Webinar

Gender equality and extremist religious fundamentalisms:

Which challenges? Which entry points?

February 2019

<u>Handouts for the participants</u>

Understanding extremist religious fundamentalisms and their impact on gender equality

*Excursus on the most common **terminology** to define the phenomenon; the nexus between **intersectionality, culture, tradition, and religions**. Some examples of **causes and effects** of extremist religious fundamentalisms as outcomes of the global interrelated crisis, such as growing poverty, insecurity, and lack of safety, crisis of democracy and civil liberties, conflicts and displacements, harm to human rights and environmental resources with a specific focus on gender-related issues. **How to analyse the context and identify entry points**.*

The use of religion as a justification for the imposition of a set of values and norms is a sociological phenomenon present throughout different historical phases and encompassing different cultures.

Contemporary highly politicised religious movements have staged a dramatic resurgence in the last three decades. In different continents, several fundamentalist religious movements have become extreme and are attempting to gain political power or overthrow the State in order to implement a social order based on their religions' prescriptions. They are doing so using violence, terror, persecution, abuse and discrimination. This is for example the case of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, al-Shabab in Somalia, Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Sikh militants in Punjab, Hindu nationalists at Ayodhya, Jewish Zionists in the West Bank, Buddhist "warriors" in Sri Lanka, and the Christian Lord Resistance Army in Uganda or the "cultural warriors" and anti-choice movements in the United States.

The phenomenon has been widely read as a rejection of modernisation, progress, secularisation, and 'westernised' values by traditional societies or political groups of interest in determined socio-political circumstances[1]. Among these values are personal status, gender equality and human rights.

As gender roles are primarily constructed through religion, culture, tradition and education, the influence of religious fundamentalisms on gender inequality and the social status of women can be substantial. In addition, religious fundamentalisms both reinforce and are sustained by patriarchal structures.

Development practitioners, human rights activists and humanitarian workers are often confronted with the risk that individuals within the communities with whom they work, or the entire communities are at risk of either being targeted by radicalised groups, or joining these groups themselves.

Extremist religious fundamentalists predominantly exert their power over groups whose characteristics or behaviours are perceived as a risk or challenge to the fundamental precepts of religion, such as women, people expressing non-normative gender identities and sexualities, human rights defenders, and ethnic and religious minorities.

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[1] Almond, G., Appleby, R. Scott, Sivan, E. (2003), p.13, 20 and Appleby, R. Scott, and Martin E. Marty (2002), p. 43.

The phenomenon of religious fundamentalisms and the causes and effects of their turn towards extremism has to be understood in order to permit the achievement of outcomes from development and humanitarian work for gender equality and human rights in affected areas.

Development and humanitarian workers might need to answer several questions to analyse this phenomenon and to identify the causes and impacts on the communities they are supporting, e.g.:

1. How to understand when extremist religious fundamentalisms constitute a threat for gender equality and human rights?
2. Who are the actors to counter violent and extremist religious fundamentalism? Who has a stake?
3. How to address the underlying factors of extremist religious fundamentalisms that constitute a challenge to the implementation of gender equality and human rights?
4. How to detect radicalisation and the gendered attraction to religious fundamentalisms and put in place preventative and responsive policies and interventions?
5. How to protect communities, groups and individuals at risk?

This webinar intends to help participants to answer these questions as well as to share experiences and practices to address challenges and identify how communities and individuals at risk can be supported. At this aim, this webinar will provide some proposals and suggestions to analyse the contexts and identify entry points.

1. Some key definitions

There is not a universally shared definition of fundamentalism, just as there is not one type of religious fundamentalism. The phenomenon of the violent politicisation of religious groups has been framed in different conceptual categories which, sometimes too narrow or originated in diverse socio-cultural and political experiences, can create confusion or generalisation.

Terms as fundamentalism, extremism, terrorism, radicalisation, and fanaticism may denote, entirely or partially, characteristics associated with politicised religious movements, but they should not be used as synonyms.

