



The Impact of CSOs on the Stereotyping of Women's Image

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
CSOs are a means of extending customs and traditions	5
The Number of Women is Larger than Men... Does that Call for Gender Sensitivity?Top of Form	6
The pay Gap between Local and International Organizations Operating in the Region.....	9
Do International Organizations Require Gender Policies for Grants?	10
International Organizations Operating in Northeastern Syria	11
The Self-Administration's Laws... How does it Deal with Gender?	12
Conclusion:.....	13
Illustrative Chart No. (1):.....	14
Illustrative Chart No. (2):.....	15
Illustrative Chart No. (3):.....	15
Illustrative Chart No. (4):.....	16

Introduction

There is a forfeiture under way regarding the issue of gender justice in the modern administrative experience in Northeastern Syria. In particular in the field of civil organizations which suddenly appeared alongside the years of war in Syria. This forfeiture is represented in the demand for gender equality in employment within institutions while neglecting justice in job efficiency and not taking into account the nature of each society's concerns, which leads to different job classification schemes between men and women. Hence, the issue of gender enhancement, or compliance with the requirements of international bodies that fund gender policies, forfeits the development of the skills necessary for new positions, and to compete on an equal footing with men within areas, monopolized by the historical background of the nature of the tribal, economic and Baathist regime, for men but not for women.

Should institutions assign a compulsory "quota" for their vacancies, irrespective of the qualifications required? Or should we work to prevent gender inequalities and create the conditions for developing local staff ready to assume new roles that have become challenges for them, regardless of their gender. There are signs of turning gender into a new ideology, imposed by political forces or international bodies that fund organizations, for reasons which do not necessarily result in the empowerment of women. Therefore, the gender quota is detrimental to job efficiency.

The eruption of popular protests against Syria's regime in March 2011, the fundamental transformation that these protests have brought about in the social structure in Syria and the sudden emergence of the idea of the political field destroyed all the expectations of the civil movement. Not to mention the destructive shift in the course of the Syrian uprising from a peaceful people's movement with clear civilian demands, the militarization of protest, and therefore the replacement of youth coordination and the civil movement with military organizations. Similarly, the foreign factor controlling Syria's internal conflict and changing its nature from a movement of a people that demands a change of tyrannical regime and a dignified life for every individual to a bloody civil conflict that destroyed everything that the civil movement hoped for. Thus, the roles of the founding components of the popular protests changed, and different institutions appeared in line with the radical transformations in Syria.

Since that time, youth coordination groups have begun to reconfigure their entities under the name of "local civic organizations". Most of them focused their work on documenting conflict-related violations, developing the capacities of youth cadres in community work, and organizing dialogue sessions and discussions on issues related to civil peace, coexistence and social cohesion.

Soon dozens of civil organizations were established in the most stable cities and towns in Northeastern Syria, away from the warfare of the time. These organizations

were established by local capabilities and with staff who are not sufficiently experienced in institutional work and who are unfamiliar with civil work.

These organizations were not able to establish a sound institutional work, given the recent experience of civil society, the reduced notion of NGOs to aid organizations and its link with the management of certain local community service problems in Northeastern Syria. Their work remained limited to the implementation of projects, without developing the capabilities of the staff that works for them and without developing their capabilities in terms of human resources, boards of directors, financial management, strategic plans, and other issues that form the structure of any local or international civil organization. These organizations, therefore, weighed on society's civil activity in Northeastern Syria. Not to mention, the current difficult conditions of the region, which means that every aspect of life is devoted to the militarization of society, including the image of women that is merging into military action alone.

CSOs are a means of extending customs and traditions

Taking into account that NGOs are regarded as, theoretically, representatives of the civil society development project, with great confusion between their real roles and not distinguishing between a local organization and a foreign organization except in the context of the wage differential, these organizations were believed to constitute the best model in gender justice, both in the organizations' relationship with their employees, and in their interactions with local communities. While these organizations are presumed to be in fact a model, the reality of the situation does not reflect this assumption.

