as election monitors, thus increasing women's visibility in politics. "WE4L also creates more public recognition and support for women in leadership positions", Huizing added. Hivos' role in this success has been crucial, as the midterm review demonstrated, and is especially valued by its partners for 'walking alongside women'. During the event, partners also indicated the importance of the (relatively) long-term support of the Dutch Ministry of Affairs which enables them to achieve sustainable successes.

1. Why linking and learning?

Hinke Nauta, coordinator of the Ministry's Taskforce for Women's Rights and Gender Equality, stressed the value of linking and learning within all FLOW-funded programs. FLOW stands for Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women, and WE4L is the biggest program it currently funds. Learning is not only important as a means to adapt WE4L's objectives and activities during the program period, but also for the Ministry itself, as Nauta emphasized. Gender equality is a cross-cutting theme in Dutch foreign policy, and her taskforce will feed valuable learnings from current programs into its thinking about new ones. Since WE4L has already achieved 'tangible results' according to the recent mid-term review, WE4L annual reports, and based on a Ministry field visit to Zimbabwe. Hopes are high that this program can meaningfully contribute to both adaptive learning and the scaling up of gender equality programs. Movement building is key to this process and the co-operation between international and local organizations brings added value. "The midterm review shows that the work being done is very important", concluded Nauta.

2. In what context do we operate? Trends and challenges

When it comes to female leadership, what are the trends, challenges and milestones? Dr. Salma Al-Nims of the Jordanian National Council for Women, touched upon some of the main (global) issues and the current challenges in her country.

The SDGs are an important opportunity to support the mainstreaming of gender equality at the national level, but many challenges still remain to be solved. Looking at women's **participation in the political arena**, the percentage of women in parliament has increased from 19 to 23 percent in the past eight years, globally. In Jordan, the number of women parliamentarians has also risen thanks to the quota system, but it is still limited to 15.4 percent[2]. "Are numbers important?" was Al-Nims' rhetoric question. Yes, they are – though not only in parliament and municipal councils, but also in university boards, judicial systems, etc. "We need women everywhere." Yet, equally important is the recognition of a different type of leadership; leadership that is about inspiration, inclusiveness and cooperation. "We need women who are inclusive and men who believe in women's power and leadership."

Operating in politics is, to put it kindly, not easy for women in many countries. Laws and social or tribal norms tend to block their aspirations, and even when they make it into politics, they often face harassment and discrimination. In this respect an important result of women's advocacy work at the international level was the inclusion of a special section on **violence against women in politics**, in the reports of the UN's special rapporteur on violence against women and girls. Last but not least, there is the double or even triple burden of women that hinders their full participation in public life. Women who have a family, parents to look after and who are supposed to take care of the household, often are simply too tired to maintain leadership ambitions. Discussing **life-work balance** should not be limited to women who are already (politically) active. "Our focus should be on the millions of under-privileged women who don't have the opportunities to participate in their communities", emphasized Al-Nims. Empowering women at all levels requires a radical redefinition of (familial) gender roles, away from defining hard-working women as 'failed mothers' and men as 'natural leaders'. Education is key in this respect; we need new role models. A good start could be the recognition of the many women who solve problems in their communities (where governments fail to) as genuine leaders.

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[2] http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm

3. What did we dream of?

At the start of WE4L, when we formulated our Theory of Change, what did we expect to achieve? In short, we aimed to increase women's participation in politics, civic organization and public administration, which then ranged between 8 percent (MENA) and 21 percent (Southern Africa). We identified the structural barriers for women to run for office, such as discriminatory laws and institutions. But we also defined the obstacles for women to become effective and influential leaders in civic organizations: patriarchy, a lack of education and networks, and violence – increasingly also on social media. Intervening at the subnational level seemed the best strategy, since that is where important decisions are made which directly affect the lives of millions of women at the grassroots level. Furthermore, the subnational level is more accessible for women than national politics; here, they can develop and sharpen the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to become capable and powerful leaders. Though their agency is the driving force behind WE4L, it's hard for them to succeed without sufficient support in society. Therefore, we simultaneously strengthen their capacities, and work with media and institutions to increase the general support for female leadership. Equally important is that women leaders and women's organizations collaborate in their efforts to bring about real and structural change.

> Our expectations were:
> 1. More women in politics and public administration at subnational level, participating fully and effectively.
> 2. Female leaders have more influence on political and societal developments and on public opinion.
> 3. Civic organizations such as trade unions and political parties promote full and equal participation of women in leadership positions.
> 4. Recognition and support from the general public for women in leadership positions.

Our Theory of Change is still valid and helps us to shape a common agenda, while linking and learning from each other. However, we have adapted it to the specific country contexts whenever necessary. In Jordan for instance, tribes are much more influential than political parties, so we shifted our influencing strategy towards engaging tribes. In Malawi partners decided to put their work with the government on hold, because of the upcoming elections; in case of a regime change their efforts would be in vain.

In fact, elections have played or will play an important role in almost all countries. A clear learning is that we have to think about our strategies during the period before and after the elections. Other learnings are:

- We consider women as agents of change, but what if women do not see themselves as leaders, or at least struggle with this role – for instance when dealing with party rules that work against them? How can we help them?
- Violence – and thus fear of violence - plays an increasing role for many women aspiring (political) leadership, especially when they are very focal (e.g. in Zimbabwe). What can we do to help them?
- Search for, engage and mentor young female leaders, to support emerging leadership. How do we get to them, what entry points can we use?

4. Where do we stand now?

In a short state of affairs, we shared inspiring lessons from Zimbabwe, Lebanon, Malawi and Zambia, as well as the main conclusions from the midterm review.

4.1 What have we learned so far?

Director Abigail Gamanya of Gender and Media Connect (GMC) kicked off with a presentation on the successes and failures of GMC's media work in Zimbabwe, followed by Léa Yammine, director of publications at Lebanon Support, who elaborated on how her organization provides stakeholders with the tools and knowledge to enhance women's (political) leadership. Project officer Irene Ntonga explained how WOLREC engaged traditional leaders and mainstream media, and project coordinator Faggy Chibanga shared how Zambia National Women's Lobby (ZNWL) engaged the government and political parties to foster concrete gender equality.

