



Plan of Action
Senegal 2006

Background

In July 2006, active networkers from the international solidarity network, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) gathered in Dakar, Senegal to develop our fourth Plan of Action (PoA). This is the analytical framework that will guide our programmatic strategies and activities in the coming years.

Over 50 women participated from 22 countries - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, Egypt, Gambia, Iran, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Malaysia, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, UK, and USA. Many dozens more contributed to the PoA through regional and country-specific meetings that preceded the Senegal meeting. The resulting PoA incorporates the views of as many networkers as possible in the collective identification of the issues critical to women's struggles for equality and their human rights in Muslim countries and communities.

Over three days of intensive discussions, we shared examples from our diverse contexts of how networking through WLUML has strengthened our ability to address the various challenges we face. We also identified, against the background of changed global, regional and national contexts, the critical shared issues facing women's struggles across the network that the network is best placed to address. We confirmed our collective strategies, and began identifying possible activities to be undertaken by the WLUML network in the foreseeable future.

A smaller group of some two dozen members of the Programme Implementation Council and other active networkers met for a further four days to discuss the structural transition required within WLUML to ensure that the network responds most appropriately and effectively to the analyses generated by our networkers.

WLUML's Current Context and Political Strategy

The essential paradox about the globalizing world is that as transnational business has relentlessly spread across the world, and as political forces and issues become more deeply interconnected internationally, there has been a tendency for many peoples across the world to 'get closer' to their ethnic, national, religious, and racial identities. The nestling within a known identity can be a way of seeking certainty and belonging in a world wherein political, economic and social boundaries are being eroded and challenged by the various forces of globalization. It can also be a route to accessing power and resources.

This 'nestling' has seen a rise in religious fundamentalism and a growth of rightwing nationalism. The 'nestling' within a religious identity has conferred enormous power on the religious right. The emerging religious fundamentalisms have served to cement the vulnerable positions of women in many countries. The convergence of armed conflict, decreased levels of social cohesion and religious fundamentalisms have drastically worsened the social, political and economic status of women.

The definition of collective identities has framed approaches to gender and vice versa. The construction of a 'Muslim woman' becomes integral to constructions of 'Muslimness' in general. This explains in part the emphasis on controlling sexuality and other aspects of women's lives. The perceived decrease in the political and economic power of men in vulnerable contexts in the developing world has given rise to a desire to exercise power in other areas such as the family through mobilizing concepts such as nationalism, ethnicity and religion. This has led to strengthened forms of patriarchal control exercised over women and children. The rise in the levels of violence against women and children are aspects of this control.

Since the previous Plan of Action two key concerns have intensified over time:

- The failure of states to close the gap between rich and poor, to provide jobs and basic services, and their abdication of responsibility for meeting the needs of their citizens, whilst aggressively asserting control over society.
- A continued rise in fundamentalisms, militarization and armed conflict and its effect on women and the controlling of women's sexuality.

To this has been added:

- A cooption of progressive discourse and language in the public domain, which require our advocacy strategies and approaches to be more nuanced, sophisticated and assertive.
- The spread of HIV and AIDS has negatively impacted on social structures, quality of life, social welfare and security, migration, and issues of sexuality and violence against women.
- Developments in information technology and media.
- A weakening of the UN and the space that it provided for organizing, and a general closing of once available spaces for alternative opinions.

Together these factors shape the context in which WLUML locates its work and our discussions on structure and strategy.

A number of future strategic directions emerge out of our understanding of the current context and our belief that the network should be needs-driven and proactively respond to the specific needs of women living in Muslim contexts.

1. WLUML shall continue to produce publications that meet a critical need at a wider level. Our publications are a key resource for networkers across respective regions and provide networkers, allies and others with information that otherwise would not be available.
2. WLUML shall continue to translate publications and materials as an important mechanism for ensuring that debate, analysis and information are made available across language groups.

3. WLUMML shall continue to disseminate information across regions and internationally to optimise cross-regional learning and feed into sharpening strategies and enhancing the impact of women's activism for their human rights.
4. WLUMML shall undertake a limited number of collective projects that respond to the expressed needs of women in Muslim contexts, and that are strategically identified as areas of activity where WLUMML can make a particular contribution to women's struggles for equality and their human rights.