By consulting the views of a group of women involved in civil work and in the preparation of this report, the participating opinions differed from the expectations of CSOs in their relationship with women. Indeed, we have noted, that they are a means of extending the traditional societal heritage, yet with different labels. Whether by not providing job opportunities for women, or by not relying on women's staff in decision-making or by the absence of their influence in political decisions. In addition to the absence of inter-institutional intercultural discussion related to language abuse in society as a whole and against women in particular.

In this context, the civil activist, Gulbahar Mohammad, said that society has yet to rid itself of the customs and traditions that have been accumulated for decades. Hence, I find it natural that "Some of those customs are brought into the workplace or the civil institution in which the person works. This is evident through the treatment or through job opportunities and project implementation, or even when we find that one of the male employees controls and imposes his guardianship on his female colleague."

Gulbahar added, "We can say that the organization has turned into a home or a mini-society and a model for the larger society that oppresses women." Other female activists do not share Gulbahar's view. Gulbahar believes that "The main reason for the absence of gender in civil institutions or other places is the stereotypical image inherited in society about patriarchy and feminism. Gender is not accepted until this moment in society and organizations are part of and affected by this society. Also, we have not reached an actual civil society and institutional work so far. The work underway, for the most part, is about continuing the work, not developing it."

Whereas the civil activist and journalist, A.W., who chose - for personal reasons - to have her name encoded in letters in this report, considers that the issue can be interpreted from a different perspective, stating that, "Civil organizations in the region, basically do not depict themselves - despite their claim – a representation of a different form of patriarchal concepts and discriminatory policies against women."

The Number of Women is Larger than Men... Does that Call for Gender Sensitivity?

The local community generally holds the view that there are more women than men in local civic organizations in Northeastern Syria. This belief has reinforced the argument of civil society officials using these ratios in response to criticisms about the application of gender policies in the work of organizations, giving women their role in decision-making and setting general and strategic policies for organizations, providing job opportunities that suit their capabilities and expertise and not monopolizing the management of organizations just for executive men and boards.

The writer and researcher, Shiyar Issa, targeted 30 local organizations operating in Al-Hasakah Governorate in 2016 (the period that witnessed a noticeable increase in the number of civil organizations emerging in Northeastern Syria, before witnessing a decline in later stages due to the cessation of funding for a large number of them, and their inability to obtain funding), through research he prepared with a field research team in the regions of Kocherat, Derik/Al-Malikiyah and Amouda, by "I Am Her" Network, entitled, "The Reality of Syrian Women in CSOs in the Governorate of Al-Hasakah". The research concluded a set of results, which clarify the percentage of women in these organizations, their roles, and the nature of their work. In the course of the research, the questionnaire focused on the number of employees in the targeted organizations and the percentage of women showed that the total number of employees in those organizations reached 1184 employees, divided into 621 female employees and male 563 employees.

However, the increase in the percentage of women employed compared to the percentage of men employed does not necessarily reflect the increase in the percentage of women employed, taking into account gender policies. The research

provided three examples about these organizations, which are, "An organization that has 121 employees, of whom 90 are women, another organization has 100 employees, of whom 75 are women, and a third organization that has 300 employees, of whom 215 are women (...) The salary in two of the three organizations mentioned does not exceed \$50, which is a very low salary."

	Total Number of Employees	Number of Men	Number of Women	Number of Men in the Board of Directors	Number of Women in the Board of Directors
١	١٢١ Employees	٣١	٩٠	٩	٢
٢	١٠٠ Employees	٢٥	٧٥	١٤	١
٣	٣٠٠	٨٥	٢١٥	٣٥	١٥

(An illustrative table showing the percentage of women employees in three civil organizations compared to the percentage of men, and the percentage of women and men in the administrative boards of the same organizations. Source: "The Reality of Syrian Women in CSOs in the Governorate of Al-Hasakah".)

This table clarifies that the increase in the percentage of women employed in civil organizations operating in Northeastern Syria is offset by a decrease in their percentage in boards of directors and senior positions, which are characterized by high salaries, influence in decision-making, and multiple guarantees related to the type of contracts, working hours, and social and job status. Also, the research indicates that 12 of the targeted organizations do not offer maternity leave, while only three organizations provide leave without pay and most of them do not take into account the conditions and livelihood of women.