Media engagement

All speakers agreed that engagement between journalists and female leaders is crucial to increase visibility and enhance women's media profile. To this end, we educate both media and (aspiring) women leaders, and organize meetings to stimulate mutual understanding and establish useful linkages. **Journalists** are used to dealing with male politicians, union leaders etc. and often have no idea of how to approach female sources. In Zimbabwe GMC educated journalists to not only approach women in English, since the educational levels of MPs are very different and some women only speak Shona, a native Zimbabwean language – which should not hinder them from getting their voices across. Based on research and meetings, GMC also identified the lack of gender diversity

and stereotypical representation of women in media; its women source directory proved useful to journalists looking for female respondents or sources.

Coaching women leaders and actually exposing them to *real life* journalists, proved to be essential. In all countries, women were successfully supported in what GMC calls 'one of the most challenging situations in modern leadership, which is meeting the press'. First of all, by helping them build their self-image and create effective messages, but also by sharpening their skills. In Zambia, aspiring female councilors got advice from a communications specialist ("Create your own platforms"), while in Zimbabwe and Lebanon WE4L organized role plays of tough practical interviews in realistic settings with real journalists. A good example of the training results is the case of MP Susan Matsunga, who managed to demand a retraction to a defamatory article in a tabloid newspaper. An important side effect was that she openly shared her domestic violence experience, empowering other women to do the same. Matsunga won a seat in parliament in the 2018 elections.

In Malawi WOLREC made deliberate efforts to **increase women's visibility** in the media, among others during a meeting which was attended by leading newspapers and TV and radio stations. The media representatives agreed to give more space to and positive projections of women in their media. Moreover, WOLREC's media engagement resulted in ten media houses assigning correspondents who are interested in women and politics. This contributed to the marked shift in the way mainstream media reports on issues such as violence against women, now linking it more to systemic drivers of violence.

Research informs a broad audience

Lebanon Support produces its own publications to turn research into action, using technology and a variety of formats to reach a broad audience. They have widely used briefing papers on women and new actors in the 2018 parliamentary elections to provide accessible information, including eye-opening infographics, such as the distribution of female candidates across the 77 lists (28 contained zero women), and the number of female candidates nominated by the major parties (0-4). The infographics also allowed for an easy distribution of information and considerable reach on social media. A round table about the publications attracted over 40 people, including female candidates, journalists, researchers and academics. The **strategy to use different, complementary channels** proved successful: both on social media and in traditional media, issues such as the sectarian nature of Lebanese politics and the systematic alienation of women were broadly shared and discussed, with a clear peak around the round table event with over 48,000 people reached.

A more recent research publication of Lebanon Support showcases how we can create – and publicly share – insights into the challenges faced by women leaders on any level in the public sphere. An [infographic](#) launched on social media depicts the types of barriers that hinder women's political participation in Lebanon. The obstacles were identified in four case studies, covering a political party, a syndicate, a civil society organization and a social movement – and are remarkably similar. The main challenge is to get civil society to actively use tools like the infographics and publications, due to the limited collaboration between civil society actors in Lebanon. Lebanon Support now plans to involve stakeholder from the initial stages of a project, aims to present research findings during closed meetings with them, and to mutually refine them into concrete action for change.

Usual and unusual allies

ZNWL saw its long-term work rewarded when, in February 2018, the government of Zambia appointed a woman, for the second time in Zambian history, as the Minister of Finance. Apart from this strategic ministry, three positions that were previously held by women were taken by women again: The Ministry of Gender, the Ministry of Community Development and the chairperson of the Chilanga Council (a district which had long been held by men). In total some 45 **women were appointed and elected as leaders** in the private, public and political sectors. Another achievement of ZNWL was the drafting of gender equality plans by five (out of eight) political parties, to be included in their party constitutions. However, a disappointment was that only two women won during the 2018 by-elections for councilors. Furthermore, Zambia still does not legally require parties to implement a women's quota. ZNWL plans to advocate for quota to be embedded in the national constitution – just like WE4L's Lebanese partners are considering a revival of their quota campaign.

In Malawi all three partners[3] provided successful examples of **engaging unusual allies**. Wolrec emphasized on how they have been mobilizing traditional and community leaders in districts where patriarchy is more pronounced to promote women's leadership. Thanks to their political awareness raising, more women now obtain leadership positions in community development committees and chieftainships. The organizations trained an increasing number of aspiring councilors, resulting among others in two local male councilors publicly supporting female candidates for the 2019 elections. Unfortunately, the perceived success of the main five

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[3] Governance, Gender, Justice and Development Centre (GGJDC), Women's Legal Resources Centre (WOLREC), TOVWIRANE

political parties agreeing on quota for women did not really pay off as the parties have still not taken steps to implement the quota. Equally, the incumbent female parliamentarians whom the programme assumed would mentor newcomers to the political arena mostly view the newcomers as contenders and they have not been available to mentor the new candidates.

4.2 What have we achieved so far?

"After the training I got from the Women's Coalition, I campaigned for the chairpersonship of the Parent Teachers Association and was elected. I defeated five men". Looking at the overall ambitions of WE4L this result may not be earth-shattering, but it definitely is an example of what WE4L can change in the lives of people at community level. The proud Zimbabwean woman quoted above felt more confident and assertive thanks to the trainings provided by WE4L, according to a recent midterm review of the program. The **review is overall very positive about the strategies and achievements** of Hivos and its partners. It praises the unique role of Hivos, as a well-known, respected and experienced partner in both regions, and WE4L as a program that is grounded in women's organizations. "There is no doubt that WE4L is in demand, relevant and promising."

Rob Watson, one of the authors, shared some of the key findings and recommendations. Key findings include that women leaders – and those aspiring leadership, including youth - are becoming **more visible and politically effective**. WE4L has increased the media awareness of women's leadership, and has amplified women's voices through its media work. Furthermore, the program has played a clear role in catalyzing political commitments, such as including gender equality in political parties' policies, and WE4L partners are successfully engaging with the public sector and trade unions.

Among the challenges the review found a **lack of country level strategies** that linked the program to local context priorities. Though Hivos enters into its partnerships very carefully, a recommendation is to also strategize and co-create with partners at the national level. Other advice includes to develop a comprehensive curriculum on women's leadership, and to make the work of WE4L more visible. Last but not least, the review recommends to "**continue supporting the project beyond five years**", since a program like this needs at least a decade for change to happen. Extending WE4L to ten years will strengthen the interventions and make a significant contribution to gender equality, democracy and justice for marginalized women. Though everyone embraced this recommendation, it was also emphasized that donors should be more interested in impact than in 'throwing in money'. For instance, ministries could play a role as ambassadors for gender equality in the five countries; reference was made to Sweden, as an example of a more creative donor attitude.