In order to contribute to the understanding of such a vast and complex phenomenon yet avoid inappropriate classifications, this webinar proposes a brief description of the terms most commonly used to refer to highly politicised contemporary religious movements.

While it is important to use correct terminology, the choice of definitions should not become an end in itself. Rather, the need is to focus on finding out about contexts, causes, impact, and responsive actions which contribute to combating violent religious fundamentalisms.

Fundamentalism

According to some of the most recognised sociological and religious sociological scholars, "fundamentalism is not just an issue of religion and faith, but a more complex and multi-level field, which includes social, political, financial and national/international factors"[2].

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[2] Almond, G., Appleby, R., Scott, Sivan, E. (2003).

The term generically refers to the belief that there is one set of religious teachings that contains the fundamental, basic, intrinsically essential, inerrant truth about humanity and deity[3]. This belief rejects any contrasting ideology or interpretation.

According to some studies "fundamentalism is best understood as a particular configuration of ideology and organisational resources – not as an 'essence' or constructive trait of any one or all of the host religious traditions". In other words, fundamentalism can be defined "as 'a pattern of religious militancy' led by 'self-styled true believers' who identified their cause as being directly opposed to secularisation". Religious fundamentalists are not confined to any particular faith or country, nor to the poor and uneducated. Instead, "they are likely to spring up anywhere people perceive the need to fight a godless, secular culture – even if they have to depart from the orthodoxy of their traditions to do it"[4].

Other studies view fundamentalism as "a response to globalisation", and a "beleaguered tradition defended in the traditional way - by reference to ritual truth - in a globalising world that asks for reasons"[5].

As a global phenomenon, religious fundamentalism relates to every religion, being Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, including those that western tradition does not consider religions, such as Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism.

Extremism and violent extremism

The term extremism refers to a radical and intransigent attitude in the field of doctrine, ideology or political action. It denotes a vocal or active opposition to values that are perceived as not in line with a specific doctrine or ideology (these values can include democracy, the rule of law, individual liberties, and political pluralism)[6]. The term is questioned according to established benchmarks. Extremist views are in fact not necessarily illegal, or leading automatically to violence and harm.

Violent extremism is a contested concept and there is not an agreed definition. A working definition is "the use of and support for violence in pursuit of ideological, religious or political goals"[7].

Terrorism

The term indicates the use of illegitimate violence, aimed at inciting terror in the members of an organised community and at destabilizing or restoring a determined order. It implies the unofficial or unauthorised use of violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims[8]. The most recent Directive of the European Parliament[9] defines what constitutes a terrorist act as "attacks against a person's life, as intentional acts that can qualify as terrorist offences when and insofar as committed with a specific terrorist aim, namely to seriously intimidate a population, to unduly compel a government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act, or to seriously destabilise or destroy the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation".

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[3] Altemeyer B., Hunsberger B., (1992); 2(2):113-33.

[4] Almond, G., Appleby, R., Scott, Sivan, E. 2003, 1:17.

[5] Giddens, A., (2000), 5:85.

[6] HM Government, *PREVENT Strategy, PREVENT Programme*, 2011.

[7] Minerva Nasser-Eddine et al., *Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Literature* Review, Counter Terrorism and Security Technology Centre, Defence Science and Technology Organisation. Australian Department of Defence, March 2011, p. 9; James Khalil, *Know Your Enemy. On the Futility of Distinguishing Between Terrorists and* Insurgents, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism (Vol. 36, No. 5, May 2013), pp. 419-30. Quoted in: European Commission, *Strive for Development. Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism*, 2019

[8] Hoffman B., *Inside Terrorism*, 2006, 1:3.

[9] European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, *Directive (EU) 2017/541 of the European Parliament and of the Council on Combating Terrorism and Replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and Amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA*, 2017.

Radicalisation

This term suggests the process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations that either reject or undermine the status quo or reject and/or undermine contemporary ideas and expressions of freedom of choice[10].