In a related context, it is important to point out that the fact that the percentage of women at work being greater than the percentage of men, regardless of leadership positions does not apply to all geographical areas in which Syrian civil organizations operate. Through field research on the reality of Syrian women in CSOs in the Turkish city of Gaziantep, which is a major former center for the majority of civil organizations working in Syria, and Syrian and foreign international donor organizations, Malak Qassem, the research author, and her field team have reached results that appear to be very low, compared to civil work in the areas under the control of the Self-Administration. As the number of women working in Syrian civil organizations in Gaziantep did not exceed 20% and most of them are not in leadership positions.

Number of targeted organizations	Total number of employees	Number of men	Number of women	Number of women in leadership positions
100 employees	9310 employees	7447	2863	16 employees including a regional director

(An illustrative table comparing the percentage of women employees in 100 Syrian civil organizations based in the Turkish city of Gaziantep with the percentage of men, and showing the number of women in leadership positions. Source: Research on the Reality of Women's Work in CSOs in Gaziantep.)

The above illustrative tables depict that the cultural apparatus of the Northeastern Syria society promotes values related to gender justice, and allows women to participate in various fields of work. Also, that the problem of disparity in the ratio between men and women in decision-making positions or with regard to influencing public policies, is often related to the competencies required by some administrative positions, not to mention the continuation of the patriarchal societal influence on some contexts, such as political work and the establishment of parties.

The societal culture of the Syrian community in Gaziantep city served as an obstacle to women's participation in CSOs, which focus on developing some values related to gender justice and women's empowerment. This is one of the issues rejected by the Syrian political and societal entities, which are imbued with an ideological religious dimension in most of them.

Based on recent statistics obtained by the author of the report from organizations, most of which work in the NES NGO Platform, it is evident that the number of men on the administrative boards of 109 organizations operating in the governorates of Al-Hasakah, Raqqa and Deir Ezzor has reached 451 men. While the number of women reached 340, which is an advanced percentage compared to the rest of the Syrian geographic regions and with Syrian civil organizations outside the country; however, it does not reflect the implementation of gender policies. A number of organizations that were targeted in the report are concerned with women's affairs and are women's organizations, meaning that it is normal for the entire board of directors and all the female workers to be women.

Likewise, the number of women working in senior positions (such as the CEO, the head of the organization or the general coordinator) is 20 women, while men receive senior positions in 98 local organizations, among the organizations that were targeted in this report, which will be clarified in detail in the attached charts at the end of the report.

Among the 116 organizations operating in the cities and towns of Northeastern Syria, the number of organizations that work/or have previously worked on projects related to women and are concerned with women's issues has reached 82, meaning that most of the organizations in which the head of the organization or the executive director is a man have previously worked on a project related to women.

The pay Gap between Local and International Organizations Operating in the Region

According to the Gender Wage Gap Index and based on the 2018 World Economic Forum report, Syria was one of the countries where the gap reached 90%, in terms of the difference in holding managerial positions, along with countries such as Lebanon, Algeria, Egypt and the Kingdom Saudi Arabia and Yemen.¹

Since 1919, the International Labor Organization has recognized the right to equal remuneration for women and men for work of equal value, and enshrined this in the preamble to the organization's constitution, which is recognized as a key element of social justice.²

Gender pay gap in the countries of Asia, the Middle East and North Africa has crossed the 40% limit, according to the ILO's Introductory Guide to Pay Equity issued in 2013. The organization finds that the gender gap is an indicator for measuring pay inequality between men and women, and it is estimated in the world at 22.9%.³

Women's salaries in international organizations are often unequal to those of women in local CSOs. Note that this is not a decisive indicator to demonstrate gender pay disparity, because basically, the salaries of employees are different between local and foreign organizations, regardless of the gender factor. Even if the percentage of women working in the organization is more than the percentage of men. As the salary scale depends, in the first place, on the job position, and the higher positions on their own have high salaries, which are widely allocated to men.