5. Food for thought

How can transformative leadership enhance movement building in politics and public administration? Food for thought and discussion, delivered by Henry Myrttinen, Head of Gender and Peacebuilding of International Alert. Sarah Gammage, Director of Gender, Economic Empowerment and Livelihoods at the International Center for Research on Women, and her colleague Patricia Griffith, Chief Strategy and Partnership shared valuable insights on measuring women's empowerment, to enable solid evidence building for future strategies.

5.1 Transformative leadership

The midterm review pointed at the lack of (shared) knowledge about transformative leadership among WE4L partners. It states that "many partners say they are promoting transformational leadership", but **few have defined what it is**. For instance, most of us know from practice that an assumption such as 'women leaders will automatically work for women's issues' is not always valid. Still, WE4L's Theory of Change assumes that women in leadership positions *will* work for gender equality. Therefore, we discussed the theory and practices of transformative leadership, after a short introduction by Myrttinen. He pointed out that, just like in many cases, there is no 'one size fits all': All sorts of aspects play a role in the choices of women leaders to yes/no work for the interests of other women.

Discussing transformative leadership also touches upon the question: what are the **benefits and drawbacks of quota**? What if the women we facilitated into Parliament refuse to advocate for gender equality issues? On the other hand, why should women talk with one voice, why should one woman represent all women? After all, one man does not represent all men. How do we deal with these kind of expectations? And what about male politicians promising to support gender equality (before the elections), yet stating they had 'more pressing issues' to focus on (after being elected)?

Myrttinen listed some more common challenges, such as 'how to engage men without stabilizing patriarchy', 'how to reach the hard to reach (women)', 'how to deal with obstacles and backlashes', and 'how to provide women with the resources – time, energy, but also money – to work in leadership positions'? Discussing these challenges led to sharing successful solutions as well as to posing new questions. Holding **male leaders accountable for their pre-election pledges** seems to work, both in Southern Africa ("Tell MPs who don't live up to their promises that you won't work for them again – this works especially at the community level") and in the

Middle East ("Publicly showcase that they did not live up to their promises"). But in the end we want them on our side - or actually, on our common side, since gender equality benefits everyone.

How to **engage men without stabilizing patriarchy** – that is, enabling them to increase their power by promising support to women? On the practical solutions side we can sign social contracts before the elections, on the number of women MPs/councilors a party will appoint. Yet, how to 'transform' the male mind and find genuine male champions of gender equality? Here, we might need an intersectional approach: work with young men (i.e. change the educational system), deal with toxic masculinity and put forward female role models. In other words: change the patriarchal culture. This also requires reminding institutions (banks, businesses) of their responsibilities and push for legislative amendments. Particularly in rural areas, a useful strategy is to engage with the 'custodians of traditional culture' in patriarchal communities.

The importance of **positive role models** can hardly be exaggerated: "Women who openly talk about leadership experiences, including the challenges, really inspire others." This works at the community level, but also in civil society organizations and political parties. Sharing knowledge and experiences on leadership by (aspiring) women leaders is also important when it comes to dealing with backlashes. How can they help each other to avoid the same pitfalls? Regarding the **double or triple burden** that withholds women from aspiring leadership positions, the question is how to support women to tap into resources without passing on the burden to other family members (mothers, sisters, daughters)? Organizing women support networks could help solve this, but also publicly challenging the culture and institutions that sustain the current (household) labor division; and encouraging organizations and institutions to e.g. replace maternity leaves with parental leaves. For women living in rural areas the situation is especially challenging: here, advocating for access to good public services can alleviate their workload and increases the chance they opt for leadership positions.

Besides a lack of time and energy, the absence of **financial resources** is a huge obstacle for women aspiring political leadership. Getting elected – or even candidacy - costs money, which women in many countries do not have, due to a number of legal and cultural barriers. Painful was the story of the Malawi candidate who sold her house to fund her election campaign, which she did not win. Yet, should we opt for financial support, like the female leaders attending a WE4L conference in Zambia did, by revamping a fund for female election candidates? Or should we be against reducing the direct costs for female candidates, and focus on tackling this issue strategically, by amending restrictive inheritance laws, among others?

What inspiring ways have women leaders found to influence politics and deal with the challenges? Some get about by 'simply' defying the limitations – yet the question is: how can all women do that? Palestinian women politicians provided a new avenue, by joining forces to e.g. protect each other against sexist attacks and organize early detection spaces for discussion. **Women leaders supporting each other** is definitely a prerequisite for sustainable transformation - and an area where we can actually make change. We can help them find common grounds for collective demands, agree on common messages and form support structures to jointly fight violence against women during elections, and social media abuse.

5.2 Build evidence to back sustainable solutions

WE4L aims to empower women to fully participate in politics, public administration and civil society. Now, halfway our project period, we reflect on our strategies, our actions and our results. What worked and what did not? Based on that knowledge and evidence, we can develop strategies towards sustainable solutions in the coming years. So the question is: how can we **rigorously reflect on women's empowerment**? How can we measure the results of empowerment strategies and activities, so that we know (and can show) that we are on the right track – or can adjust our interventions?

To that end, Sarah Gammage and Patricia Griffith, Chief Strategy and Partnerships, use the framework of Naila Kabeer. In her definition, **empowerment is a process of change** in which people's "ability to make strategic life choices" expands. In other words: they can increasingly make decisions that result in desired outcomes. In this empowerment process, a Theory of Change is helpful for both project planning and for defining the monitoring and evaluation indicators. Having decided what kind of transformative change you want to achieve, what is within your sphere of influence and what strategies suit your goals, the question is: what can you measure that indicates process change, inputs, outputs and outcomes over time?

According to Kabeer, **three dimensions define people's ability to make strategic choices**: resources, agency and achievements. Resources are the building blocks for women to exercise power (human, financial, social and physical capital). Agency is the voice women have, the extent to which they can participate and influence decisions. And achievements are women's improvements in health, education, income generation etc., as a result from the increased agency. All three are limited by the norms (taboos, expectations) and institutions (policy structures, inheritance) that govern the society women live in. How can we measure progress in these dimensions? Gammage and Griffith gave a few examples of **measuring voice and agency**. Is a woman able to speak in public? This can be measured quantitively, using baseline and endlines, and randomized control types,

among others. Yet it can also be measured qualitatively, through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and role plays. Important is, that it serves your goal: learning what works and what does not, and being able to adjust your strategies and activities to bring about the desired transformative change.