WLUMML's Contribution to Women's Struggles

As networkers, our links through WLUMML have provided us both practical as well as emotional support, both of which are crucial to the successful promotion and protection of women's human rights. WLUMML provides access to focused information and resources not otherwise available to networkers and widens networkers' circle of contacts especially across regional, linguistic and cultural barriers. In turn, this gives networkers the experience, knowledge, language, analyses, and strategies that are the necessary tools for resistance and change. WLUMML has helped women identify upcoming challenges to their rights - and therefore resist these more effectively – and has also ensured that women's views are heard beyond their immediate locality.

For many networkers, the flexibility offered by WLUMML's network structure is especially important because it enables us to work on national priorities while simultaneously, by linking women across global boundaries, it enables us to generate international pressure for local rights struggles and contribute to international advocacy and analyses.

More than the sum of its parts, the added value of a network lies in generating an analysis of women's rights violations that can only emerge once international networking has uncovered our diversities and similarities and how these can be used against women. Our coming together adds important new dimensions to our local understanding of local power dynamics.

WLUMML's input into networkers' activities towards reform of laws, exposing fundamentalist strategies, the re-reading of religious texts in women's favour, and protecting women human rights defenders has been particularly important.

In addition to the collective energy generated by linking through WLUMML, networkers see a deep value in knowing through WLUMML that others elsewhere share one's values and may be experiencing similar difficulties, and that prompt support in situations of both personal and national political crisis is available.

Expectations of WLUML, our Identity and Principles

Women Living Under Muslim Laws is a feminist international solidarity network that provides information, support and a collective space for women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam. The network aims to strengthen women's individual and collective struggles for equality and their rights, especially in Muslim contexts.

The principles which are the basis for our networking are the recognition of:

- Autonomy in diversity;
- Complementarity and reciprocity;
- Respect for each other;
- Space for discussion and debate.

Networkers want to explore further the meaning of a network, especially what the meaning of diversity is within WLUML; how this relates to people working from within a religious perspective and those working outside this framework; and their interconnections. Additionally, networkers will discuss more closely the potential advantages as well as drawbacks a network brings for the people it links, leading to an exploration and identification of the best structures for leadership within WLUML.

Looking ahead, networkers will clarify how to engage with the network, especially for newer networkers and those not fluent in English or French. This requires mechanisms for mentoring as well as greater clarity on WLUML's goals and identity whilst recognizing that all those connected through the network cannot have a single strategy and that networkers may have different perspectives. The WLUML network expects to strengthen links in migrant contexts and the Middle East, requiring focused attention on overcoming language barriers between feminist activists globally.

Other important aspects of this process of reaching out will be: diversifying our means of communication; ensuring WLUML analysis is accessible to grassroots networkers as well as audiences beyond the network; developing new ways to ensure a greater flow of information and feedback to each other regarding activities being undertaken by networkers; and a shift towards regional planning processes that take into account regional specificities.

Building Capacity and Engaging with New Networkers

The ICO and RCOs will take a lead responsibility for engaging with new networkers and particularly for facilitating capacity building of networkers. To do this they will:

- Organize one capacity-building activity every year to orient newer networkers to the principles, analyses and activities of WLUML, and where necessary also to feminist perspectives; and
- Assist in developing new activists through internships and related activities.

In addition, the ICO will build the capacity of active networkers and the regional coordination offices to raise funds by developing generic project proposals and maintaining a database of appropriate funding sources.

Critical Issues for WLUML

The critical issues identified at the Senegal Plan of Action meeting as our priorities for collective analysis and action (discussed in detail below) indicate a clear continuity from previous Plans of Action. This does not imply that situations in individual contexts have remained unchanged, but rather that because of its unique global position WLUML has correctly identified the issues most likely to concern women in Muslim contexts over the past two decades, and that networkers see a continued value in linking and sharing with each other on these specific issues.

WLUML's analysis of the four critical issues below explains why it is important to address each issue, and the comparative advantage of addressing these issues collectively as the network rather than engaging in purely localized initiatives.