Like terrorism and violent extremism, radicalisation is a contested term and there is not a broadly adopted definition. However, it is commonly understood as "the social and psychological process of incremental commitment to violent extremist ideologies"[11]. Radicalisation manifests in different ways across various beliefs, and across different communities and countries of the world. "Often 'radicalisation' merely describes a process where an individual's beliefs move from being relatively mainstream to seeking a drastic change in society: this is not synonymous with terrorism"[12]. Those affected will not necessarily become violent.

Fanaticism

This term indicates the intolerant, exclusive and uncritical submission to a religious or political faith. Fanaticism is often a cause of intolerance, and sometimes violence, towards those who profess a different religion or political faith. Even if fanaticism has been most commonly associated with religion and politics it can be found in almost every sphere of human activity including the military, entertainment (for instance, among some football fans), and social activism[13]. "Fanaticism is necessarily, like racism, of which it is never far removed, a disease of group. An isolated fanatic, like an isolated racist, reports to psychiatry, but belonging to a group allows him/her to access a superior dignity by having a political role, that of influencing history"[14].

These terms and concepts are still a matter of discussion in the academic community, international organisations and governments, and should not be used casually or as synonyms. In addition, clustering religious politicised movements according to their resemblances may lead to the wrong conclusion that all fundamentalists are extremists or terrorists.

2. The nexus between intersectionality, culture, tradition, and religions

Some religious traditions are characterised by a **dualistic vision of the world**. For example, in some Christian communities "the world" external to the faith community is seen as being under Satan's rules. The most traditional Islam distinguishes between the Islamic community and the non-Islamic community. In Judaism, the orthodox and ultra-orthodox streams strictly observe tradition, differently from the conservative and progressive streams that fosters the practice of traditional Judaism while embracing modernity. In recent times, extreme fundamentalist Hinduism has associated nationalism with religion by questioning the national allegiance of other faith communities.

Generally, **extreme religious fundamentalisms combine an entitlement to exist with affiliation to the particular faith** and see communities or individuals with other identities as adversaries.

These movements can perceive social change as a threat because it instils doubts about the existence of one truth to be slavishly observed. In this sense, extreme religious fundamentalists can

[10] Wilner A., Dubouloz C., *Homegrown Terrorism and Transformative Learning: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding Radicalization,* 2010; 22(1): 33-51.

[11] Horgan, J., *Walking Away from Terrorism Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements*, London, 2009.

[12] European Commission, *Strive for Development. Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism*, 2019, p. 6.

[13] Marimaa K., The Many Faces of Fanaticism, 2011; 14: 29–55.

[14] Haddad, G., *Dans la main droite de Dieu. Psychanalyse du fanatisme*, Premier Parallèle, 2015, p. 23.

perceive change as a disturbing factor that proposes new values belonging to secularism. In this restricted view, secularism is seen as part of a narrative about democracy, human rights, and modernity that implies contamination by western values such as pluralism, and social and political differentiation which alienate followers from religious tradition.

Religious tradition is also a major component of what constitutes a determined culture. Culture and religious tradition are certainly interconnected, but they should not overlap. Yet, this happens in some contexts so that the "cultural" character of a community or society is seen as corresponding to its religious traditional rituals, practices and comportments. However, culture is not a fixed phenomenon, rather it is dynamic, it changes over time due to exogenous or endogenous factors, the influence of media, political changes, and international trends. Like secularism, **culture may be perceived uncritically by the promoters of extreme religious fundamentalisms** that view it as a fixed and unchangeable matrix that shields their entitlement for existence. Extremist religious fundamentalisms perceive gender equality as an element of cultural change, rather than as a basic right. As such, gender equality can be intended as a threat to the maintenance of culture, hence as a threat to the same religion.

Extremist religious fundamentalisms can **intersect with other structural factors** that hinder development and fulfilment of human rights standards, **such as poverty, age, ethnicity, gender, political affiliation, geopolitical situation, socio-economic status, culture, tradition**, etc.

When religious fundamentalisms become violent they predominantly target women, girls, people expressing non-normative gender identities and sexualities, diverse ethnic, social, and religious identities and human rights defenders. Why? Reasons vary across traditions and cultures, but certainly the **control over individuals' bodily autonomy and decision-making about sexuality** plays a great role.