6. Food for practice
How can we break down our work into work into compelling & informative stories? How can storytelling help us to communicate the change processes we work so hard to achieve? And, equally important: how to get these stories across a wide (or targeted) audience?

6.1 Storytelling
Storytelling is, according to Hivos' content manager Mark Schleedoorn, unlocking the potential of all the **unknown people and their 'small deeds'** who, quoting Noam Chomsky "have made change in the past, [and] are responsible for making change in the future too." By telling their stories we can make sure these women and men don't go unnoticed. And by telling the stories of the women we aim to empower, we also make our work visible, accessible and shareable. It is an easy-to-communicate and compelling way to bring complicated or very factual messages to a wide audience. Illustrative of how storytelling works is this moving videoclip which touches upon emotions that we all share. Lesson: if you manage to tap into that, your stories will resonate with policymakers, donors, and the general public. And with journalists, who often do not have the time or appetite to go through a lengthy report.

A (good) story has three main characteristics:
- A main character with whom you can identify (emotions, struggle, motivation)
- Less is more: get to the core, skip the unnecessary details
- Pick a narrative: what trials and tribulations did the character go through?
Each storyline basically gets down to a character moving into action which then brings about change.

So what should we tell? Our communication is often focused on measurable results that we can celebrate and share with donors, preferably in facts and figures. But what about the importance of our approach, or the impact our work on the lives of real people? How to document and communicate the increased opportunities for women on the ground, other than the number of female MPs you supported to get elected? '**Approach stories**' tell what you intend to do, for instance what the 45 journalists and the partner experienced during the training in Zambia, how the training was conducted, etc. '**Impact stories**' can share measurable results as well, yet contained in a story about the meaning of these results for the people we support, such as the impact of the Malawian male councilor (in a 100 percent male council) who made room for a female successor. Or the longer-term impact that you can (partly) claim, for instance the results achieved by the elected female MPs: what change did that make, in terms of legislation or public debate, for instance?

Storytelling not only benefits communication about your results, but also **linking, learning, monitoring and evaluating** your work. It's easier to share stories with other partners and countries, and to use stories to evaluate the impact of your work, than to (only) compare numbers and share reports. Even reporting to donors does not necessarily have to be restricted to figures and reports; they are also interested in the stories that illustrate our journeys towards change ("Donors are human beings too", as Jules van der Sneppen, representative of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, happily confirmed). Designing attractive formats for the stories you tell will make them easier to produce, share, recognize and digest for your audience. A great example which e.g. could be used to introduce the projects under WE4L, is the (Mercedes-paid) 21 Icons Project. Inspired by the life of Nelson Mandela, 21 Icons is "a visual celebration of the lives of men and women who have shaped the world around them for the better". Each short video clip provides a lot of information, but the attractive format tempts you to want to learn more about this person.

How to overcome the obstacles that keep us from sharing the stories of our work? "We often lack the technical expertise" and "We don't include it in our planning". Storytelling is not similar to making (expensive) documentaries. There are **a lot of easy formats** you can choose from. Make photographs and add a few short lines, film with your smartphone or interview the people you work with. This provides you with the material to produce and share compelling stories. Remember that you don't have to print a book: creating one success page (WWF example) or one story about a community leader can also work. "Let's use what is available to us."
With regard to the project planning: **facilitating the process beforehand** can help you collect valuable stories. Draw up and distribute a few FAQs that staff can use in any given situation, such as: what is her ambition, what is

she doing now, is there a short anecdote to tell, etc. Yet it all starts with the question: what do you want to share, what do you consider a success or a setback? Then think of someone you can attach that question to: what character could tell this story? **Learn to recognize a (good) story**, when you visit communities for instance. If you are impressed by someone or touched by her story, then usually other people are too. Basically, emotions are quite universal.

Of course, creating stories also comes with **setbacks and pitfalls**. What if a woman you launched as a hero keeps being identified and brought to the forefront as *the* hero of a certain project? What if media misuse the portraits or videos that you have put online? How to deal with the possible dangers you expose the portrayed women to? Regarding the latter: this comes down to both having a good protocol (informed consent, ethical procedures) and using your own common sense (if you might harm people or processes, don't publish). And in the digital age it is almost impossible to avoid information spreading on social media, though we must take precaution measures (which are in the protocol). Still, we can identify lots of problems, but that should not withhold us from telling stories and share them. As long as it works to present the same hero, it does not have to be a problem – and if it is, try to find a similar one, now that you have learned what works.

Not everyone is enthusiastic about the **concept of heroes**. Ahel in Jordan promotes the use of stories that support a redefinition of leadership: successes are not a one person achievement, but a result of collective leadership. This way, women can identify with the story characters ('you are like me, I might join you'). Yet we don't operate in a vacuum and the question is: what narrative do we want to communicate, what agenda do we want to push forward? Sometimes we need stories on powerful leaders, other times we have to show our vulnerability or claim our successes. In this session we have learned how to find stories and how to package them. How can we support each other to make that stories come to live? Especially on social media, it is really complicated to keep a story going and stimulate interaction. Three tips: keep it very short, never ask questions that people cannot answer (like 'how can we feed 9 billion people') and do use a (shareable) call to action.

6.2 Storytelling in Jordan, Lebanon and Zimbabwe

Storytelling is core to the work of the Lebanese **Maharat Foundation;** its founders are all journalists and the NGO works on freedom of expression and media development – among others striving to modernize journalism and politics. Project manager Layal Bahnam shortly presents the objectives Maharat uses storytelling for, such as monitoring and evaluation (M&E), advocacy, training and awareness raising.

Shortly after the parliamentary elections of May 2018, Maharat organized a meeting with a focus group of women candidates using storytelling to monitor and evaluate their work. Each candidate told her story about dealing with the media and her challenges to access media. Since many women complained about the way journalists interviewed them, Maharat set up a series of **gender-sensitizing trainings for journalists**. Among others, they used a [video](#) showing a journalist who asked a female candidate questions such as 'what does your husband think of you running as a candidate?', including a set of guidelines on how to conduct unbiased and nondiscriminatory interviews with female candidates. Sharing online training videos like these really helped to spread the message, especially among young journalists, reaching far more people than through workshops. Maharat translates the results of its media monitoring reports into **accessible infographics and animations**, to raise awareness among journalists, youth, female candidates etc. It organized meetings with MPs where women candidates shared their stories of not being taken seriously by the media, and asked their target groups to come up with (videotaped) recommendations for women candidates. A recent study found, among others, that advocating towards media does work: the one newspaper that adopted a gender equality policy has clearly changed its reporting in a gender-sensitive way.

