



Promoting Inclusive Political Participation Seculars and Islamists on the Status of Women in Morocco

Who are we?

The project was carried out jointly between the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva (CFG) and the Swiss Federal Department for Foreign Affairs (FDFA)

The CFG works in the arena of conflict transformation, peace promotion and violence prevention. From 2011, following the wave of popular uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East, the CFG concentrated on accompanying those countries facing profound political and social changes.

The engagement of the Swiss FDFA in the field of peace and security promotion is among the four strategic priorities of the Swiss Foreign Policy Strategy 2016-2019. One of its specific areas of engagement is the transformation of violent conflicts with a religious dimension.



Context

In North Africa, one of the consequences of the wave of popular uprisings in 2011 was the opening of the political space to the general population, including actors with religious references. In Egypt, in Tunisia and in Morocco, parties identified as Islamist rapidly gained in popularity. Aside from Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated parties, which were already known, Salafis appeared as new political actors who began to claim their right to political engagement.

The new state of affairs soon created a polarisation within society between political actors with secular references and those of Islamist inspiration.

Morocco has experienced many tensions between secularists and Islamists around this issue in recent years. This polarization is particularly evident on the issue of the status of women. This question is at the intersection between religion and politics because of the central role played by women in families, by the different religious interpretations attached to them and by the definition of their role in the public space. The actors working on women's issues in Morocco are deeply divided, although they all support the need to improve the status of women. This polarization therefore hinders constructive and effective work in this area.

These tensions are very well illustrated by debates on equal inheritance, claimed by mainly secular associations and personalities and rejected by mainly Islamic personalities and associations.

Approach and objectives

The project brought together secular and Islamist actors committed to improving the status of women with the aim of overcoming obstacles to collaboration due to their opposing principles. These actors, academics, religious leaders, women's rights activists and civil society actors sought to establish a common discourse, based on practical action, in which everyone could engage while respecting their different references and inspirations. Within the space constructed by this project, actors discussed topics such as women and religion, violence against women, women's rights in Moroccan legislation vs empirical social realities, equality vs man-woman complementarity. These general discussions allowed the actors to come to terms with one another, to discover the subtleties in the different positions, to identify interests that bring them closer together, and points on which they agree, beyond their differences. They also exchanged views on their respective projects on the status of women, identifying shared priority areas such as the status of women in rural areas, the issue of illiteracy and, more generally, the need to develop an ethics of the public space.

Complementary information

For more information on the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva and its activities:

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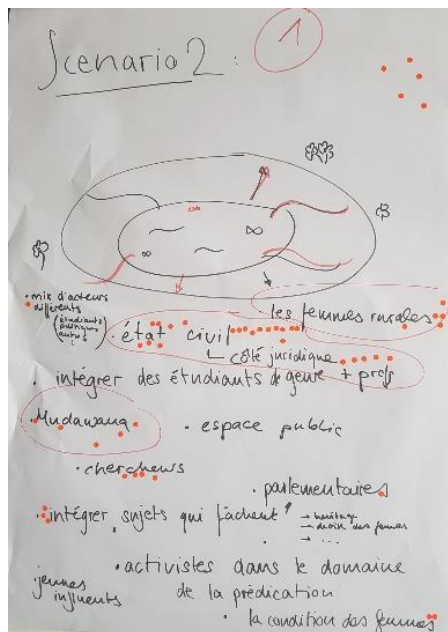
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Results

Throughout the meetings, the atmosphere of mistrust has given way to a spirit of a united group, a collaborative and inclusive spirit demonstrating solidarity above and beyond the participants' different affiliations. The participants were very positively surprised by the changes in their own behaviour. To be able to approach "the other", to speak to them, to recognize "the other" as an interlocutor, fellow citizen and collaborator in the construction of their society, beyond the fundamental differences that separated them, was a very strong and meaningful experience.

In terms of conflict transformation, participants were able to experience an alternative way of dealing with conflict, that neither escalates tensions to the use of violence nor requires a solution imposed by a third party.



Motivated by this positive personal experience, the participants decided to continue their collaboration in order to bring the benefits of these changes to a wider audience. Having already jointly organized a public roundtable on ethics in the public space, they would like to continue this collaboration in activities that seek to promote democratic values.

By virtue of its novel approach, this project, run in 2016/2017, was a success of great significance in that it brought together actors who were characterized by deep oppositions in their worldviews. The fundamentals of this peace-building project are therefore very relevant and can be adapted to other contexts in order to bring together deeply divided people in the same living space.



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