Bodily autonomy and integrity are at the core of gender equality and justice because it involves respect and fulfilment of one's own aspirations, choices and rights. These span, for example, from sexual and reproductive health and rights, to a life free from all forms of violence, to decision-making in the economic, political, and social spheres.

3. Causes and effects of extremist religious fundamentalisms for gender equality

The rise of religious fundamentalisms that have turned into extremist and violent movements should be seen as part of the interrelated crises the world is facing.

Economic, social and political distress have produced inequalities, discriminations, growing poverty, and failure of states to provide essential services. The crisis of democracy and civil liberties and the depletion of environmental resources have increased unsafety and insecurity of many populations around the globe and produced armed conflicts, militarisation, displacement, migration, and social disruption.

Poverty and injustice are commonly seen as causative factors for the growth of violent religious movements. In addition to this, the destruction of welfare states as a consequence of conflicts has fuelled the growth of religious political actors that replaced the state in the delivery of basic services, gaining for that the loyalty of the populations and the spread of their ideology.

- When extremised, religious fundamentalisms can perceive **progress** towards modern and global education, equal employment opportunities, scientific advancement, and social organisation **as a promotion of secularism** which they reject.

The affirmation of religion in the political and social sphere reflects the uniformity of beliefs and practices of its adepts. Societies build their identity politics on gender equations and relationships which constitute the symbolism of culture and traditions for future reproduction. Religion

significantly regulates women's lives in the social, political and private sphere, and thus it determines the state of gender inequalities.

- The **relation between the presence of religious fundamentalisms and gender inequality** in a given context can be explained by the assertion that societies with high religiosity tend to accept the authority of religious leaders that advocate a patriarchal organisation of society and family[15].

- **The position of women in societies dominated by religious patriarchal rules and settings is double**: on the one hand their autonomy and decision-making at different levels of their public and private life is restricted; on the other hand, they can vehiculate the same patriarchal values, particularly through the education and upbringing of children and as a role model for other women and girls.

Without question, many religious institutions are of great help for women who are economically and socially marginalised. However, it is undeniable that the economic and social distress favour women's adherence to religious fundamentalisms, which may cause:

- limited participation in the society's public life
- limitation in making autonomous choices
- exposure to several forms of discriminations and violence such as domestic and gender-based violence, inequality in inheritance, and forced and early marriage.

While analysing the context it is of utmost importance to be free from cultural prejudices to avoid conflating socio-cultural facts with religious practices, so as not to produce biases and to better identify the responses. For example, the practice of cutting and female genital mutilations has long been considered an Islamic practice, while it is not. The exact origin of this harmful practice is still uncertain. While it is a concrete fact that it is carried out in areas of the world with strong Islamic influence, the practice sometimes originated much earlier than the advent of Islam. In these cases, working with religious leaders for communities to abandon this practice is proving very effective. Similarly, while child marriage is a practice permitted by the Islamic tradition, it is less common in Muslim communities in India than in Hindu communities for completely different cultural and socio-economic reasons. According to contemporary interpretations, child marriage was banned in the age of the Vedas. Recent academic studies have substantiated that it became prevalent due to poverty, especially among rural communities in India. Thanks to the promulgation of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act in 2006 India has witnessed one of the largest declines in child marriage rates, from nearly 50% to 27%[16].

4. Analysing the context and identifying entry points

It is neither feasible nor required that every development and humanitarian worker becomes an expert of extremist religious fundamentalisms. What is necessary is to adopt rigorous analysis of the local contexts using specific expertise, if circumstances so require.

Using **'intersectionality'** as an integrated analysis of oppression, as well as of opportunities, is useful to:

- Understand the causes of violent religious fundamentalisms and assess adequate responses to the violation of human rights, violence, discrimination, and abuse as their outcomes.
- Identify the interactive factors and processes that create different power relations and the mutually reinforcing dimensions of societal inequalities.