In **Jordan, Ahel** also uses storytelling for a range of purposes, in addition to the more common uses such as communication, instruction and celebration. What the four examples co-director Nisreen Haj Ahmad gives have in common, is that they serve building leadership and social movement action, by empowering and mobilizing people. She starts with the story-in-a story of Habib, who was severely underpaid as a teacher, organized a strike, was fired and joined the teachers' movement. Her story was used to persuade the Ministry of Education to force schools to pay teachers the legal minimum wage. The bottom line: everybody has a story to tell, and Ahel uses this principle in its **agency training**, pushing women to realize they also have a story to tell; and while a woman tells it, she changes from an object in a general (I am like any woman) story to a subject in – and the owner of her story.

Other uses of storytelling include **producing collective identities**, evolving the hidden collective identity in a group (for instance: people who serve in the army and those who refuse to go in the army) in addition to the apparent identity (for instance: Palestinian or Druse) by telling stories of different people. A third use is to create solidarity and **call people to action**, like the underpaid farm worker Amina did by organizing a house meeting with the other women workers. Telling her story and calling to stand together to demand payment at the end of the day (we can all do what I did), resulted in the creation of a local action committee. Ahmed, the main character

in the fourth story, used the story about his divorced mother to **counter the dominant narrative** about divorced women. He related about her hard work in difficult circumstances and how she enabled her children to study. Conclusion: true, personal stories empower and mobilize people, and can be told in thousands of places, also when you don't have the resources to make a video or poster series.

A rather radical choice for internalizing the technique of storytelling was made by the **Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe** (WCoZ), a network of women's rights organizations and activists. Director Sally Ncube explains how her organization **applied storytelling throughout the project cycle of WE4L**, from formulation and inception, to implementation and M&E. WCoZ uses storytelling techniques to design and co-create the WE4L interventions; the baseline research is based on stories of women leaders; and the needs they express in their stories are used to develop both content and approach of the trainings, as well as the lobby and advocacy strategies.
In Zimbabwe there is a huge gap between the equality-promoting laws and regulations, and the unequal chances and marginalization experienced by women leaders on the ground. WCoZ opted for storytelling as an approach to **learn from women leaders' real life experiences**: what works and what does not for them, what areas should WE4L focus on, what activities address their actual needs and expectations? So WCoZ gathered stories among women leaders of their journeys - how did they become what they are - about their barriers and challenges, their training and support needs, the way they use the information gained from WE4L, and their strategies to sustain their leadership. Other than reports or surveys, stories can tell what it's like to be a leader, provide clear examples of the challenges women leaders face, and bring to life inspiring success stories.

WCoZ uses the stories to inform, to educate, to mobilize, to recruit, to stimulate activism, to celebrate and to bring to the attention the issues that it is advocating for, and to inform the WE4L program. This requires some basic **conditions of the storyteller**. Basically, she has to be a leader in civil society or public administration at (sub)national level and willing to share her story at several occasions, ranging from informing the baseline study and the program, to facilitating workshops or performing as a guest speaker. To get these stories out to the right stakeholders, WCoZ co-creates content, decides what story to communicate on what online or offline platform, and prepares the women to confidently tell their stories.
After almost two years of applying storytelling techniques to WE4L, WCoZ concludes that the stories help to foster understanding of the realities of women leadership, their needs and project results. They stimulated duty bearers to address barriers, ignited solidarity between women leaders, enabled linking and learning, showcased legal and governance gaps regarding women's equal participation, and increased women's confidence. An important lesson learned is that sustainably empowering women for leadership requires a multifaceted storytelling approach, because women leaders are not a static and homogeneous group.

7. What is our position in the broader women's rights landscape?

"I am struck again by the similarities", a Malawian participant remarks after the presentation about Lebanon and Jordan. Among others, she refers to the challenges for women to become a leader in the minefield of politics. In particular, for women in rural areas it is extremely difficult: apart from cultural barriers, they are often too poor to even take the bus. Should we not focus more on economic empowerment of women? And expand our outreach more explicitly to rural women?

Middle East

Expanding to rural areas is one of the strong Unique Selling Points (USPs) of WE4L in Jordan. The program is working to break the negative coverage of rural women through a media dialogue and a national campaign to promote women in politics and the economy. In Lebanon rural outreach is still one of the weaknesses that WE4L is working on; women's activists here are usually very urban-based. Therefore, the partners did some focus group discussions and gathered best practices, to provide evidence needed to improve action on the ground. How do you get people on your side? This more evidence-based way of working has become one of WE4L's strengths in Lebanon: "We don't so much rely on assumptions as in the beginning".
Another issue is the relation of female politicians with their voters. Both in Lebanon and Jordan we worked hard to counter the stereotypical coverage of women in the media through our own platforms and – a USP of WE4L within the Lebanese women's rights landscape – targeting advertising agencies to stop promoting sexist ads. Yet a lesson learned is that women running for elections or for candidacy did not relate enough to their voters; talking for instance about women's rights when their public was concerned about certain issues in their communities. Here Hivos also gathered evidence (analysis of the voters and their interests) to coach women leaders to define and package their messages.
Building public profiles is important for women to position themselves politically. With a lot of work being done on elections by other Lebanese women's organizations, WE4L decided its added value lies in coaching women to maintain their profile between the elections – having the luxury of a 5-year program to make this choice.

To increase women's agency, WE4L brings women's organizations together in regional networks and supports nation-wide organizations. Yet, a point of concern in Jordan and Lebanon is how to increase the impact on the ground. Therefore (evidence-based) tools are being developed to increase the impact of grassroots work, and close the gap between policymakers and women activists outside the capitals. In Jordan WE4L engages community-based organizations, and supports women in other sectors (education, health) - this could be an expansion strategy for Lebanon as well. An asset is that in both countries WE4L has good links to young people.