The issues of militarization, fundamentalisms, women's bodies and legal status are interlinked and feed into each other, and therefore many WLUML activities around one issue have an impact on a broader range of issues. An example is WLUML's on-going work to promote constitutions that not only guarantee gender equality but also avoid vague declarations about 'Sharia' as the source of national law. Our experience indicates that such vagueness is used to introduce misogynistic family laws, limitations on women's mobility and property ownership, and imposed dress codes. It is also our experience that demands for such declarations about 'Sharia' arise in post-conflict situations where identity has been manipulated to cause or prolong the conflict, and contexts where fundamentalists seek to dominate the national political agenda and society. WLUML's work on constitutions, therefore, brings together our analyses from all four critical issues of militarization, fundamentalisms, women's bodies and legal status.

In highlighting these critical issues, WLUML acknowledges that the network will not be able to address all aspects of these issues, and also that there is a need to link up with existing initiatives by allies. A separate strategic planning exercise is needed to allow networkers to

identify concrete activities that are more focused in scope, responsive to the needs of the moment, determined by capacity, and above all focused on aspects that WLUML is best positioned to address. The possible activities designed to resist and challenge the forces that define the current context will be built upon previously successful strategies of linking across boundaries, research, documentation, capacity-building, and facilitating advocacy.

Peace-Building and Resisting the Impact of Militarization

Ethnic and religious identities and issues have increasingly been mobilized in the past few decades to strengthen barriers between communities, and to promote and justify militarization and war, conflict, armed interventions and other forms of violence, including in the Sudan, in Sri Lanka, and in Afghanistan. There is thus a direct link between fundamentalisms and the escalation of militarization and violence. WLUML's work on identifying early warning signs of fundamentalisms, and addressing fundamentalisms contributes to resisting the build-up of militarization and violence.

In addition, WLUML recognizes the need both to end the impunity of those responsible for war crimes and genocide, and to address the effects of militarization and violence on women and on communities. Sexual violence against women in war and conflict is increasingly being recognized thanks to the work of many (including WLUML networkers). Some work is also being done to address the specific needs of women survivors of war and conflict. These must be further supported and developed.

However, the trauma of war and conflict also often result in a cementing of community barriers against the 'other,' which makes it difficult to work towards peace settlements considered just by all parties. Those working to build cross-community understanding and links – often women – are frequently severely criticized, and sometimes alienated by all sides. They require support to build internal resistance and strength, and external solidarity and help.

Furthermore, although women's exclusion from conflict resolution and peace-building processes has long been noted, it continues. While the growing mobilization of women in fundamentalist movements is evidence that women's inclusion does not guarantee gender justice in agreements intended to resolve conflict and reconstruct societies, the exclusion of women often results in women's issues and concerns being ignored altogether. Interventions such as the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, providing for women's inclusion in all peace processes, are intended to address this and there has been some progress. Much more needs to be done.

Women's exclusion from leadership and participation in negotiations for peace and reconstruction reflects the lack of commitment to gender equality among all local, national and international negotiating parties. In the context of rising fundamentalisms, this exclusion has usually meant supporting conservative and patriarchal interpretations of national, ethnic or religious identities during negotiations. This has frequently involved reducing and

restricting women's rights on the grounds of religion or cultural tradition. As a result, women's rights in post-conflict situations may be even narrower and more contested than previously, as in Iraq. There must be greater global discussion of how to acknowledge communities' collective claims and grievances, while at the same time avoiding supporting fundamentalist identity politics in the name of respect for culture and community.

Programme

WLUML will continue to be active in the movement to end impunity, such as continuing to work with the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice (formerly the gender caucus of the International Criminal Court) and initiatives such as the Tokyo Tribunal. We are concerned to ensure that in both conflict and 'post-conflict' situations, externally imposed and narrow identities not be used against women's interests and rights. Therefore we will work in alliance with feminist and progressive groups working in this field to build the capacity of women activists in Muslim communities and countries in peace-building and anti-militarization, in order to support their work in ensuring that women's rights are protected in social, economic and political reconstruction.