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[15] Norris, P., Inglehart, R., 2004.
[16] https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/india/

- Address multiple grounds for bias and discrimination, such as age, sex, gender, social status, economic situation, ethnicity, etc.
- Understand how different sets of identities impact on power relationships, access to resources, and benefits as well as the different types of discrimination and disadvantages according to the combination of identities.
- Unlock the transformative potential of including substantively distinct experiences.
- Apply the principle of "do no harm".

Below, some tips on how to identify the causes and impact of fundamentalist religions and detect entry points:

1. ***How to understand who the actors of extremist religious fundamentalisms are that threaten gender equality and human rights. Who are the actors to counter them? Who has a stake?***

It is important to assume that religious discourses and representations are not static and change over time and contexts. However, religious fundamentalisms always contain a dominant (often conservative) and a subaltern (often more progressive) discourse. What becomes dominant is a matter of power of collective identities over others rather than theological issues. It can be difficult to question community or national leaders when they establish how things are supposed to be done by using the argument of "culture". This argument is very effective, given the colonial histories of much of the world.

- **The supporters of extremist religious fundamentalisms** should be looked for inside groups of power that have interests either in controlling a status quo or promoting a change that is rewarding for them (economically, politically, socially). These groups can be internal or external to the community, or both.

  However, it is important to focus as much as possible on local groups present in the country and at community level.

- **The actors to counter extremist religious fundamentalisms** should be looked for first in the same community, especially the young people and community leaders.
  Finding allies is crucial. Religious leaders who promote tolerance and respect are essential allies. Human rights watchdogs, feminist organisations, and academic actors can back actions and produce positive domino effects. Likeminded donors promoting democracy and civil liberties can boost countering actions.

- **Many have a stake**, not only the most directly involved parties. Often, extreme religious fundamentalisms are fuelled by external groups of power that have interests in the destabilisation of a given context for economic and geopolitical reasons. It is necessary to identify opposers of extremist religious fundamentalisms and strategize with key allies for awareness raising, communication and counteraction.

2. ***How to address the underlying factors of extremist religious fundamentalisms that constitute a challenge for the implementation of gender equality?***

Gender, class, ethnicity, geopolitics, and economic interests are crucial factors for the construction of collective identities and hegemonic powers. The way collective identities are shaped can magnify gender inequality and injustice. Extremist religious fundamentalisms reject the existence of non-

normative gendered identities and have a general tendency to repress women's choices and decision-making power.

- The impact of religions on gender relations should be examined with reference to the **structures of authority in the patriarchal family** that religious fundamentalisms may propose or sustain.

- The elements shaping **oppressive masculinities** should be addressed. These are rooted in family, society and school education. The construction of boys and men's gendered roles, and social and cultural characteristics should be analysed and deconstructed in order to give way to non-authoritarian masculinities that reject the use of force and 'power over' as 'natural facets' of being a male.

- It should be recognised that in some societies religion's predominant position in the private sphere can give it unique significance to women. However, it is also critical to analyse the value of women's roles in the private sphere because often this is not solely determined by their "production" or "reproduction & care" role but rather by their **control over what is produced**. Valorising women's knowledge and capacities and developing new skills can help to minimise the oppressive structure of authority and liberate women's decision-making power towards external aspects of the production chain.

- **Religion's promise of security and safety for women will remain a myth unless it can install governance systems in the spirit of a modern state, and diverse family structures and needs**. Identifying and responding to these needs is crucial to support women's voices and address gender inequality. Policy dialogue with partner governments is key in order to address gender-based discriminations and identify entry points and good practices which support progress towards gender equality that the governments are ready to embrace. Support for the drafting of laws that promote gender equality and the abolition of gender-based discriminations by referring to women's hermeneutics of existing legal and religious legal traditions is a strategic intervention which can produce long-lasting change for gender equality.

3. *How to detect radicalisation and the attraction to religious fundamentalisms and put in place preventive and responsive policies and interventions for gender equality?*

A great concern in development and humanitarian action is how to protect vulnerable people from being drawn into extremist religious fundamentalist movements. Although poverty, unemployment, and lack of political freedoms have been identified as fertile soil for the radicalisation of young people it must be noted that, **more commonly, recruits come from educated unemployed or powerful religious elites**.

