

**Women's Empowerment Strategies in NGOs in the city of  
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia-Exploring the Complexity and  
Challenges of the Cultural Context**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the complex issue of women's empowerment strategies in NGOs in Saudi Arabia. The rapid social change, which has taken place in the recent years, has transformed both private and professional roles for women in the country; it has created new spaces and increased visibility for women. The empirical study employed a mixed methods approach consisting of interviews and questionnaire survey. The analysis identified five major strategies employed by Saudi NGOs to promote women's empowerment, which include: guests and events, building alliances, media, religion, and framing women's issues. The findings identified religion as a decisive influence in many decisions made by NGOs regarding women's empowerment strategies.

The analysis furthermore identifies contrasting views regarding employing the term "empowerment" these reflecting the rapid social change and ideologies present in the country. Ultimately, the thesis portrays the challenges NGOs face promoting women's empowerment which is equally reflected in the literature review and the empirical findings of the study.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CEDAW- UN Convention Eliminating Discrimination Against Women

MGD- Millennium Gender Development

NGO – Non-Governmental-Organisation

## Chapter One: Introduction

By dint of their academic, professional, and economic successes, they are quietly breaking down their country's pervasive discriminatory policies and social attitudes (Isobel Coleman 2010:205).

In Saudi Arabia, the issue of women's empowerment has gained international attention in recent years, but increasing women's participation as active members of society within the complex social context of the region does not come without its challenges. Women in Saudi Arabia have been at the centre of reforms taking place in the country and, significantly, the goal of empowering women has been included in the Tenth Saudi Development Plan (2015-2019) as one of its major objectives, with women's empowerment being explicitly stated and discussed within a development plan for the first time. As Nabulsi (2009:165) describes it, "Saudi women are the Kingdom's most powerful and emotive political football. Their situation is a benchmark of how far, fast and in what direction the Kingdom is moving". While there is a body of scholarship that explores empowerment more generally, and women's NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) generally elsewhere, little research has been carried out on the specific strategies that women's NGOs in Saudi Arabia adopt to increase activism and participation in their activities. Nowadays, NGOs are increasingly working as a "catalysts for social change" especially in promoting empowerment through their activities (Elbers *al et.* 2014:1). This thesis, therefore, explores, through an exploratory mixed-methods investigation, the strategies adopted by Saudi NGOs to promote women's empowerment. The study looks at fourteen NGOs based in the city of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, which is one of the most modern and advanced cities

in the country (Coleman, 2010; Al-Rasheed, 2013; Thomson, 2014). The complex, unique nature of this society has thus required a sensitive approach to the research to be employed by the researcher to investigate the controversial issue of women's empowerment there.

This study aimed to identify the practices and tactics that NGOs have been using in order to negotiate through conservative and patriarchal society and promote women's empowerment through their activities. The NGO strategies investigated included the use of guests and events, the media, religion, the framing of women's issues and the building of alliances. Each strategy has its own dynamics, which are explained in detail in the analysis chapters. The thesis aims to investigate women's empowerment in NGOs and is guided by the following questions:

- What are the strategies that Saudi NGOs use for women's empowerment?
- What roles do these strategies play in women's empowerment in NGOs?
- What factors influence preferences regarding the particular strategies that are adopted to promote women's empowerment in NGOs?
- To what extent are the strategies used by Saudi NGOs for empowering women effective?

This research follows a mixed methods design consisting of interviews, document analysis and a survey. Qualitative data was collected from three main sources within each selected NGO. Firstly, data was collected from official documents, including yearbooks, reports, statistical reports, brochures, and any other publications from within the NGOs. The second source of data – and the primary type of data – was generated from semi-structured interviews with female NGO managers, planners and founders. A third method – the questionnaire survey – was employed to increase the reliability of the findings and the number of responses. All these forms of data were cross-referenced in the analysis to

identify recurring themes in the responses. The interview data was categorised into codes or indicators, which were analysed qualitatively, while the survey was statistically analysed using the Statistical analysis software SPSS.

