

The work of the Syrian Moderate Opposition Resilience (MOR) Strategic Communications Project must calibrate itself to the contours of Syrian society if it is to contribute to the promotion and reinforcement of moderate values. These contours do not just include regional and socio-economic nuances. Gender, gender roles, and the way gender impacts perceptions and influence are also important in assuring project work is effective. So central is the question of gender in terms of promoting and reinforcing moderate values – and let us be specific here, so influential are Syrian women as arbiters of values – that the Albany Consortium has included the element of gender in its theory of change and evaluation framework.

Syria sits in a region of dismal human development and gender equity profiles. Regionally, women are disadvantaged economically, politically, and socially compared to all other regions (UNDP Human Development Report, 2016). The conflict in Syria has negatively impacted Syrians' relative position on all scales. Access to education, health care, and economic opportunity has been debilitated, and while these deprivations represent a burden on all Syrians, those who are less likely to be able to wield influence are disproportionately impacted. The conflict has exacerbated engendered negative coping mechanisms such as early marriage (girls and boys), child recruitment (boys) and transactional sex (mostly women and girls). Gender based violence is a pervasive, although poorly understood. It should go without saying that vulnerability and an inability to influence are highly correlated to a lack of voice.

That said, Syrian women continue to wield powerful influence in the family and in the community. Their dominant position inculcating values at home and as teachers is not to be underestimated. And with many women now thrust by tragedy into head of household and breadwinner positions, their attitudes and positions are growingly influential. They need and deserve to be heard.

The MOR Project offers an excellent opportunity to (1) elevate Syrian women's 'voice', (2) assure that women and girls have access to information and programming that is meaningful and interesting to them, and (3) integrate gender awareness into project products. For these three things to happen, consultative processes and audience insight analysis, training, capacity building, and product design will all need to be highly engendered.

The Consortium will take a number of affirmative steps to assure that gender in the MOR project is integrated and mainstreamed at the heart of all activities – not relegated to an 'any-other-business' category. Specifically, to improve Syrian women's and girls' voice, the Albany Consortium will create dedicated partnership opportunities for women's civil society organizations and female journalists interested in developing communications, outreach, and messaging. The focus may be explicitly on gender topics, the situation of women, services targeting women, or the focus may be far more general – the organization's contribution to community cohesiveness, problem solving or peace-building, for example. Albany's previous engagement supporting the Syrian negotiating team in Geneva provides us with good access to assist at that level. Enab Baladi, another Consortium partner, has a demonstrated history of empowering and responding to women, and focusing on gender as part of their mission. Audience insight and evaluation work by ORB will explicitly examine and analyse how communications and attitudes are engendered.

To assure women and girls have access to germane information and programming, the Albany Consortium will combine the existing Target Audience Analysis, partner consultations, and the on-going audience insight work of ORB to support the training, mentoring, and coaching of Syrians, civilian and military, developing and disseminating communications products. The combined forces of information, analysis, and training will also contribute to integrating gender into all project products and specific, observable examples of gender integration will be articulated in the project log frame indicators, thereby requiring tracking, evidence, and disaggregated data collection.

All our projects are cognisant of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, on Women, Peace and Security. In accordance with the UK's National Action Plan (in which Syria is one of the focus countries), the consortium supports promoting the protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence and the promotion of participation of women at all levels of decision-making in institutions and in mechanisms for preventing, managing and resolving conflict in peace negotiations and peace operations.