Tolerance is a basic aspect of religions and denying its ability to accept diversity and promote coexistence is *per se* a manipulation of religion for other purposes.

- It is important to promote and reinforce **tolerance and respect for diversity**. This should be done not only through empowering and supporting the "categories at risk" (i.e. people expressing non-normative or non-standardised behaviours that are perceived as threats to a certain order, women and girls, human rights defenders, and feminist and women's civil society organisations) but also by involving religious leaders, and people at risk of radicalisation, especially the youth.

Fundamentalists can manipulate ideas of diversity for their own gain, shutting down criticism of them causing women's oppression using the argument of cultural diversity.

- It is necessary to **examine the politicization of identities** and question who benefits from promoting the notion of community homogeneity.

- Fostering the **understanding of privilege and oppression** and **nurturing inclusive identities** is a gendered response to counter extremist religious fundamentalisms. It is important to comprehensively **challenge oppressive and toxic masculinities** that hamper gender equality and compel men and boys into oppressive and stereotyping gender roles.

- **Focussing on empirical information** is also a powerful strategy. The collection and dissemination of concrete data about the effects of extremist religious fundamentalisms on populations can be effective (i.e. the consequences of early marriage on girls' health and on child mortality, the benefits of girls' education for themselves and their communities, the increased wellbeing of families and communities due to women's work).

4. *How to protect groups and individuals at risk?*

Economic policies are not neutral but are the result of power relations in societies. Individuals and groups at risk should be understood not only as potential targets of violence or oppression, but also as those at risk of violent radicalisation.

- Promote strategies to eliminate poverty: **equal and just distribution and redistribution of economic resources** is key to protecting people in vulnerable and marginalised conditions.
- Value **care work.**
- Facilitate access to **economic opportunities and resources for women.**

The values of peace, justice, intercultural dialogue, democracy and human rights are at the basis of development and humanitarian action.

- Support to **women's and feminist groups, organisations, networks, and researchers** is critical to enhance these values and develop sounder arguments in favour of gender equality.
- Ensure programmes that cultivate the **values of and skills for peaceful negotiation and dialogue**. Address these programmes not only to marginalized groups but also to those in power.
- Promote the **politics of inclusion and representative governance**: support women's participation in political debate and decision-making.

Feminist geography of religions and feminist hermeneutics have identified patriarchal authority at the basis of male dominant discourses in societies and religions. Identity politics proposed by these male dominant discourses oppose pluralism and gender equality.

- Identify, strengthen and support **local actors who carry out discourses on gender equality and justice, democracy, and human rights.**
- Strategize to **engage the whole community around common objectives** for peace, dignity and service delivery, such as access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, access to energy and water resources, access to the labour market, etc.

Women's empowerment, citizenship and representation: The case of the ceramists of Sejnane (Tunisia)

Sejnane is a city with less than 5.000 inhabitants in the governorate of Bizerte, North Tunisia. The town is well-known for being the production centre of an ancient tradition of artistic pottery made exclusively by women. Recent research has found that the origin of Sejnane pottery dates back to prehistory and that the pottery making process, the shape of the objects and the decorative patterns have remained almost unmutated.

The pottery skills of the women of Sejnane consist of specific techniques to produce the terracotta artefacts. These go from extracting the clay from the wadi beds to cutting it into blocks, crushing the blocks, purifying the clay in water and, finally, to making gorgeous and elegant objects for domestic use and embellishment. Utensils, human and animal figures are decorated with two-tone geometrical patterns reminiscent of traditional tattoos and Berber weaving. The beauty of the forms and decorations, the importance of this production for the local economy and the prominence of women's social role due to their valuable creations attracted anthropologists and artists who have made the art of women in Sejnane known internationally.