Gulbahar Mohammad points out that pay gaps are related to job positions, meaning that "Since the majority of senior positions in the organization are allocated to men, consequently men's salaries are higher than women's, as the pay scale in local civic organizations in Rojava, where applicable, is by job title".

However, the reality in the international organizations operating in Northeastern Syria is different, in terms of the pay gap, as the activist A.W. notes that despite not being able to talk about full gender equality:

¹ Deutsche Welle, women speak to DW Arabia about the wage gap with men, 2019.

² Martin Oelz - Shauna Olney - Manuela Tomei, "Equal pay: An introductory guide", ILO, 2013.

³ Pamela Kesrouani, "The Gender Salary Gap in the Arab Region", Raseef 22, 2016.

"However, with regard to salaries, there are no differences, and job opportunities are available to everyone. On the contrary, I find that there is positive discrimination in favor of women in terms of providing job opportunities, and imposing a diversity in departments. Women also occupy senior management positions. Nevertheless, in general, because decisions in these organizations are central, high positions are not influencing, whether they're occupied by males or females. The head office is the decision-maker, which can be in Washington or Paris, not in the region."

Do International Organizations Require Gender Policies for Grants?

Following 2011, civil organizations operating in the governorates of Al-Hasakah, Raqqa, and Deir Ezzor since their establishment have relied entirely on projects and funds provided by international donor organizations. These funds are the basic and only budget of the organizations, and through these projects, the work of the organization continues and the salaries of its employees are paid. Meaning that the cessation of projects and funding for organizations operating in the region implies the cessation of civil work.

However, donor international organizations, on the other hand, do not develop the capacities of local civil organization staff or provide them with experience and develop skills to reach sustainable civil organizations and implement institutional working conditions. Also, international organizations do not impose gender policies on the local civic organization, but rather they look primarily for the implementation of the project, in addition to providing accurate financial documents and files.

In this regard, Majed Dawi, a consultant working for the German organization GIZ, and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of ASO for Consultancy and Strategic Studies, says that international organizations "do not impose gender-sensitive conditions in their work with local organizations operating in Northeastern Syria."

The reason is attributed to the fact that "international organizations themselves take into account the social conditions in the region, as they do not impose a gender condition for granting funding to organizations operating in Raqqa governorate, for example, due to social factors there, where some norms impede women's ability to participate in public affairs."

He added, "Organizations conduct ongoing fieldwork to understand the social nature and the circumstances. Thus, they realize that imposing a gender policy can hinder the implementation of projects. Therefore, they are looking primarily for the implementation of the project and are concerned with the aspects of financial paperwork more than other details."

Gulbahar Mohammad believes that international organizations are unable to impose gender policies, because the problem, according to her perception, lies in the fact that international organizations, "are not present on the ground, meaning they can be

easily deceived, which is possible. Also, these organizations want to implement projects, with financial measures and transparency issues ready. In general, organizations do not work in the field of capacity building and development."

While A.W. stated, "Despite partnerships with local organizations, there are no gender requirements. The existing conditions are related to the establishment of departments, the existence of general policies for the organization, and a board of directors and structure. International organizations focus on paperwork, the right budget, and of course humanitarian goals and gender issues that are taken into consideration of the target groups."

She points out that "Even if international organizations want to stipulate that gender policies exist, the question remains a formality, because the presence of women in the board of directors of local organizations is almost formal, and they have not been given equal opportunities to occupy positions and lead in these organizations."

Majed Dawi asserts that the imposition of gender conditions may lead to, "stopping funding for a large number of organizations that work in areas of a tribal nature."

International Organizations Operating in Northeastern Syria

Besides local civic organizations operating in Northeastern Syria, there is a group of international organizations operating in the region, whose work is often based on the implementation of relief and development projects. It has a different mechanism and a different way of dealing with the case of women.

Activist and journalist, A.W. says, "The difference exists in the internal laws and fundamental principles which organize and administer these two groups, as well as, in their institutional and temporal structure. International organizations are mostly ancient, and most have been founded after World War II, which were a response to the wars and tragedies that their societies witnessed, and which had clear humanitarian goals, tried to address and improve through them the lives of individuals and their requirements in accordance with the principles of human rights."