The research philosophy of this thesis is grounded within the Islamic Feminist paradigm that permeates research. Through this approach, religion has become a tool for women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia, instead of one for controlling and suppressing women. This philosophy is largely influenced by the Saudi context, which has a unique and particular way of embracing religion in a way that serves a broad range of perspectives through a wide spectrum of interpretations that includes the most conservative to the most liberal ones under the same approach. However, as this research will illustrate, Islamic Feminism challenges the perspective of Colonial Feminism regarding women's status by presenting a complex form of women's empowerment within the paradigm of Islamic Feminism.

The literature on empowerment and NGOs in other developing countries does not match the Saudi context as it focuses mostly on issues relating to poverty. However, many studies on gender and patriarchal societies were useful for developing a better understanding of the factors affecting women's rights and empowerment in Saudi Arabia. As mentioned above, the role of religion, in particular, appeared to yield insights into how women's NGOs operate in Saudi Arabia. The first step of the investigation involved selecting an appropriate context for the research study. NGOs were selected as an appropriate place to investigate women's empowerment, as the promotion of women's empowerment is represented in their objectives and activities. Montagu (2010) describes civil society in Saudi Arabia as "surprisingly under-researched and somewhat unrecognizable" (Montagu 2010:67).

The theoretical framework of the study also drew on studies that combine NGOs work and women's empowerment, such as Joachim (2003), who provides insights concerning the tactics that NGOs use to influence policy and mobilise resources in their favour. This study captures the negotiation process that NGOs undertake in their advocacy work on women's rights, and describes how they frame issues relating to such rights in order to push their agenda and gain access and support for them. It offers insights into the back stage operations of NGOs – into the different steps and processes of advocacy, and the criteria that they use to advocate and lobby for a particular issue. Although this study has not necessarily captured the practicalities of working in a specific context, it has captured the negotiations and the strategies used to influence decision making on women's empowerment issues. This research is qualitative in nature because it is based on the theoretical framework which explains NGOs mobilising structures as tools for influencing political actions through a framing process of presenting problems; offering solutions; and providing justifications for policy interventions. In fact, Joachim's study offers a detailed explanation of the dynamic nature of women's NGOs, focusing on political opportunities, the framing process and strategic plans that influence agendas regarding women's issues (Joachim, 2003). This research will use Joachim's (2003) study as a focus, along with numerous other studies (Moghadam and Senftova, 2005; Kabeer, 2005; Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2007; Paterson, 2008), including some that identify indicators of women's empowerment in NGOs in Saudi Arabia (Shalaby, 2008; Montegue, 2010; Afif, 2009). However, these studies provide different explanations and reasons for the dynamics of women's NGOs, with some focusing on the dynamics of NGOs in relation to women's empowerment in particular. In order to create an index of categories and indicators that can be used as a guideline throughout this fieldwork, the researcher combined the information

from all these sources regarding the work that NGOs carry out on women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia.

Significant studies on women's empowerment in similar contexts include Paterson's (2008) study of the role of NGOs in women's empowerment in conservative area in Baluchistan, Pakistan and Abu-Rabia-Queder's (2007) work on NGO strategies for women's activism in Palestinian Arab-Bedouin, where both capture the negotiations regarding women's empowerment in a very similar conservative context to the Saudi one. In fact, both studies were undertaken in patriarchal societies where NGO programmes have taken the local culture largely into account, and where approaches to women's empowerment were designed to work in the conservative male dominant society they were located in. Strategies such as inviting religious guests and reinterpretations of religious texts were very useful for understanding the phenomenon in this study, because they did not only capture a similar religious background, but also similar patriarchal characteristics that added to the understanding of the Saudi society (Paterson, 2008; Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2007). Also, few studies have also discussed the social context of the Arab Gulf countries, explaining the tribal patriarchal nature of the society, including Saudi Arabia (Devriese 2008, Pool 2005, Demuto 2005, Thomson 2014, Hamdan 2005, Ehteshami and Wright, 2007, Raphaeli 2005, Al-Ahmadi 2014, Metcalfe 2011 and Islam 2014) Most of these studies emphasised social development especially in employment and education.

