MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN LEBANESE MEDIA BY TRAINING MEDIA PROFESSIONALS ON CREATING MEDIA FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Alarming rates of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) have been recorded in Lebanon in the past few years due to the deteriorating economical, political and health situations. Despite the essential impact that the media can have in enabling an environment where social norms around SGBV can be shifted, the Lebanese media still plays a role of spoilers of peaceful coexistence between different genders, fails to present realistic and nuanced situations of VAWG, and peddle gender-based stereotyped versions. A baseline study conducted by Search for Common Ground (Search) with 21 media professionals and film students shows that despite the high levels of higher education of the media professionals, %52 of them were not aware of most of the gender-related terms, and %76 were not familiar with the guidelines and principles of creating gender-sensitive media products.

In December 2021, through its “Toward a Gender-Equitable Society” project that is being implemented in partnership with ABAAD-Resource Center for Gender Equality (ABAAD), Search has successfully engaged 21 media professionals and film students in a 10-day media for social change workshop under the projects’ second objective: enhancing the capacity of Lebanese TV/film industry to produce gender-sensitive media products.

This activity aimed to encourage the use of media in breaking gender stereotypes by strengthening the media professionals and film students’ knowledge and capacities on topics related to gender and SGBV and on the ethical representation of situations and storylines that include scenes of SGBV. This was done by offering the participants the space to implement ethical guidelines and principles related to portraying gender and SGBV in their media products, mainly ads, series, and films. An evaluation survey shows that %87 of the participants believed in the importance of the workshop's topics and its relevance and effectiveness to their work.
The workshop was a safe place for participants to identify and express their gender identities regardless of the constructed social norms. At the beginning of the workshop, two of the participants were brave to classify themselves as non-binary and gender fluid. At the end, four more participants became more aware about their gender identities and felt encouraged to share them with others. They learned new gender-related terms and became able to correct existing misconceptions they have around gender and SGBV.

The workshop was an opportunity for the media professionals and film students to increase their ability to write gender-sensitive scripts. At the end of the workshop a total of 15 scripts were produced by the participants, all of which incorporated gender mainstreaming and sensitivity.

"I've gained useful information on a personal and professional level that helped me correct misconceptions I learned before. - A film student during their participation in the media for social change workshop." 

Another remarkable success that these activities achieved is the creation of a harmonic and creative group of media professionals and film students who have synergies of ideas among each other regardless of their different educational and cultural backgrounds. The participants preferred to exchange their knowledge and expertise by working in groups. For example, one of the film students who was producing her personal media product outside the project nominated three of her colleagues from the workshop to help her and they agreed to work together in the future.

This workshop is a turning point for the media professionals and film students to be the pilots of social transformation through promoting gender-sensitive media approaches.