Southern Africa

Equally in Southern Africa WE4L strengthens women (aspirant) leaders to become more visible and politically active, with considerable success at the personal level, as is being demonstrated by women's feedback and stories of change. Women report increased confidence and influencing skills, they engage with other women – passing on their newly gained skills – and achieve concrete (lobbying) successes for their communities. WE4L's influencing work even led to some male councilors openly giving way to female aspirants.

WE4L in Southern Africa works with all layers of society, with a focus on political parties in Zambia during the first program year, because of the elections, and more recently also in Zimbabwe. WE4L was one of the first to work with aspirants - a clear USP within the broader women's movement. In Malawi, just like in Lebanon, WE4L fills an 'election gap': most NGOs start supporting women candidates shortly before the elections; WE4L has been doing that for 2.5 years, long before the 2019 elections. Another gap that is being filled is the focus on subnational level, where efforts and funding by others are scarce.

Other USPs include collective movement building, resulting among others in strong women's CSOs that jointly lobby governments and communities. WE4L in Southern Africa has integrated leadership strategies, addressing all women who want to join, and specifically targets youth, aspiring leaders and frontrunners. A challenge is though, that some incumbent women leaders feel threatened by newcomers and refuse to mentor them. In addition, the selection process in political parties can be very intimidating, especially in Malawi, discouraging women to run for these primaries.

In Southern Africa the program is particularly strong in working at the community level, where most voters are based and where patriarchy rules. The story of Esnat Gondwe tells us how important that work is: if WE4L had not come to her community, she would never have aspired to become a leader and run for councilor - as she does now. Yet in Southern Africa, WE4L also encourages and supports issue-based campaigning and concrete cooperation between women's organizations at the national level, for instance on Women's Manifestos to promote gender equality in politics.

Shared challenges

In all countries we have been working persistently on the increased representation of women in political parties and Parliament. Lebanese participants are convinced that we need **quota**, because political leaders never seem to live up to their promises: just a few days before the elections they announced not to vote for a woman. Zimbabwe participants had a similar experience: in March 14 political parties signed up for a 50/50 representation of candidates, but when it came to nominations none of these 14 did. And the situation is not any different for party leaders in Malawi and Zambia. Yet other than in Lebanon, Zimbabwe has a good constitution and laws (in terms of gender equality) - but at the end of the day the number of women elected increased by only one percent.

So both **promises and legal provisions** are definitely no guarantee for gender parity in politics. We need to do more. The challenge is: how to reach out and talk to the voters? In addition, women have to transform as well, and put aside their individual gains, to become real agents of change once they have conquered a parliamentary seat. We need to educate both the voters and the ones who win.

Getting back to our ToC, what does this mean? Are we not focusing too much on political participation, meanwhile **losing on the public and the traction**? Our program is about leadership, but that is always connected to other domains of women's empowerment, such as income and resources. What about mobilizing women for political processes? Another question is: what is our indicator for success – is it the number of women in leadership positions or other effects of our work? And how can we make the results or our work (more) visible?

Three more questions to take away to the next session or to our offices after this meeting:
1. How do we mobilize young women? Engaging young female leaders is seen as an opportunity in most countries.
2. Should we focus on engaging male champions and if yes, how?
3. How can we better communicate what we are doing, and activate political mobilization?

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8. How to support linking & learning among partners, and how to experiment, innovate and scale?

We can not only learn from each other, but also from organizations with similar goals and ways of working. Inspiring lessons on innovation came from Simavi, and from our partners in Jordan, Malawi and Zimbabwe.

8.1 Lessons from Simavi

Simavi strives for a healthy life for all, increasingly centering its activities around women and girls. What can we learn from the way this organization supports its partners to experiment, learn and innovate? Program managers Dorinne Thomissen and Sandra van Soelen, shared some of their best examples.

The first example is a WASH & Learn program, promoting Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in 40 schools and communities in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. A common problem of WASH installations is the lack of maintenance and thus their sustainability. Simavi **tapped into the knowledge of its partners**, by hiring a knowledge sharing and learning officer, who defined five learning themes with the partners and set up teams for knowledge sharing. Together they designed, among others, a simple, but effective financial plan for maintenance, including a risk analysis. Simavi supported its partners through half-yearly learning events, practical trainings and a Whatsapp group to share knowledge and experiences.

Another example of innovation to ensure sustainability are the pre-paid water systems, **developed from scratch with two private sector parties**. The challenge was how to make people pay before getting water of the newly installed water pumps, to ensure the maintenance costs would be covered. (Most people can pay a small fee, and for the extremely poor another solution is being sought.) This resulted in two innovations which are currently being tested and eventually might be scaled up: a coin machine and a pre-paid token machine, both linked to a dashboard showing possible problems and the amount of water that has been sold.

Cross-continent learning, experimenting and innovating in menstrual health projects resulted in the new program 'The Perfect Fit'. It started with the assumption that lessons learned from an African project on menstrual health could be applicable to Indonesia. A study researched the validity of that assumption, after which Simavi decided to conduct a pilot that would test the recommended integrated approach: providing the women with knowledge on menstrual health and access to e.g. clean water and menstrual pads, and breaking taboos and restrictions. The pilot was regularly tested and evaluated with the partners, who came up with new ideas; this led to getting a new partner onboard. The Indonesian women learned how to produce reusable pads, while the partners managed to engage community leaders and men. After two years, the results inspired Simavi to scale up the pilot into 'The Perfect Fit' program, which might eventually be rolled out to other areas.

Simavi stimulates innovation, but never imposes it on partners. It begins with an idea, that is being discussed with partners who then might reject or like it, or get inspired to come up with something else. During learning events there is a lot of space for partners to discuss about problems and mutually develop solutions. Simavi staff itself had a **training on out-of-the-box thinking** and can use the same techniques in developing programs with partners.

Simavi has learning teams on different levels, both as an organization and linked to a program; what these teams want to learn depends on the context and the program (and sometimes on donor requirements). Its Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) programs are more rights-based (instead of needs-based like WASH) and not necessarily high on governments' agendas. Simavi learned that it could **use WASH programs as an entry point for SRHR**, sensitizing local partners on menstrual hygiene and slowly expanding the project to related issues that women came up with, mainly questions about sexuality. It's not always easy to get governments onboard, but on the ground it works.

In general **Simavi uses its target groups as a source of innovation**, asks them for input. Their solutions are often quite logical, they don't have to be super-sexy or out of the box. Innovation is not necessarily complex and high-tech - it is about looking back, seeing what is the need, and trying; it can be very nearby. Also, there are a lot of funding opportunities for innovation that are not being used.