Through the literature review, the research identified five categories of strategies that NGOs in Saudi Arabia use to pursue women's empowerment. These categories are used as themes and guidelines throughout the study. The first category concerns the use of political opportunities inside NGOs, and includes several further sub-categories. These include support from royal family members, elites and government officials, who are all influential



in adding to the prestige and legitimacy of NGOs, as well as the access they are granted; the hosting of events, conferences and forums that benefit NGOs professionally through open discussion of scientific issues in a professional manner (Joachim, 2003); cooperation with other Arab and international NGOs, which provides them with legitimacy through inviting experts, companies and observers; and the use of the media, which has an impact on public opinion and attitudes as well as on policy makers (Moghadam and Senftova, 2005; Abdullah 2008).

The second category is the use of Islamic religious influences inside women's NGOs as a strategy for empowerment. A large majority of the Saudi society is religious, and NGOs use this influence to attract the public and the state. To illustrate, Islamic texts are used to make references (e.g. verses from the Quran), and Islamic interpretations of the text are used to justify activities and to ensure that actions appear religious in order to obtain a greater acceptance of them (Paterson, 2008). In addition, NGOs often invite religious figures (male or female) to their events and lectures (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2007). Finally, philanthropic religious motives and goals are stated in the advertisement of events and fairs, as people will pay more money if it goes to a good purpose or cause.

The third category concerns the restriction of the use of gender-specific and feminist terms inside women's NGOs, such as the restricted use of explicit or implicit feminist terms in mission statements, goals, activities and speeches. The researcher is keen to explore whether gender terms are used at all within NGOs, and whether feminist terms are associated with religious terms (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2008).

The fourth category concerns how NGOs utilise available local recourses to empower women, such as through integrating participants, beneficiaries and families into the NGO activities; offering educational courses and workshops for women; showing appreciation

for traditions by encouraging local products to be produced by local women; using local volunteers, donations and materials; and using local professional academics, social workers and experts to give experience, inspiration and motivation to other women (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2007; Paterson, 2008).

The fifth and final category focuses on the public engagement of NGOs in promoting their services and activities, including the hosting of public events in shopping centres and public areas; and the use of the media by NGO through public appearances in interviews, TV programmes and on the news. This category also looks at how technologies are used by NGOs to access and distribute information to the public, via social media networks, blogs, mobile phones, email, publications, advertisements and other communication tools (Moghadam and Senftova, 2005; Cronwall and Edwards, 2010; Villeval, 2008).

## **1.1 Research Context**

Understanding the history that provides the backdrop to the current Saudi cultural context is also essential because it sets the scene within which women's reforms have been and continue to be made. In Saudi Arabia due to its patriarchal conservative nature, women have been largely absent from the public sphere, being restricted to their homes and to other informal gatherings (Catty and Rabo, 1997). The first demands that were made by and on behalf of Saudi women were for their rights to education. This began when many families in the western part of the country (known as Alhijaz) started sending their daughters to other Arab countries for education, and this was soon followed by requests for the provision of girls' schools within Saudi Arabia, with two schools for girls being approved in Jeddah in the 1960s (Hamadan, 2005). Although the number of schools approved for girls was

initially very low, this initiative was significant as it generated demands for education for girls from all around the country. However, many conservatives, including the religious authority, provided strong opposition to such demands. The government needed to carry out a number of negotiations between religious authorities and families in order to allow girls to attend schools, as many families refused to let their daughters go to school. Ultimately, girls' education became a legitimate claim to address reforms regarding women. Most importantly – as the main claim of this thesis suggests – a number of aspects of girls' education had to be culturally and religiously approved, and restrictions were implemented, such as the segregation of sexes and the requirement that consent be obtained from male guardians. In addition, up until 2001, the head of girls' education had to be a religious authority (Hamdan, 2005). Ongoing negotiations with religious authorities over what is suitable for girls' educations have taken place since, and have consequently laid the foundations on which the negotiations have taken shape. This tangible relationship between religion and women in Saudi Arabia influences most reform initiatives and proposed changes regarding women's rights, roles and statuses. However, Huband (2009) argues that, nowadays, this ideological justification that dominated the Saudi scene for years is growing less convincing in the face of the modernisation that the country is undergoing. Yet, Islam is still playing a major role in the advancement of any social progress, and for women's empowerment in particular.