She adds, "These values and the need for their practices were recognized in an appropriate political and social environment, in order to develop accordingly their own necessities and problems. In terms of the local experience, it's very poor, because there were no local organizations and associations prior to the Syrian crisis, except those affiliated with the authority. Consequently, the organizations established alongside the chaos of war were not formed by clear rules to respond to the urgent needs of society. Rather, some of them were dominated by narrow political visions, and some were controlled by foreign political agendas. Hence, these associations were not established in accordance with the basic humanitarian standards and principles that represent the essence of international organizations, which pledges to respect the international charters and laws regulating the affairs of organizations and

human services, such as neutrality, integrity and independence. Consequently, local organizations did not adopt clear policies, because they basically lacked an explicit civic vision. Moreover, patriarchal customs, norms and concepts still govern the minds of some of their officials."

She points out that "Even international organizations have shortcomings and difficulties. They have policies, but they don't seem to be explicit, because their employees are local employees. Fortunately, employees of foreign organizations are also responsible for follow-up and supervision and there is also accountability, in particular as regards sexual exploitation, fear of penalties and strict laws, and this, in turn, improves the reality of women in these organizations even more."

The Self-Administration's Laws... How does it Deal with Gender?

Since its establishment in 2014, the Self-Administration with all the variations in its governance formulas up to 2018, until its stability at the "Self-Administration of Northeastern Syria", has maintained a consistent methodology in its vision of the issue of women. This vision differs greatly from the vision of the Syrian regime and the Syrian opposition at the political and economic levels and differs at the social vision of the roles and patterns of women's presence in society. The Self-Administration has adopted what it constantly describes as "a reactionary authoritarian mentality in society," and declared its support for full equality between men and women in the various fields of work and life, including the political and military fields. It has also implemented participatory management in all local government institutions.

The Democratic Self-Administration in Northeastern Syria finds itself one of the best models in the region with regard to dealing with the issue of women on the social and political levels and describes itself as a woman's administration and that its laws are optimal for empowering women in society. It (the Self-Administration), as it states, implements all gender policies in its institutions, imposes a joint presidency in its work system, equals men and women in salaries, and sets strict laws regarding issues such as violence, harassment and sexual exploitation, yet in return, it faces harsh criticism from activists. Civilians find that all of the above are mere formalities and their primary goal is purely ideological.

The Organizations Affairs Office indicates that it requires the application of gender policies in granting licenses to local civic organizations, and indicates that the office has not yet received any complaints from women working in organizations about job positions, however, on the other hand, the office does not study or require the implementation of a financial policy that equals men and women in salaries.

A.W does not agree with the activity of the Self-Administration in this context; she says that "the Self-Administration does not pave the way for all women, but instead

works to militarize society and women. Consequently, we still find the fear of Self-Administration concerning women's initiatives, to the extent that some women's organizations that work with the Self-Administration are a barrier and a negative factor in the way of women's independent initiatives.

The number of organizations authorized by the Self-Administration in the governorates of Al-Hasakah, Raqqqa, and Deir Ezzor, and specialized in women's affairs, is 8. The organizations are; "Women for Peace, Green Women, the Free Woman Waqf, the Four Seasons, Alnarjes, Jasmine, Nasmat al-Furat, Feminist). While there are dozens of other organizations that have a women's department, or have previously implemented a women's project in Northeastern Syria.⁴

The number of authorized organizations in Northeastern Syria, according to information obtained by the author of the report from the Office of Organizations Affairs in Northeastern Syria, is 198 and these organizations work in various specializations, including; education, health, relief, peace building, development, capacity building, women, livelihoods, and agriculture.⁵

Conclusion:

The war has exacerbated the need for civil organizations, mostly relief aid, to offset the lack of institutions in Syrian society, which had been plagued by an authoritarian regime that had no civil institutions at all. Following the overthrow of the Ba'ath authority from the regions of Northeastern Syria in 2014, and the advent of another military regime, brought about by the demands of the war itself, civilian life in this region was completely disrupted.