Possible activities:

- Ensure networkers have access to documentation produced by allies regarding women's strategies in peace-building (including use of Security Council Resolution 1325 and other instruments).
- Share analyses amongst networkers, with peace movements, and with progressive forces generally on the linkages between militarization and violence on the one hand, and fundamentalist identity politics on the other.
- Identify, document and share women's strategies in peace-building in areas where identities have been mobilized as a key issue – whether before, during or after militarization and conflict.
- Support capacity-building for women peace-builders in Muslim contexts– including on women's rights and legal status and leadership issues - as well as conflict resolution skills, the specific needs of women in conflict and post-conflict environments, and the use of international and regional instruments.
- Organize cross-regional and cross-religious/ethnic identity exchange programmes to resist the emergence and strengthening of narrow identities and support solidarity across community barriers.
- Map the impact of militarization on women/ girl-children in Muslim countries and communities, including effects and trends of migration, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), trafficking, sexual exploitation and violence.

Preserving Multiple Identities and Exposing Fundamentalisms

Recent years have seen a growth in multiple forms of fundamentalisms that operate from the local to global levels in ways that force people into ever more narrow and mutually exclusive identities – both collective and personal. These political, cultural, religious and economic forces are often interconnected in ways that reinforce each other's agendas. Of continuing concern is how some otherwise more progressive forces, the mass media, donors, etc. have accepted the appropriation of human rights discourse, the language of democracy, and arguments of 'cultural specificity' by fundamentalists who claim to be 'moderates.'

Fundamentalisms and constructions of identity have been focal concerns of WLUML since the network began and it has always linked with allies working on similar issues in different parts of the world. Experience has shown, however, that while many similarities may exist, there may be significant differences in the context-specific strategies adopted, both in terms of discourse and in terms of interventions and actions taken.

Following September 11, 2001, dichotomies of the 'either you're with us or against us' variety have gained unprecedented legitimacy, further complicating the tasks of women struggling to assert their rights in a feminist agenda. The 'war on terror' has legitimized an erosion of civil liberties and promoted a 'racial profiling' of Muslims in Europe, North America and Australasia.

It has also resulted in a privileging of religion as the pivotal identity for all those in and from Muslim communities and countries, regardless of any other factors and markers of identity. This further strengthens the hold of fundamentalist political elements because it legitimizes the notion that such closed 'Muslim' communities (stereotyped as conservative and immutable) exist, enabling fundamentalists (including those masquerading as 'moderates') to claim to be the sole legitimate voice of particular communities. Any voices diverging from this stereotype are dismissed as not 'truly authentic', denying feminists and other progressives from Muslim contexts the space in which to define their own personal and collective identities, to dream of alternative futures, and to act upon their aspirations. There is therefore a need to support, make visible and promote the legitimacy of alternative voices from within Muslim communities.

Programme

The contemporary globalized nature of the factors and forces impeding women's rights makes it imperative for WLUML to address the growing forms of fundamentalisms and their interconnections. Therefore, building on its previous experiences and current resources, WLUML will:

- Deepen understanding and analyses about the differing realities in our localities; the specific discourses and strategies used in given contexts to promote the common agenda of various fundamentalist forces and their alliances – both formal and informal – that allow fundamentalisms to gain strength.

- Build common understanding, share strategies and strengthen alliances within and beyond the WLUMML network to counter fundamentalisms, make visible alternatives, and support women's rights across similar but different contexts.

Possible activities:

- Research and make visible the commonalities, linkages and patriarchal collusions in the apparently disparate agendas of various forces operating in diverse contexts and levels, across religions, regions and forms of 'fundamentalisms'.
- Track, analyze and share with local women's struggles the various contextually specific strategies and discourse used by fundamentalisms.
- Investigate the political economy of fundamentalist groups from local to transnational levels.
- Expose individual fundamentalists who present themselves as so-called 'moderate Islamists' but who do not, in fact, work for women's human rights.
- Provide solidarity and support to activists promoting women's human rights and fighting fundamentalisms.
- Provide safe spaces for women activists to openly debate and develop pro-active alternatives to fundamentalisms, whether from a secular framework, a framework from within religion, or any combination of these most suited to each local struggle.