Although women's welfare associations were also introduced for women in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s – along with women's education – the activities of women have remained largely hidden to the public (Devriese, 2008, Montagu 2010). Recently, however, an increasing number of NGOs have emerged that have challenged the traditional conception of women's associations within the region as being charitable only. Furthermore, globalisation – specifically through the internet and the media – has been very influential

in changing Saudi society in general and women's organisations in particular (Glosemeyer, 2004:145). In other words, education, western influences, government reforms and the internet have generated changes in the activities and appearances of women in Saudi Arabia.

However, Saudi women not only face obstacles from the state, but also from social constraints, and sometimes from their fellow women. As Abu-Khaled (2009:109) notes, the stereotypical image of women is rooted in the "collective emotional memory" of both men's and women's mind-sets. Attempts to tackle discrimination against women were addressed through the UN CEDAW, which Saudi Arabia has signed, and this has created a pressing point for the government. Although the recent reforms in Saudi Arabia have led to there being fewer constraints on women, women that work for NGOs regularly have to negotiate with state officials, the public and the community in order to carry out services within these NGOs. Understanding this negotiation process is crucial for understanding the dynamics of women's NGOs, irrespective of whether their negotiations are intentionally or unintentionally carried out by women (Devriese, 2008; Jad, 2004). While many concerns have been raised by Western countries concerning the statuses of Saudi women, many women in NGOs have utilised their positions to mobilise particular strategies to address women's issues (Dawson, 1998; Devriese, 2008; Jad, 2004, Ottaway, 2005 and Staudt, 2005). This research addresses the issues of how women in such organisations arrange their activities and resources in order to advance female empowerment and, furthermore, how they push for policies which favour women using extant religious and cultural norms. It is also very important to take into account the government's changing policy regarding their commitments towards women's empowerment issues through implementing different policies in order to integrate women into the national development plan. This change was

greatly influenced by the country's signing the Millennium Development Goals, and they are using these indicators for guiding women's empowerment (<http://www.mep.sa.gov>).

## **1.2 The study's contribution to knowledge**

This research is important because there are few studies that focus particularly on the unique context of women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia, and the current study offers an inside look into the 'women only' spaces represented by the NGOs under study. It also explores the attitudes that women in leading positions at NGOs have on women's empowerment and their visions and objectives concerning women in Saudi Arabia. The findings of the study make contributions to knowledge by bridging a gap in the literature concerning the role of women in Saudi NGOs, and offer a description of the different ways in which empowerment has been promoted and facilitated. This study also contributes to knowledge in this area by documenting the rapid social change taking place in Saudi Arabia, and witnessing this turning point for Saudi women. In addition, it offers insights into the five strategies that NGOs employ to promote women's empowerment by exploring different tactics and aims for overcoming challenges forced on women within the Saudi society.

Finally, and most significantly, this thesis has been able to detect the first attempts of activism in the Saudi society. It identifies forms of activism and recognises the first signs of mobilisation made by women in NGOs. However, the activities identified in the analysis are still primary and individual and do not reflect an 'organized' activism or mobilisation that we can generalise to the whole social and political system.

### **1.3 The structure of the thesis**

This thesis consists of ten chapters, starting with the introductory chapter which outlines the topic and the main research questions of the thesis, sketches the structure within which this question is situated, and describes the significance of the study and presents the major literature that helped shaping this thesis. The second chapter then provides background information about Saudi Arabia, which also sheds light on the historical and cultural context of the thesis. This chapter is essential for understanding the topic and the methods being used, and lays the foundations on which all the strategies that are investigated depend. It also talks about women's status in Saudi Arabia, and their progress in the fields of work and education, as well as their roles and statuses within NGOs.

After that are the literature review which is split into two chapters, chapter three talks about NGOs in general and its relation to the civil society. It also talks about women's NGOs and Saudi NGOs in particular. In addition, it also presents the major barriers facing NGOs in Saudi Arabia. Chapter four is more specific in content, it talk about NGOs and its link to women's empowerment. It is also discusses the main five strategies this thesis is investigating including guests and events, building alliances, the media, religion and framing women's issues. Presenting the main literature about each strategies and explains in general its role in NGOs as an empowerment strategies.