Conflicting social norms overlapped in the areas of Northeastern Syria due to the internal displacement movement, whether the civil groups that came from the Arab areas inside Syria, or the displacement that occurred from the Kurdish cities occupied by Turkey in 2018/Afrin, and in 2019 Serekaniye/Ras al-Ain and Tal Abyad. Thus, the need for NGO relief organizations has increased, resulting in development projects that lack the qualified human resources to be implemented.

Consequently, these organizations, along with other local organizations that have been established to support the community with food baskets, and some slogans related to civil society and women's empowerment, had no hesitation in finding formulas to conform to local customs, and to prefer them to projects which have become paper proceedings required to administer the funding process.

In practice, no comprehensive study of cultural diversity linked to the numerous identities that govern indigenous groups in Northeastern Syria has taken place. The

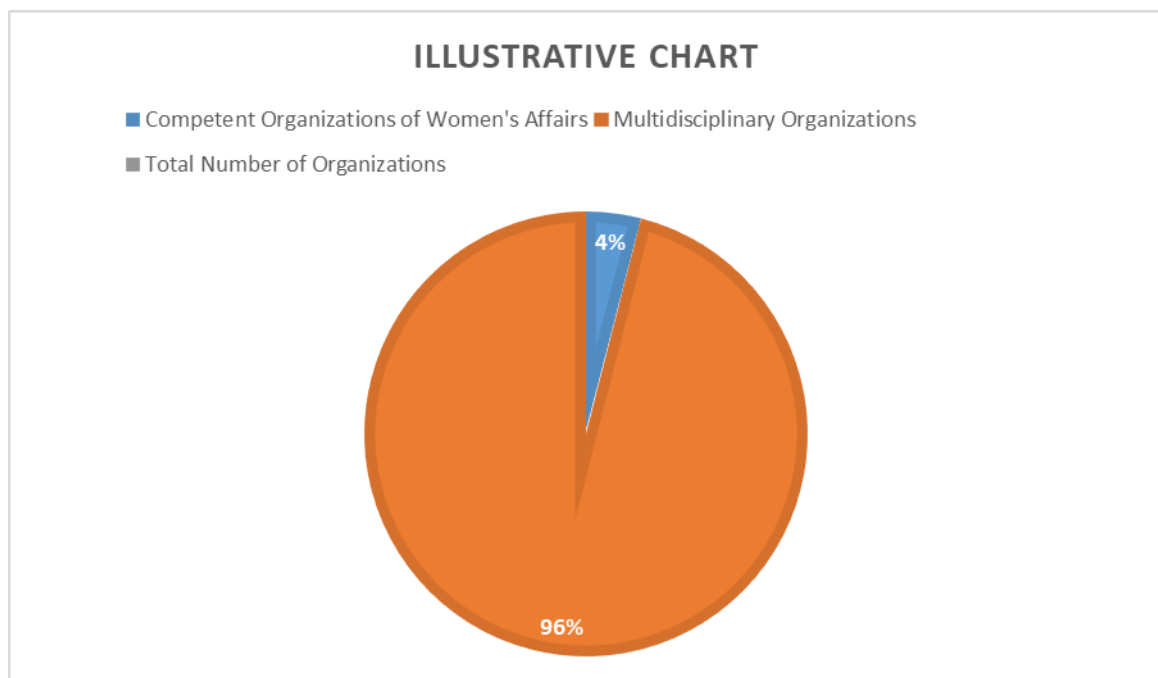
⁴ The report author obtained these numbers from the Organizations Affairs Office in Northeastern Syria

⁵ Ibid.

relationship of the cultural apparatus of these groups to the process of modernizing society in conditions of war, where the rule is necessarily applicable to the barrel of a weapon and to the militarization of society. Thus, to date, the organizations known as civil society have not affected the realization of their slogans. In many cases, their policies have gone against their claims. And the position of women is front and center in these opposite policies.