Widening Debate about Women's Bodily Autonomy

WLUMML's previous research and action has helped to understand how woman's body, through sexuality and reproduction, is the site of many social, cultural, religious, legal, and political struggles. In the name of religion – be it Islam, Christianity or many other religious beliefs – or in the name of cultural purity and tradition, women have been subjected to discriminatory practices, codes of conduct and laws with the ultimate goal of controlling their sexuality. These practices and laws constitute and reinforce violence against women, while sexuality has also been used as a tool of struggle in political and armed conflicts.

Although the growing demand for sexual rights by feminist movements is reaching policymakers, this effort must be reinforced by developing new tools of analysis, looking at other strategies developed by communities to claim their rights, exploring new and subtle ways of control over women's bodies and identifying issues linked to sexuality which have remained hidden.

There is a need for greater research, documentation and mapping in Muslim communities and countries of the various discourses and practices around sexuality: virginity testing, child marriage and early pregnancy, wife inheritance, FGM, cross-generational marriage, polygyny, spousal relations, scholarship from within the frame of Islam - including regarding

the Qur'an and hadiths, on sexuality and specifically on women's sexuality, has to be deepened. Women's responses and struggles around these discourses and practices have been diverse and creative; these need to be better documented and circulated.

The spread of HIV/AIDS has offered a new entry point to deal with issues of sexual, social and legal discrimination against women in Muslim communities (e.g. the wife's duty of obedience to the husband, women's lack of control over their sexuality and over condom use, their greater vulnerability to infection, etc). It is crucial to promote the new recognition of women's sexual rights as part of the global framework of human rights. We need to investigate and understand the different forces at play and develop new strategies to support the rights of women and people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). There is a dramatic need to understand and widen the debate around HIV/AIDS prevention in Muslim communities, and develop strategies to counter the arguments currently coming from narrow conservative positions, to enable women to assert their rights and protect themselves.

Same-sex relationships and homosexual identities have been among the most silenced issues related to sexuality in Muslim communities. It is important to organize trans-national and trans-cultural research on ways in which Muslim societies deal with the issue – including the currently developing Muslim scholarship of a reinterpretation of homosexuality in Islam.

Programme

WLUML will continue to work with allies to ensure that the concerns of women in Muslim contexts feed into global debates on sexuality and women's bodies, and particularly on the manipulation of sexuality by identity politics. Most importantly, we shall seek to promote and expand debate within networking contexts on all aspects of sexuality. This debate will be grounded in our support for greater documentation and the development of new analyses and strategies regarding women's claim to sexual rights in Muslim contexts. Our long-standing and continuing concern regarding violence against women, although closely connected with WLUML's other three critical issues, will be primarily focused through the lens of sexuality and the struggle for women's bodily autonomy.

Possible activities:

- Develop position papers on issues related to sexuality in Muslim contexts, and use opportunities at regional/international levels to circulate such material in order to ensure the voices of women from Muslim contexts are reflected in global debates and influence policy.
- Strengthen linkages with progressive scholars working on sexuality and Islam, and make their analyses accessible to networkers.
- Develop advocacy materials for diverse audiences, including the mass media, that counter and provide alternatives to the specific discourses used to silence women's demand for sexual rights and bodily autonomy in Muslim contexts;
- Facilitate linkages between and with groups working on HIV/AIDS issues in Muslim contexts in order to share experiences and strengthen strategies.

Promoting and Protecting Women's Equality Under Laws

Women are constrained from taking action against oppressive practices and/or from accessing their human rights by a lack of knowledge of formal (especially constitutional) rights. Custom and culture combine to govern the possibilities that are open to women in any context. Additionally, women internalize the constructions of womanhood in their societies and are told that these have religious sanction. Hence, women often believe these constructions are the only, or at least the only valid, definitions of womanhood. In Muslim communities, women who challenge or diverge from the prevailing ideal of 'Muslim womanhood' are seen to be challenging nature, religion and community.