Innovating with Hivos

Hivos is a social innovator that wants to explore new ways of doing things. Shortly reflecting on how Hivos supports its WE4L partners to innovate, program manager Marcel van der Heijden sums up **the built-in learning moments**: the annual ToC workshops, Outcome Harvesting, the midterm review, and then of course the annual linking and learning events. It is these learning moments which can trigger innovative new pathways to change. Hivos tries to avoid continuing along the pathways taken, while we know these will never lead us to our goal. So exploring new pathways can be included in updating our ToC; moreover, the ToC is designed to help us find new pathways wherever necessary.

Our linking and learning component **focuses on three questions**: 1. what can we learn from each other, 2. what can we learn from what we did so far, and 3. how does that lead to new ways of doing things. At a more micro

level we learn important lessons from testing, organizing focus group discussions, asking target groups for input, which can all spark innovation and change the way we work.

New tools and approaches

Encouraged by the Simavi presentation, participants shared a wealth of valuable innovative tools and approaches they use in their respective countries and discussed new tools that could work for WE4L. In the plenary we shared three really inspiring ideas:

1. Café Talks (see also below). In Jordan WE4L found new ways to engage young people in issues around female leadership. The power of this concept lies in its simplicity. All you need is a space (café), WiFi and a group of trained moderators; so all you have to do is organize that and train some young people to moderate discussions and amplify these through life Facebook conversations, etc. Reaching out to youth in their own environment means you don't have to get them out of their comfort zone. In their own (offline and online) space youth can discuss issues around women leadership, make plans for solutions, and organize actions. Another strong point of this concept is that it generates content *and* feedback; young people who are not present in the cafés can react and ask questions through the livestream on Facebook.

Can we also use this concept in Southern Africa? Yes, we can. In this region we already have coworking spaces funded by Hivos, which seem a perfect fit for the Café Talks concept. Another option is to make the connection with Hivos' social entrepreneurship program: young people as café owners who can then organize events such as the Café Talks, or cooperate with private companies (e.g. mobile phone producers, internet providers). And, thinking even bigger, we could use the concept for other programs, having political conversations focused on economic empowerment, leading to livelihoods, etc.

2. Phone banking. This can be a powerful tool to reach out to and convince e.g. political party leaders to advocate for certain issues. Phone banking basically comes down to sharing names and phone numbers of leaders you want to influence and have a small group of women call them whenever they are about to vote on an important issue.

3. Joint programming on economic and political empowerment. Based on the lesson learned that financial resources play an important role in women's opportunities to participate in politics ('politics are an expensive field'). How this is being done depends on the situation and the opportunities in the area the women run for elections, ranging from capital injections to trainings that enhance a candidate's capacity to raise money.

8.2 Innovative highlights from Jordan, Malawi and Zimbabwe

Café Talks in Jordan

Drabzeen has found a way to actively engage youth in women's empowerment, by relating it to community issues and mobilize people at the local level to come up with solutions. Anas Al-Rawashedeh, director of this Jordanian youth organization, shared the reasoning behind, and the results of, the 'Café Talk' program. Drabzeen empowers youth by giving them the space and tools to become an actor – and an agent of change - in their community. **Facilitating conversations between young people** plays an important role in the NGO's strategy; hence the Café Talks. The idea was based on research among Jordanian youth, indicating they 1. had lost hope; 2. wasted their time in cafés; and 3. wasted their energy in unfruitful discussions.

What are the Café Talks? In a nutshell: open dialogues (90 minutes) about one issue (e.g. 'What prevents women from attaining leadership positions?'), involving 10 to 35 young men and women. They discuss the topic, come up with ideas to solve it and then select one main solution. Participants are invited via a Facebook event or by Drabzeen's 'ambassadors', and range from individuals to people connected to NGOs, tribal structures or local governments. Since girls cannot always come to public cafés, the talks also moved to other public spaces, such as universities, and to the online domain. Café Talks are **led by young ambassadors** who were trained by Drabzeen on moderating the discussions, reporting, and community management – a crucial role, considering the importance of the Facebook livestream and associate online discussions. After six months 21 ambassadors were trained and led 21 Café Talks, involving over 735 youth in 7 regions (and 49 subregions), which were broadly picked up by the media.

Café Talks don't end after the talking. Drabzeen asked the ambassadors to submit a plan based on the proposed solutions during 'their' Café Talk sessions. People could then vote for the most unique idea, and the plans were pitched in front of NGOs and companies during a 'market', resulting in actual support for 17 out of the 20 proposal; for example, a smartphone app to provide safe and easy rides for women in a region with a lack of proper transportation. Café Talks is a powerful concept to create space for innovation: after only one training, the ambassadors went back to their communities and **mobilized them to find solutions for community issues**, seen from a gender perspective. An example of how this can drive change is the director of an investment office who initially refused to facilitate the Café Talk. Still, he did attend the talks and changed his opinion, now stating that girls also have the ability and should get the chance to be a leader. But also the ambassadors change, as a result of the training; they become motivated defenders of women's rights.

Crossing party lines in Malawi

Ruth Asha Banda of Governance, Gender, Justice and Development Centre (GGJDC) shared the three main strategies her organization uses in Malawi to create space for innovation: knowledge sharing, establishment of women solidarity groups, and mentorship and role modelling programs. Regarding the first one: taken as an important lesson learned from last year's linking & learning event, the three partners in Malawi decided to also conduct linking and learning in their country – both between partners and within the impact area of the partners (that all work in different regions). In their effort to significantly increase the number of women representatives in local councils, they **organized exchange visits**; a recent example are the twenty aspiring female candidates visiting a sitting councilor in another region. The women returned very inspired and "ready to face their male counterparts in the forthcoming tripartite elections", as a national newspaper reported. They not only felt encouraged by the fact that women obviously can win elections, but also that the female councilor "delivered to the people's expectations" after being elected; so they learned from the local communities they also visited. Answering a question on how GGJDC succeeded in persuading women from the grassroots level to aspire a leadership position, Banda explained that it was exactly this: the opportunity to improve public services for their communities.

