



## 2009 WISE Conference “Change through Philanthropy”

### **Leveraging Corporate Social Responsibility for Women’s Progress**

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#### **Objectives/Background:**

In 2006, Vital Voices, with local partners in the Middle East and North Africa, launched a ground-breaking project to promote public-private partnerships for social and economic progress. The focus of the project is to promote sustainable and profitable partnerships that positively impact communities, especially women.

Regional governments and civil society have traditionally been the vehicles for social progress. With enhanced economic prospects in recent years, the private sector now has both the opportunity and responsibility to become an effective partner in social and economic growth. As a result, a number of private sector firms and individuals have set early examples of business investment in the community.

The Vital Voices public-private partnerships program is designed to:

- Inform, encourage and inspire cross-sector collaborations;
- Support and highlight these efforts in the region; and
- Build a more comprehensive approach.

#### **Strategies for Change:**

Partnership and philanthropy are not new concepts in the region, but this project encourages local entities to think about these principles differently. Vital Voices empowers grassroots women’s organizations to form partnerships with companies and governments, eager to meet their corporate social responsibility goals.

This program focuses on building relationships and partnerships. Often, companies and governments want to create relationships with women’s NGOs but do not know local organizations. Vital Voices’ project begins with a *Forum for Public Private Partnership*, which meets regularly and brings all parties together to discuss their work and interests. Vital Voices then works with both the sectors to build their partnering capacity. This is done by providing key training to NGOs, through partnering and proposal writing workshops, and working with them to seek in-kind funding and support.

We also train private sector companies and governments on corporate social responsibility and marketing. As relationships develop, projects and areas of partnership emerge. Vital Voices then works with local partners to provide specialized technical expertise to support the projects.

#### **Challenges & Successes**

In many places “women’s issues” are sensitive and companies may be reluctant to work on them. We help local partners make a “business case” for investing in women’s issues. One success story is that of a breast cancer awareness program “Making it Our Business” in Jordan and Dubai that has engaged more than 30 leading companies. In Jordan, a partnership project has focused on establishing service centres for victims of domestic violence. Two such centres will open this fall.

Another challenge revolves around “ownership” and “credit” for the work. Through case studies and pilot projects, program partners are shown that they are more successful and efficient when they work together.