WLUMML endeavours both to unravel how custom, culture and law combine to structure women's lives and to highlight how the dynamics of religion and politics shape these combinations. This also assists women in understanding what the processes of legal construction and reform involve. Such knowledge is vital to those taking a critical and questioning approach to rights, laws, and constructions of womanhood. In recent years, there have been gains and positive reform in many Muslim contexts in Africa, Asia and the Middle East - entirely due to women's consistent efforts. But at the same time, across the world fundamentalist forces have used the demand for the introduction of regressive interpretations of Muslim personal and penal laws as a cynical means of national political mobilization. In some instances this has led to gross violations of women's human rights and in others has obstructed efforts towards reform that supports women's equality.

Over the past two decades, WLUMML has built up impressive expertise in women's rights in Muslim jurisprudence, customary laws and practices, and the civil and criminal laws applied in Muslim majority and minority contexts. Because the network links women across such a wide range of countries with diverse customs, statutory laws and legal frameworks (some derived from religious and others from non-religious sources) and very varying interpretations of Muslim laws, WLUMML has been able to distill from this cross-comparison a strengthened analysis of the forces seeking to restrict women's rights and the methods and justifications they use. We developed a wide range of materials out of the 10-year 'Women and Law in the Muslim World' action-research Programme at the international, regional and national levels. These continue to enable women to resist conservative and patriarchal constructions of gender and women's rights their rights (justified with reference to religion, custom and tradition), and to facilitate women's access to their human rights. These materials need to be made available to even wider audiences.

The need for advice and support in their effort to assert their rights and autonomous choices, especially within the family, is the main reason individual women contact WLUMML, be it a local networking organization, a Regional Office or the International Coordination Office. In an increasingly globalized world, where people are often subject to multiple legal systems, our transnational linkages have enabled WLUMML to offer practical and legal advice often unavailable elsewhere.

Programme

In the coming years, building on the extensive work done in the Women and Law Programme, and working in collaboration with allies wherever appropriate, WLUML will focus on challenging discriminatory laws, and strengthening women's capacity to ensure the implementation of recent positive reforms.

The programme has two prongs:

- To ensure the repeal or amendment of discriminatory laws and the adoption of gender-just laws, including equality legislation and equality mechanisms (such as national gender commissions). This will include national law as well as the ratification, domestication (bringing international commitments into effect under domestic laws and policies), and the removal of reservations to international laws such as the United National Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) or regional provisions such as the Protocol on Women's Rights to the African Charter.
- To strengthen capacity to monitor and advocate the effective implementation of non-discriminatory and progressive laws that recognize and support women's human rights.

The first prong will focus on family/personal status law reform. Related issues to be taken into consideration include: legal texts, procedures, Muslim discourses, interaction with constitutional provisions, customary laws and practices, parallel systems of law, access to formal rights, majority/minority contexts.

Possible activities for the first prong:

- Develop an electronic version of the WLUML publication 'Knowing Our Rights', making this more widely accessible.
- Develop a web-resource on family laws, including texts of codes, resources on the history of the codification of Muslim laws and the construction of gender in Muslim jurisprudence.
- Document, exchange and share (including through translation) effective family law reform strategies.
- Develop 'model' family laws out of examples of 'best practice' from different contexts.
- Collect, develop and share arguments to support positive law reform using both human rights frameworks as well as justifications derived from Muslim jurisprudence.
- Make available to networkers, especially in contexts with new or planned mechanisms, examples of how gender equality mechanisms (including national gender commissions) have best worked to strengthen women's status as well as problems encountered.

- Hold a high-profile international conference to share a diverse range of national, regional and international strategies and to mobilize campaigns for gender-just family law reform in Muslim contexts.
- Identify and/or document and share ‘best practice’ regarding the use of international and regional human rights law to promote women’s human rights in Muslim contexts.

Possible activities for the second prong:

- Build capacity to analyze procedural law and train networkers in strategies to ensure effective implementation of positive provisions in law. This would include a Training of Trainers to allow for adaptation to local contexts.
- Conduct a Training of Trainers on human rights from a gender-sensitive perspective for judicial personnel in formal forums applying customary, Muslim, or other laws in Muslim contexts.
- Conduct a capacity-building training in law reform campaigning, advocacy and lobbying, including understanding UN language and principles of feminist law-making.
- With key allies, support skills development in shadow reporting and the use of international human rights conventions by networkers.