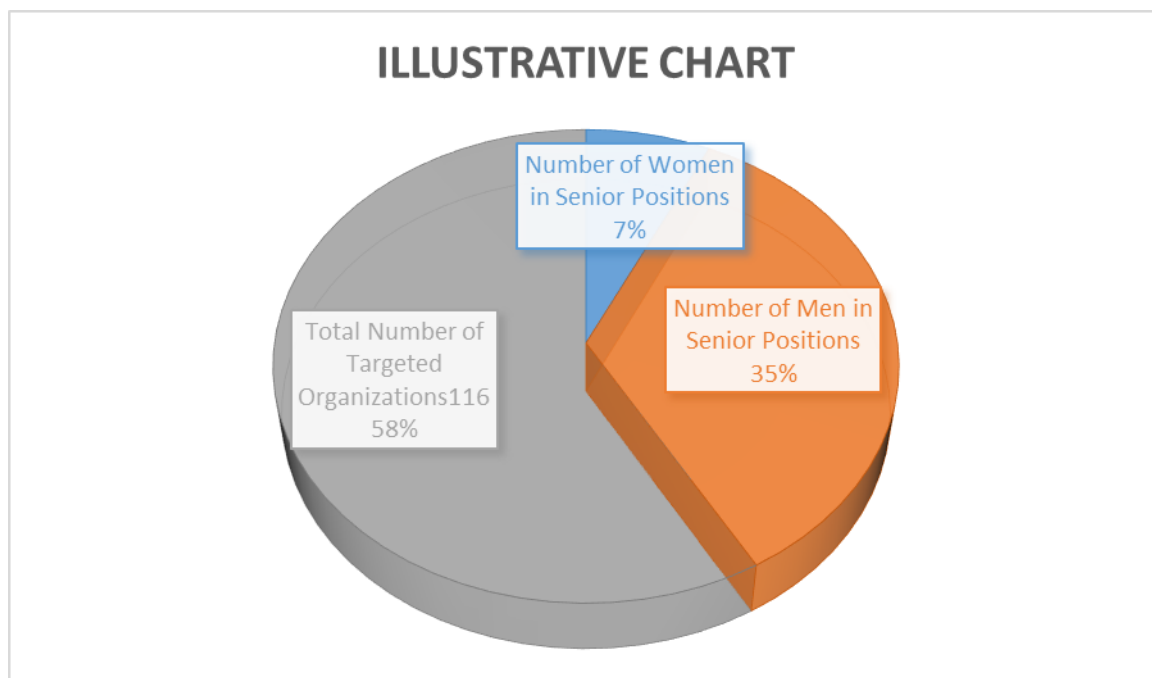
Illustrative Chart No. (1):

Percentage of organizations specialized in women's affairs compared to the total number of organizations authorized by the Self-Administration



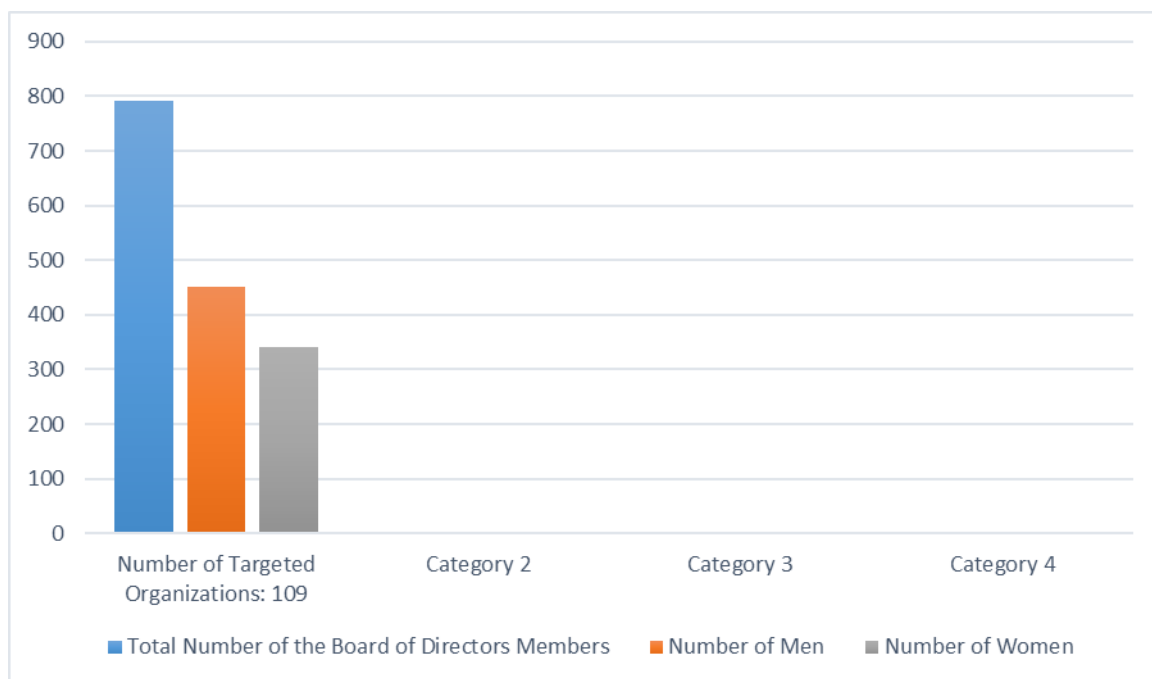
Illustrative Chart No. (2):