The methodology chapter comes next, and consists of an explanation of the data collection methods, the types of data sought and the data analysis process. The methodology chapter is also important for establishing the validity and credibility of the study, as it provides detailed information about the data collected in every process during the thesis. The fourth chapter is the literature review, which looks at previous research conducted on the topic, and explains how this literature is relevant to the current study. It also presents some of the

contemporary studies that have been undertaken in similar contexts, and provides insights about the cultural aspects of the topic studied.

The data analysis then takes place over five chapters, which analyse each of the five strategies being investigated in the thesis. Chapter five concerns guests and events, and explains how the use of guests and events in NGOs works as a strategy for women's empowerment. It consists of two sections – one on guests and the other on events – and each discusses different kinds of guests and events and how certain different types serve the particular targets of these NGOs.

Chapter six concerns the building of alliances, and provides a discussion of different kinds of cooperation between NGOs and other organisations. This chapter also offers a description of the different resources that NGOs use to develop cooperative relationships with other organisation or institutions. Also of importance here are NGOs' relationships with the government, and the ways in which they cooperate with it.

Chapter seven concerns NGOs' use of the media, and begins by outlining the different kinds of media they use, and the role that these different kinds play in promoting women's empowerment. A further discussion of social media and how it has dramatically contributed to social change in Saudi Arabia is then provided in relation to NGOs in particular.

Chapter eight concerns religion, and provides insights into the major role that religion is adopted to play by NGOs, and that it plays in Saudi society more generally. A further discussion is also provided concerning the ways in which NGOs employ religion to gain credibility and influence people.

The last analysis chapter (Chapter nine) then looks at the framing of women's issues, and discusses the use of feminist discourse and the selection mechanisms employed by NGOs

to frame issues in their favour whilst also avoiding hostility. Another section here looks at women's relationships with men in NGOs, and explains the dynamics of this relationship. This chapter also talks about the recent changes that have occurred for women in Saudi Arabia, as well as the limitations to women's empowerment there.

Finally, chapter ten provides the conclusions of the research and summarises the thesis by offering an extensive discussion of all five strategies used by NGOs for women's empowerment. It shows how these five strategies work together to achieve the goal of empowerment, looking at the ways in which they link and intersect. The discussion also reflects on the broader negotiation process that is taking place in Saudi society on issues regarding women's status and rights, and inside NGOs in particular.



## **Chapter Two: The Historical and Social Context of the Study**

In Saudi Arabia, social change affects all aspects of life, including women's positions and statuses. Historical, political and social dimensions are essential to the understanding of on-going social change in Saudi Arabia (Thomson, 2014). It is important to consider the distinct character of the country in order to appreciate the cultural differences that exist within the various regions of Saudi Arabia, because such differences are pronounced and critical for studying social change. Currently, with the reform initiatives taking place within the country and because of the demands of globalisation, it is impossible to avoid the social changes that have been observed by society (Metcalf 2008). Women, now, contribute to Saudi society at many professional levels, yet they still face daily cultural restrictions (Demuto, 2005; Coleman, 2010). Moreover, changes regarding women are considered by many in Saudi Arabia to be the result of modernity projects led by Westerners (Karam and Afioni, 2014). Shaw (2006:41) described this as a "feeling of erosion of important values within an ancient culture thrown on the defensive", and noted that the majority of research conducted in Saudi Arabia has focused on issues surrounding oil and economics. Little research has been conducted on cultural and social issues by Western academics, and more attention is needed from researchers to understand these social changes.

The Human Rights Watch Report (September, 2010:1) notes that a number of changes have taken place for women, including a "loosening [of] the rigid segregation between men and women in public places reflecting changes in social attitudes". However, the report also highlights the continuing violations of women's rights that are taking place, including the

poor efforts by the government to combat domestic violence, and their limited legislative attempts to establish equal rights. The issues concerning women are centrally those with religious and social aspects, but are not reinforced through political changes in the Saudi society. This chapter will discuss the historical context of social change in Saudi Arabia by identifying the factors that have influenced change and the extent to which social change has affected different areas of society. It will also shed light on the status of women in Saudi Arabia, and their presence in major areas of social life, including in education, employment, legislation and civil society organisations.

