

# SESSION 7:

## Networking and Coalition-Building

(Approx. 4 hours in total)

### Session Objectives

- To explore the strategic advantages of joining or creating a coalition to press for political change
- To weigh the costs and the benefits of collaborating with other groups on initiatives.
- To consider what policies and practices among its members would maximize the success of a coalition

## 7.1

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### Exercise: Making Friends in New Places

(Approx. 30 min.)

Choose a volunteer to read the article below about Rabéa Naciri's efforts to pass a reformed Family Law, Moudawana, and the steps she and other pro-reform campaigners took to reach out to different constituencies.



For Rabéa Naciri<sup>16</sup>, Change Is Possible and Necessary

*In October 2003, Rabéa Naciri was spending an evening with friends in Beirut when she received an urgent phone call from Rabat. "Where are you? Did you not listen to the news? That's it! It's done! The King has announced the reform of the Moudawana! We won! We won!" said her friend Mina who was calling from Rabat.*

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<sup>16</sup> Refer to Rabéa's Naciri's bio on page 56.

Rabéa was flabbergasted. She had been campaigning for the reform of the Moudawana (Family Law) in Morocco since she co-founded the Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM) in 1985. A graduate of history and geography, Rabéa had served as a university professor, but her passion had always been in her struggle for women's rights in Morocco.

In the early 1990s, there had been minor reforms to the Family Law, which brought some hope that rights for women could improve, some day. "We all knew that despite all its flaws, this first reform was important," says Naciri. "It meant that things were changing and changeable. The Moudawana was no longer sacrosanct. We had succeeded in planting a wedge, but the hardest was yet to come."

Rabéa and her colleagues worked tirelessly—lobbying, campaigning, and mobilizing women for action. Sit-ins, picketing, and rallying marked the years to come. "We had to show how the current Moudawana was undermining and hurting women. We highlighted taboo issues such as violence against women, rape, child abuse, sexual harassment in the workplace. Women started giving testimonials and the media became more and more interested in supporting our struggle." The reform of the Moudawana became a common topic of discussion in the streets, in the newspapers, and in people's homes.

Towards the end of 1998, Rabéa Naciri hosted a meeting of activists from women's organizations. At this meeting, activists launched the creation of the National Network to Support the Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development in Morocco. "We learned to work together and put our differences aside. We had the responsibility to unite the movement if we wanted change to happen," she says.

The drafting of the Plan was requested by the Moroccan government. Coordinated by Rabéa, it involved contributions from various ministerial departments, universities, and women's organizations throughout Morocco.

According to Rabéa, "1998-99 was a crucial period. We worked together and organized a women's march in Rabat on March 12, 2000. Women took to the streets claiming equality. We called for change and for respecting and upholding women's rights. But our movement was so strong that the conservative religious forces became worried. They organized a large, parallel march in Casablanca with women calling for sustaining the present situation of inequality."

The setback provided even more impetus for collective action. Rabéa describes their response, "We realized the importance of working together and of involving all social strata. We called on theologians, academics, lawmakers, jurists, human rights organizations, and women's organizations in the region and internationally. We researched religious texts, cultural practices, other experiences in reforms, etc. We developed our own well-thought arguments for the reform of the Moudawana. We never missed an opportunity to speak out, but we were armed with facts, figures, and irrefutable arguments. But most of all, we sent a clear message that

*our struggle would not be deterred and would not end before the Moudawana was reformed.”*

*When the Moudawana was reformed in October 2003, “It was an amazing moment,” recalls Naciri. “I had been waiting for this moment for more than 20 years... We won. We did it. But the fight was not over. We have to be there to help women understand and use this new law. Now we must be the watchdogs for its interpretation and implementation.”*



### Questions for Group Discussion

- How did coalition-building help secure the passage of the new Moudawana?
- What are some other examples of coalitions?
- What has been your experience participating in a coalition, both good and bad?
- What are some advantages of coalitions? What are some drawbacks?

## 7.2

### Exercise: Working within coalitions

(Approx. 30 min.)

Ask a volunteer to read the following description of the International Women’s Democracy Network, launched by Women’s Learning Partnership in 2005.



*Women’s Learning Partnership took a leading role in developing the International Women’s Democracy Network (IWDN) at the recommendation of participants attending the World Movement for Democracy’s Third Assembly in 2004. During the Assembly, participants explored the viability of creating a network to support women’s participation in democracy work. The discussion focused on identifying existing international or regional networks that could be brought together to support each other’s work, and to exchange ideas about shared objectives and resources. Participants shared their concern that there are a comparatively small number of women who are actively taking part in democracy movements.*

*In September 2005, WLP established the IWDN Secretariat<sup>17</sup> to provide a coordination mechanism through which women could engage in dialogue and pursue the goals of the Network. Grassroots women’s organizations and activists*

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<sup>17</sup> Please visit <http://www.learningpartnership.org/iwdn> for more information about IWDN.

*could coordinate networking activities at the national and regional levels. Today, the International Women's Democracy Network provides a means for building solidarity among women and women's organizations engaged in democracy activism. By providing a virtual resource center and a forum for exchanging information and knowledge, the Network supports women's full engagement in the development of democratic practices and institutions at the community, national, and international levels.*

The IWDN's goals are to:

- Exchange experiences, share best practices, and train others in democracy work;
- Develop and support advocacy campaigns initiated by members at the local, national, and international levels;
- Build solidarity among and support individuals and organizations engaged in democracy activism;
- Increase interaction and communication among and between various transnational networks, including those working on women's rights, human rights, peace, and environmental issues.
- Create an Online Resource Center that presents information and knowledge on the priority areas of the network.