The percentage of women in senior management positions compared to the percentage of men in 116 targeted organizations.



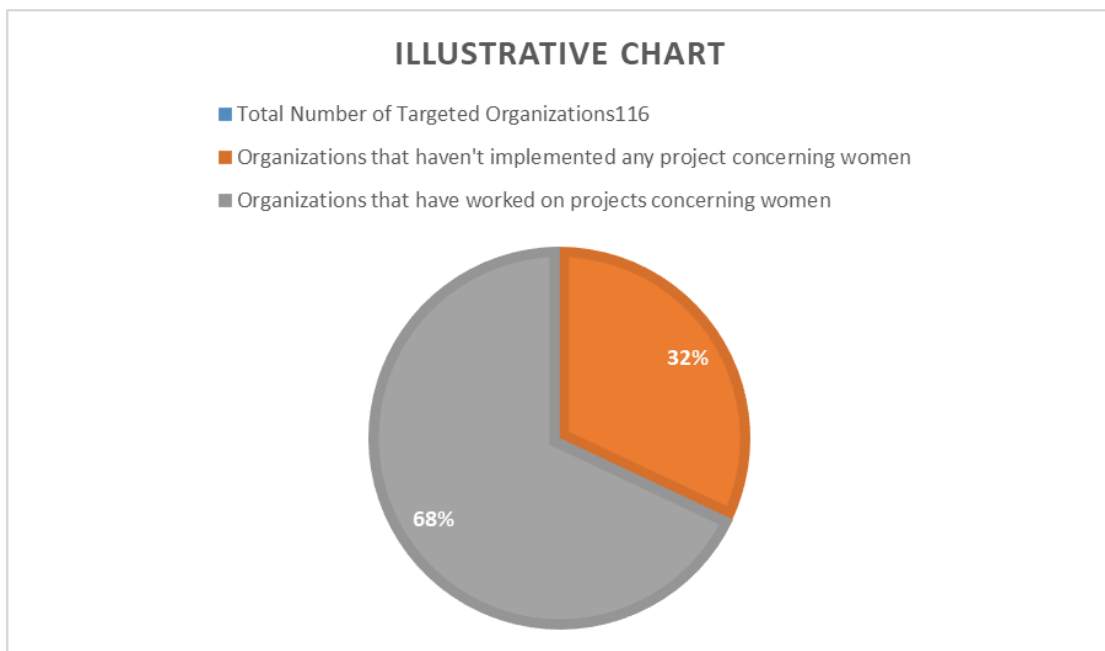
Illustrative Chart No. (3):

The percentage of women on boards of directors in organizations compared to the percentage of men.



Illustrative Chart No. (4):

Percentage of organizations that implemented projects related to women compared to the total number of targeted organizations operating in Northeastern Syria.





The Impact of CSOs on the Stereotyping of Women's Image

Rojda Ali