## **2.1 The historical and cultural context**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932, and the country covers most of the Arabian Peninsula. Its establishment led to its people being transformed from being members of independent unsettled tribes to being under an “autocratic monarchy” (Pool, 2005:295). With the unification with the western region known as Alhijaz, and the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina, the country came to be held in great respect by Muslims, with the government relying on pilgrims as a main source of income (Pool, 2005). In 1936 the discovery of oil in the East brought a massive resource of opportunities to the country. During the oil boom in 1970, oil production doubled, and wealth poured into the country (Pool, 2005). It was at this time that major development plans took shape to ensure that resources were appropriately used to meet the country’s needs. However, its dependency on oil made the country vulnerable in many ways – that is, despite the oil still being considered to be advantageous to the country, the oil influence was not without some consequences that may not be desirable for its citizens. As Pool (2005) argues, the renting of oil fields in return for income had certain political and social consequences for the

country. For example, the government does not tax its citizens, and welfare, health and education are free. In return, the citizens do not make claims on the government (Pool, 2005: 291; Shaw, 2005).

According to Thomson (2014), Saudi Arabia's sources of legitimacy are religious and socio-traditional ones that represent the religious and tribal elites from whom the government seeks its support and constituency. Saudi society is a patriarchal one, in which Islam is the dominant ideology, but kinship and tribalism remains a main feature of this society (Thomson, 2014). The social structure in Saudi society, as Al-Rumaihi (2008:224) has explained, relies largely on the tribe and the extended family, which can become, at times, a challenge in the face of "modern democratic values". This is also noted by Maisel (2013), who argues that tribal influences are considered to be "an obstacle in the development of a modern society" (Maisel, 2013:285). He adds that despite efforts to exclude the concept of the tribe from the process of national building in Saudi Arabia, tribal practices are still obvious in many forms of public life (Maisel, 2013). The tribe continues to play a major role in Saudi life, and regularly contributes directly to the decision-making, as the tribal leader and man of the family are in charge of their affairs. This tribal structure based on hierarchal system of male dominance which gives more power and privilege to males over females (Willoughby, 2011). However, the progress of female in the society is heavily stressed the supportive role of their extended family as many of successful women had their family support in their lives (Welsh *et. al.*, 2014).

Historically, the elite tribes also had control over civil society, and any reforms had to be made from the top-down (Ehteshami and Wright, 2007). Moreover, the ruling tribal leaders in the Arabian Peninsula used to have well-established power and authority in the region, and developed regional support from them to maintain their positions (Ehteshami and

Wright, 2007). Therefore, civil society changes would not be implemented unless the leaders choose to do so. In protecting its position against possible challenges, civil society had the power to introduce changes, but lacked the power to implement alterations to political agendas. In other words, political constraints on civil society organisations limited their ability to produce effective reforms or enhance social mobility (Ehteshami and Wright, 2007:915).

More recently, the reform in oil monarchies (in the Persian Gulf) was introduced to serve certain agendas. This reform was driven by internal and external pressures for civil society to have a greater role within these countries, especially given ‘the wider effect of globalisation’. These agendas include the aims of these countries’ leaders to achieve greater legitimacy (Ehteshami and Wright, 2007:916). From the beginning of his reign in 2005, King Abdullah initiated major reform plans across his government, and the changing demands of globalisation increased the country’s readiness for such reforms. Despite the King’s efforts to promote reforms, the conservative religious leaders (ulama) continue to exert their influence in inhibiting them. As Hamilton (2010:3) argued that reform in the ‘conservative kingdom’ involves negotiations between conservative and liberal reformers in which both parties seek to legitimise their claims or ‘agendas’ in terms of Shari’ah laws (Al-Rasheed, 2013:17). Pool (2005:290) also notes that the government of Saudi Arabia has been struggling to maintain the balance between “liberal-reformist and Islamic orthodox [groups]”, which emerged as a result of the changes in the civil society. Ultimately, for these reforms to be successful, they have to be facilitated through the ‘Islamic framework’, as this dominant ideology is the key to any initiated change (Thomson, 2014:25).

As explained above, the tribal patriarchal nature of the society determines the kind of reforms and changes are accepted and welcomed. With rapid changes around the world, Saudi Arabia found itself at the middle of this speeding change caught between embracing change while maintaining identity. It is critical to understand the adding dimension to the Saudi mentality where explaining behaviours and attitudes from the point of view of religion is not adequate, the tribal and patriarchal nature is more dominant and it gained more powers with the support of religious justification. The patriarchal nature is not only about the male dominance system it is about hierarchical system that works from top to bottom, from the eldest to the youngest, from elites to the ordinary and from males to females.