Both programme strands would be supported by:

- Promoting spaces that enhance feminist analyses of Muslim jurisprudence and scholarship.
- Developing a database of progressive Muslim scholars to provide networkers a readily accessible source of argumentation in favour of women’s human rights both to respond to threats to these rights as well as to support pro-active reform efforts.

WLUML’s Structure in the Changing Context

Like all feminist networks, WLUML has constantly grappled with the challenges of evolving and maintaining a structure that enables effective implementation of activities while allowing sufficient flexibility to respond to, sometimes rapidly, changing circumstances. As an international network, WLUML has also faced the additional challenge of communicating and working in multiple languages simultaneously. In this we have succeeded in expanding our work in French and Arabic, as reflected in our multilingual website. Some focused cross-country work, publications, and networking have been conducted in Farsi/Dari, Russian and Chinese. This is apart from the numerous local languages of networking groups.

While fluidity of structure has been a key strength of WLUML, over time this fluidity has given rise to questions such as: Who is a networker? How are decisions taken at different levels? And, who can speak on behalf of the network? The role and functions of the coordination offices also need to be further clarified, and mechanisms formally established for including

new women wanting to participate more actively in the WLUML network. The need to revisit existing structures, to clarify, refine, or alter existing mechanisms has been an on-going discussion within WLUML for some time now. In order to improve decision-making, communication and inclusiveness, WLUML set out some operational guidelines, and clarified roles of networkers and various WLUML bodies.

We have identified a Transition Team, made up of Board members and representatives from the coordination offices, which will take these changes forward.

WLUML's operational values include:

- Accountability
- Transparency
- Clarity on roles, responsibilities, decision-making, etc.
- Access to Information
- Space for discussion and debate
- Meaningful participation
- Trust
- Consultation
- The right to speak and be heard

Who is a Networker?

WLUML distinguishes between networkers and active networkers. A networker can be either an organization or individual that/who:

- Subscribes to WLUML's principles and values and puts these into practice in their own context;
- Receives and engages with WLUML information; and
- Engages in two-way communication with WLUML Council members, Coordination Offices or sub-committees (see below).

An active networker/networking group, in addition furthers the work and vision of the network under the umbrella of WLUML by:

- Contributing/participating in WLUML initiatives - e.g. collective projects, solidarity work;
- Engaging in a consistent two-way interaction over a period of time with WLUML Council members, Coordination Offices or sub-committees (see below) that are undertaking on-going WLUML collective projects/activities;
- Taking responsibility for some aspect of WLUML's work; and

- Being involved at the decision-making level, for example in the identification of critical issues.

Through a process of engagement prior to the Plan of Action meeting and continued at the PoA, several agreements were reached or confirmed in relation to WLUML and its structure.

The main body responsible for WLUML, currently the Programme Implementation Council, focuses on network policy-making rather than implementation. The council therefore needs a new, more appropriate, name. Implementation of WLUML collective projects is the responsibility of project committees, which may include networkers who are not members of the Council. Meanwhile, the coordination offices (international coordination office, ICO, and regional coordination offices, RCOs), have assumed responsibility for the core activities of on-going networking, information exchange and solidarity responsibility. The coordination offices also play a major role in building the capacity of networkers. Overall, there is a greater emphasis on the role of the regional coordination offices, which are hosted by autonomous networking groups and which are accountable to the Council for their programmatic WLUML work.

WLUML's governing structure, the Council, consists of a maximum of 20 members, who are elected for 3-year terms from the pool of active networkers who have taken responsibility for an aspect of WLUML's work beyond their immediate national context. The Board, which has legal responsibility for WLUML, is elected from the Council. Both the Board and the Council have rotating membership for specified terms of office (including maximum terms), in order to ensure a wide pool of active networkers are drawn into WLUML policy-making and oversight. The Board and Council continue to delegate on-going managerial and programmatic oversight functions to sub-committees (eg, Finance Committee, Publications Committee) and further sub-committees will be established according to the network's needs.

The Transition Team will work with active networkers to further refine decisions taken at the PoA regarding the functioning and criteria for involvement in WLUML's various structures.