### Questions for Group Discussion

- What do you think about the International Women's Democracy Network?
- What are the advantages organizationally and strategically in creating such a network? What could be the disadvantages or "non-advantages" of this Network?
- What questions would you ask the Network coordinators before committing your own or your organization's time and resources to the Network?
- What would you say to your group or your organization to convince them to engage in such a network?

## 7.3

### Exercise: Youth Movement

(Approx. 20 min.)

Choose one or two volunteers to read the following story.



*Lena Rivas and her colleagues at the Women's Union had been in the meeting for over two hours discussing strategies for attracting more young women to join their efforts to promote women's rights. Looking around the room, the women had laughed grimly when they realized that the youngest among them was 41 years old. Most were in their 50s. Where had they gone wrong in passing on to the next generation the importance of continuing the struggle for women's rights, at home and abroad?*

*Young women seemed to think that their freedoms would simply increase automatically. They did not understand how hard women like the members of the Women's Union had worked in previous decades to secure basic liberties for women. But it was a waste of everyone's time to sit around complaining that young people did not appreciate all the sacrifices they had made. The Women's Union needed to focus on the future.*

*Lena argued that they had to work harder to make the work they were doing relevant to young women. "What are most young women concerned about today?" she asked. "Music? Clothes? Text messaging?" several of the women suggested ruefully.*

*"But what about going to college and finding decent men to marry?" asked one. "And what about whether they should have careers or be stay-at-home mothers?" suggested another. "Perhaps we should invite young women to a workshop to talk about their issues so that we can better understand them," said a third, "and use the meeting as an opportunity to talk about the Women's Union and our history."*

*"But we shouldn't call it a 'workshop.' I can promise you that my daughter would not come within a mile of a workshop led by old ladies."*

*"What if the Women's Union could get a celebrity to endorse our work, or even join our organization, someone who is popular with young women? Someone who is involved in charity or other causes and who cares about young women today?"*

*"That's fine, if we could find someone. But let's focus on the young women and what the Union might be able to do for women today."*

*"I don't think that what my nieces might want from a women's organization has much to do with what we've been fighting for over so many years."*

*“That’s not necessarily true. Sexual harassment, the glass ceiling in the workplace, property laws to better protect women’s equity... all these issues are as relevant today as they were 20 years ago, or more so.”*

*Lena raised her hand. “Ladies, we’ve been at this for hours. Can we agree that we need to attract more young women, and that to do this we need to understand what issues are most important to young women today? And that we need to figure out ways to make the Union more youthful and relevant—through involving celebrities, hosting music events, or other activities?”*



### Questions for Group Discussion

- Do you think that the members of the Women’s Union are being realistic about what they will need to do to attract more young women? Why or why not?
- If you were at the Women’s Union meeting, what suggestions would you have made?
- Assuming that the Women’s Union can attract a number of young women to their next endeavor, what measures could the Union implement to take greatest advantage of the young women’s presence?
- How might the Women’s Union use the media to draw attention to their work?
- How important is it to consult with young women about programs that would interest them?

## 7.4

### Exercise: Our Own Coalition

(Approx. 45 min.)

Ask a volunteer to read the following description of working collaboratively<sup>18</sup> with other organizations:

#### **Partnerships, Collaborations, Networks, Alliances, and Coalitions**

Partnerships, collaborations, networks, alliances, and coalitions are all relationships in which organizations or individuals share information and resources to reach their goals. You can increase your effectiveness when you capitalize on the resources and services of other organizations, and they in turn benefit from your organization’s contributions and expertise.

There are, however, some disadvantages to working collaboratively. The most common is slowness of group decision-making or even, in some cases, an inability to act. Every organization has its own decision-making process. Thus, the greater the number of organizations that are involved in a decision, the more steps will be needed to reach a course of action that all can agree upon, and the greater the likelihood that there will be conflicts. The second big drawback is the amount of time, energy, and resources that must be dedicated to communication between and among the coalition partners to keep each abreast of the coalition’s needs, as well as its next steps.

Next, write on the board the group’s **Session 4 Goal**. Make three columns and ask the group to brainstorm the following regarding their Session 4 Goal:

| Organizations, agencies, political parties, media, and other groups that are already working on this goal: | Organizations, agencies, political parties, media, and other groups that are not working on this goal, but might be sympathetic: | Organizations, agencies, political parties, media, and other groups that would be opposed to supporting our work: |
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<sup>18</sup> For additional information on building coalitions, please see Appendix E: Networking and Coalition-Building Tip Sheet.

Ask the group which of the organizations listed are their top five (or more, if appropriate) that they would want to work with. Circle the ones they list.

Break the group into pairs. Ask each pair to consider one or two of the organizations circled, so that every circled organization is discussed.

Ask each pair to take notes on paper about:

- What would they gain from working with this organization?
- What might be potential conflicts, difficulties, complications?

Reconvene the group and ask each pair to report back their findings.



### Questions for Group Discussion

- How diverse is the list of organizations, agencies, political parties, media, and other groups that are already working on the Session 4 Goal? Are they all women's groups?
- Will a coalition be more effective in reaching the Session 4 Goal than if organizations pursue it independently?
- What are the likely obstacles that the organizations will face in working together? Can these obstacles be overcome?
- Is each partner organization interested in contributing to the coalition's work, not just garnering publicity or other individual rewards from the coalition's efforts?
- Is each partner organization accepted within the coalition by the other partners?
- How important will it be to form alliances with media representatives—newspapers, radio, television, and others? Why?
- How important will it be to include other social justice organizations?

Together reexamine the lists on the board. Ask the group whether there are any groups they now want to add or remove as potential collaborators. Why or why not?