In the aftermath of the revolution of January 14 2011, the Salafist movement – a violent extremist Islamic fundamentalist group – redoubled its dynamism in Tunisia. This phenomenon can be explained, at least in part, by the general amnesty that benefited over a thousand detainees, followers of this movement, as an attempt of Ben Ali's regime to mediate with Salafists in the country.

Salafists were very active in Bizerte governorate. In Sejnane, they created a sort of caliphate, imposed the Sharia law, and suppressed several fundamental freedoms. They were reported to be greatly intolerant and severely punish those who resisted or opposed their dictates. Women in Sejnane were forced to veil and wear the burqa. Television and music were strictly prohibited. Men were obliged to beard and pray in the village mosque. Sellers and consumers of alcohol, tapes and music CDs, and coffee shop owners were imprisoned in Salafists' prisons. Violence, killings, and mutilations have largely occurred in the area. In early 2012, the inhabitants of Sejnane asked the government and the national army to protect them. During years, the governmental forces and extremist Salafists engaged in battles and clashes that claimed dozens of lives.

The Salafists' takeover of Sejnane affected women in every aspect of their life, particularly in their productive activity as recognised ceramists. Their movements outside home to collect and prepare the clay in open space have been limited, as well as selling their products autonomously to shops, individual tourists and in local fairs. In addition, a sharp decrease of tourism in the area for the insecurity conditions, along with a general decrease of men's productive activities for the same reason, obliged women to depreciate their artworks. Men took up the role of pottery sellers and gained control of women's work revenues.

Although women's knowledge and skills relating to the craft of handmade pottery in Sejnane continued to be passed down through traditional and informal education, women stopped to produce some typical figures. Salafists imposed to drop the production of the traditional dolls and animal figurines because every representation of God's living creation is strictly forbidden in extreme fundamentalist Islam.

The warning that Sejnane had definitely become a Salafist caliphate started to circulate among Tunisian civil society. In 2012, the Citizen Association for Participatory Democracy (Association Citoyenne pour la Démocratie Participative - ACDP) included Sejnane in a series of training and awareness raising activities on participatory democracy. Three activists ventured to the town directed to Sejnane Pottery School. During several visits, ACDP's activists were able to establish **trusting relationships** with Sejnane women ceramists by adopting a **cautious and respectful attitude** focusing on the **artistic production as an entry point** for discussing their general living conditions.

ACDP found out that **the work of Sejnane women ceramist was poorly organised and lacking the basic principles of decent work**. The restrictions imposed by Salafists on commercial activities had caused the area to impoverish further. Women's artistic capabilities had been limited to the intensive production of cooking utensils that men of the families were selling on the local market at a meagre price.

ACDP decided not to do any specific project to support women's productive activity but to engage with them in **discussions about decent work, labour organisation, community participation and identity**. Little by little, **relational bonds were created and channelled confidence**. Women started speaking about their private life and the risk of radicalisation of their sons and daughters. The harsh impoverishment had caused many young people to engage as foreign fighters in Syria under ISIS, and in the governance vacuum people were even grateful to the Salafists for ruling and providing services.

ACDP gradually involved children in pottery workshops with their mothers and focused on **young girls' education and prevention of school drop-out**. During the workshops, the organisation cautiously but constantly introduced subjects related to **decision-making and acceptance of diversity in the community**. Progressively, the **discussions involved more and more community members** around the need to organise and dignify women ceramist's work.

At that point, the community was ready to receive material support.

ACDP and other organisations funded specific **training courses on the production chain, administration and trade** and organised Sejnane women ceramists' participation to the **World Social Forums** (held in Tunis on 2013 and 2015) which gave them a very high social visibility at national and international level.

Women ceramists in Sejnane founded professional associations and **restarted the production of their typical doll and animal figurines**.

An integrated action made of financial support, research and advocacy, but above all women and feminists incessant work of building social and cultural bonds, has made this case an experience of success at international level.

During its 13ᵗʰ session (26 November to 1 December 2018), the **UNESCO Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage decided to register the know-how related to the women pottery of Sejnane in Tunisia on the list of intangible cultural heritage of humanity**.

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