## **2.2 Factors associated with social change**

As mentioned in the previous section, many interrelated factors influence social change, some coming from outside the country, and some from within. Saudi society is transforming at every level, and the rooted cultural values that have dominated for so long have recently been shaken (Al-Dakhil, 2009:59). Change is occurring in Saudi Arabia, “in a diverse manner and at varying speed” and, in order to study this change, it is important to understand the socio-political context as well as the different external and internal issues that issue it in (Ehteshami and Wright, 2007:914).

Each factor has brought a new wave of change. Firstly, as already noted, the oil boom in the mid-1970s was one of the main causes of social change in Saudi Arabia. With the support of rapid development plans, Saudi Arabia experienced a leap into modernity, and this period brought substantial economic, social, educational, and infrastructural changes

(Fakhro, 2005). Another factor contributing to change was the Gulf War in 1990, which brought with it a growing political awareness and openness to other nations (Hamdan, 2005). According to Ehteshami and Wright (2007:913), the Gulf War not only brought an “economic burden on the oil-rich monarchies, but also fostered a new spirit of political activism within the civil society across the region”. More specifically, the Western presence in Saudi Arabia generated voices calling for change from both the traditional conservatives and the liberals there.

The tragic attacks of September 11, 2001 had a significant impact on social change globally, and in Saudi Arabia in particular. The Saudi government became aware of the urgent need to implement political, social, cultural and economic reforms (Raphaeli, 2005:517). A great amount of attention was directed at the country, and external pressures for reform were imposed on Saudi Arabia’s government by the United States. In addition, growing numbers of reformists from both liberal and conservative sides also began demanding reforms (Ehteshami and Wright, 2007; Raphaeli, 2007). Consequently, the Saudi government took immediate action within the country and planned other changes to take place following 2001. Some of these changes were publically announced and took place immediately after 9/11, including the regulation and monitoring of religious speeches in mosques, which required more moderate speeches to be made, promoted the moderate version of Islam and denounced the extremist way of thinking (Raphaeli, 2005; Thomson, 2014). In addition, charity organisations were regulated and supervised by the Ministry of Social Affairs. For example, the Ministry banned the collection of unauthorised public money for charitable reasons (Montegue, 2011). In education, the curriculums and religious matters were immediately edited to remove any content that was extreme or hostile (to the West). As Hamdan (2006:56) states, “the events of 9/11 brought to light again and more

powerfully than ever before the issue of women's rights in Saudi society". She also argues that, in the aftermath of 9/11, the Saudi religious education system, and the Saudi educational system in general received a lot of criticism.

Domestically, the government has also faced violence from extremist groups within the country. These groups have planned terrorist attacks inside Saudi Arabia and have used violence as a tool against the 'non-believers', including other Westernised Saudis (Raphaeli, 2005). Haynes (2005) explains that all religions have fundamentalist groups that develop concerns about social and political issues in their communities by focusing on the fear that 'secular forces' are threatening their ways of life. Only a small number of attacks have been observed inside Saudi Arabia, although many more have been planned but discovered and disabled by Saudi officials. Therefore, the problem is complex, and in addition to the security issues that these groups raise, the government is also concerned by the ideology they promote and the effect they have on the younger generation, as this will have a direct impact on youth groups and may lead to extremist thinking amongst them (Haynes, 2005:94). In addition, as a result, the authority of the religious police was weakened by the government soon after 9/11 (Hamdan, 2006; Raphaeli, 2005).

In an attempt to tackle extremist thinking, the Saudi government established the National Dialogue in 2003, in which debates over issues concerning citizens are hosted through a series of annual and semi-annual meetings that address urgent problems or issues facing the country (Thomson, 2014, El-Fassi 2014). Issues that were previously considered as taboo subjects are now being discussed publicly through the National Dialogue, for example, the third National Dialogue was entitled 'The Rights of Women' (Nonneman, 2008; Thomson, 2014; Raphaeli, 2005; El-Fassi 2014), which was established principally to address the terrorist problem in a public forum. The king addressed this issue using the

media, providing extremists with criminal records with a chance to give themselves up and come back to a moderate way of thinking. Nonetheless, all the reforms initiatives under the National Dialogue still have to be made from within the Islamic framework, which is the frame used for any attempt to make social changes (Coleman, 2010; Thomson, 2014).