The twenty women were from five different political parties – and this is a result from the second innovation of the Malawian partners: **establishing women solidarity groups** who cooperate across party lines. Together they mobilize and inspire women with leadership potential, influence public support for women leaders, and join forces against the intimidation and violence against women aspirants. WE4L succeeded in getting district women leaders from five different parties to cooperate for the first time, and create 'head messages' towards other party women. They are now a strong group which jointly mobilizes other women to support women leaders in their district. An important success factor for having these women join forces without getting expelled from their parties was the dual approach of WE4L: top-down and vice versa. The Malawi partners invited men and women from all parties at the local level to convince women, before the elections; and they ensured support at the national party level before approaching parties at the district level.

Role models and good mentors are crucial in convincing women aspirants that they can run as a candidate, that women can be capable leaders. As a third innovation, GGJDC located, trained and engaged high-level mentors and role models, to engage and inspire the aspiring candidates. Since in Malawi, just like in other countries, women from political parties sometimes were not available to mentor newcomers, GGJDC developed an identifying tool to search for role models at the local level. As a result, they now have **a wide range of role models**, male and female, retired and active, coming from political parties and from the private, public, religious and even traditional sectors. In the coming years, WE4L in Malawi seeks to develop innovative strategies to better include young female leaders, and to start earlier with the capacity building of women as political leaders.

Hub councils in Zimbabwe

Gender Links (GL) is a regional gender equality and justice organization, which operates in the 15 countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In Zimbabwe, GL works with 83 local councils on action plans to engender their services, enabling them to showcase their best practices at national events and awarding them certificates, to encourage peer learning and competition. An innovation in this field is the 'hub model': identifying the **best performing councils** in all ten provinces as 'hub councils' that others can learn from. At the lowest local level GL encourages women's participation in e.g. water or climate committees - issues of concern to them on a daily basis.

GL's work on governance, media and gender-based violence is grounded on research and publications. Consequently, as Zimbabwe country manager Priscilla Maposa explained, one of the main strategies to create space for innovation among GL's partners, was to make all this information easily accessible for the end users. Starting with its most important publication – the annual [Gender Barometer](#) covering all SADC countries – GL began to **package its huge data collection in visually attractive infographics** and share these on social media platforms, thereby reaching a wide audience – including the hard to reach youth. To ensure the sustainability and scaling up of this innovation, GL invested in capacity building of its staff (infographics development, social media use) and trained the IT skills of local partners and authorities, so they could access GL's data. In addition, as a lesson learned, GL is now producing a printed newsletter containing all barometer visuals, to also reach marginalized areas with poor internet connections.

Another innovation is the **Community of Practice,** an online platform where media, authorities, partners and individuals can share experiences and strategies, to learn from each other and collaborate for improved results. The platform helps disseminating the Gender Barometer information by housing its data portal. The last innovation Maposa shared has made the work of GL and its partners a lot easier: the switch to **online monitoring and evaluation**. On platforms like survey gizmo all M&E tools are made available for both GL staff and the partners, allowing for real time M&E.

9. Moving forward: Twelve takeaways

Having had two days of very intensive linking and learning, where do we go from here, how do we move forward? Reflecting on the two days of linking and learning, Hivos' Women's Empowerment program development manager Lucy Mung'ala followed the thread in the program. Together we captured twelve takeaways (*1-12*).

Following the thread

We started by going through the **1. Theory of Change**, to see where we are, what our experiences were and how we sometimes adapted the ToC to our country circumstances. Yet, even though we have localized the ToC, it is still huge. So we can ask ourselves: what should we do with our ToCs, how can we put things forward? What in the ToC would we really want to push forward – since we do have to prioritize? Also, the midterm review advises us to formulate country-specific strategies more explicitly, based on the localized ToCs.

Then moving on to discuss **2. Transformative leadership**, we realized all our work is grounded on transformative change; we just have to create the narrative that we want to follow (what is the challenge, what is the solution and what are the actions you want to take?). After this initial working session, we should discuss the issue of transformative leadership more in depth. And maybe include the question of how we can make the transformational changes that we already achieve more visible, e.g. how WE4L strengthens women in civil society and public administration to become leaders.

We all know what the challenges are, but we sometimes have difficulties to come up with concrete solutions to handle these challenges. Maybe we should narrow these down to three or four that we can actually address, common **3. Key challenge**s that hinder us from taking action in our program.

4. Measuring agency, voice and leadership is difficult. We are comfortable about talking about numbers and events such as elections, but we don't talk much about the process of mobilizing people for political action. What do we, in this respect, consider a success; can we reframe this? Is targeting women to participate in political activities a program success? And can we consider working with women to engage male champions as 'working on women's rights'? Regarding the outcome and output indicators that we should report on in IATI, these are part of the agreements with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and therefore not easy to change. Yet they are being discussed with the Ministry, since we doubt if this set of indicators represent what we do in the WE4L program. But for now we will have to work with these.

Talking about our successes to others: how do we package these successes? How can we position ourselves using **5. Storytelling** skills? But also: how can we do more with storytelling, for example produce stories of change (including the results of Outcome Harvesting) for reporting, to mobilize political support and resources? Or use it for capacity building at the request of our partners?

Where do we want to go, what do we keep, adapt or reinvent? We shared inspiring **6. Innovative ideas** and practical tools that we can borrow from each other – this will most certainly be followed up. Also, we talked about how to back our work with solid **7. Evidence** – including the wealth of data we already have: how can we (better) use this for information and advocacy?

Other issues that we might take forward after this linking and learning event are:

8. Competition/duplication/coordination with other organizations in the same field. How do we relate to them? Should we claim our space towards dominant (UN) organizations or think more strategically about how we can build and use these relations?

9. Challenges versus solutions: we tend to focus on challenges and not so much on solutions, both in our strategies and in our communication (as if people will change simply because we tell them what the challenge is). Maybe we should spend 20 percent of our time and energy to the challenges, and 80 percent to the solutions?

10. Action research inserted in all programs, to support impact assessments for all partners in all countries, to allow for complete learning and comparison between partners.

11. Share (short) learning documents to enhance learning between WE4L partners outside the annual linking & learning event; and compose a document which comprises all lessons learned in the past two days. In addition, we might improve our knowledge and skills by organizing a workshop on storytelling or follow the online course 'Leadership, organizing and action' (Harvard University, Marshal Ganz).

12. Strengthening the gender policies of political parties, and also look at the legal framework that is necessary for sustainable change.

Linking and learning in WE4L will not stop after this event: we agreed to continue discussing the above issues and share our knowledge and experiences, at least on the WE4L website and social media.

PHOTOS FROM THE EVENT ARE AVAILABLE *HERE*