The National Dialogue's aim to bring citizens together to debate important social and development issues, such as education, work, women's rights, unemployment and extremist thinking attracted appreciation and acceptance from the public. The National Dialogue also allows women to participate in its discussions. Although it does not allow them to be in the same room as the men, they discuss their issues and their comments are publicly announced in the meetings. This constitutes a new way in which women's views are integrated into the public discussion of issues of concern to all citizens. Numerous studies about Saudi Arabia have referred to the National Dialogue as a main channel between the government and its citizens (Hamilton, 2010; Le Renard, 200; Montague, 2011; Thomson, 2014 and Human Right Watch, 2010). However, National Dialogue still remains largely as an expressive tool but also has become a legitimate channel for citizen to express their critique on areas of concern.

The media has played an essential role in social change in Saudi Arabia. The voice of reform comes from educated Saudi people who are pushing for changes to be implemented in different areas in the country, and the media is therefore their main tool for enforcing and influencing internal change. Hamdan (2006) argues that the press has been granted more freedom than it had previously, with Saudi columnists being increasingly able to criticise the performance of the public sector. This, according to Hamnad (2006), is a "great relief for both men and women who have long felt deprived of freedom of speech. Both women and men are hopeful for signs of slow but steady change occurring in the country."



Human Rights Watch (2010) also agrees that a growing number of Saudi activists are discussing issues on the internet and advocating changes.

Newspapers, satellite television channels and the internet are among the most influential parts of the media domain in Saudi Arabia. According to Kashoggi (2005), the editing of the Saudi newspapers is mainly supervised by the Ministry of Information. However, in reality (and in legal terms), newspapers are wholly owned by the private sector. Kashoggi argues that newspapers are commercially driven and intent on attracting larger audiences through more daring coverage, and recently Saudi newspapers have presented certain cases and specific problems that directly impact on public policy. Satellite television channels were first introduced to the Saudi public in 1991, during the Kuwait War – in which Saudi Arabia was involved. CNN and MBC were among the first channels to cover news on the war (Kashoggi, 2005), and gradually satellite TV became part of almost every household in the country. The internet was introduced into Saudi Arabia in 1996 and, over the last decade, this new form of information provider has brought major changes there, leading to broader perspectives being seen in public opinion and on local and international affairs. Recently, conservatives and reformists have also used the internet to disseminate information about their groups (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, Saudi Arabia initiated a number of reforms prior to 9/11. However, these reforms were better facilitated and implemented after Abdullah became king in 2005, as he initiated reforms inside Saudi Arabia to compliment the actions he had already taken as Crown Prince (Thomson, 2014). The reforms, as the Human Rights Watch (2010:1) mentions, included four major areas: “women’s rights, freedom of expression, judicial fairness and religious tolerance”. To improve political participation, the government

launched the first municipal elections in 2005, which drew international attention, with half of the 12,000 seats being elected ones in 178 municipal councils (Nonneman, 2008).

## **2.4 Women's status in Saudi Arabia**

A large portion of the recent political, economic and social reforms in Saudi Arabia have concerned women (Islam, 2014). Saudi women have unique and complex characteristics, and therefore any analysis of the status of women in Saudi Arabia must consider the fact that certain measures cannot be found elsewhere. As Coleman notes, the status of women in Saudi Arabia has many contrasts, as there are many highly distinguished women in professions. However, they “enjoy fewer legal rights than any other women in any country in the world” (Coleman, 2010:205). However, despite the many restrictions that Saudi women face, many of the reform efforts have been directed towards them, and Saudi women have proven their determination by standing at the “forefront of social and economic change” (Coleman, 2010:205).

Some of the gender empowerment measures in developing countries do not generate accurate results when applied to Saudi women. For instance, economic and educational measures do not reflect a context-appropriate understanding of issues that are relevant to equal status for women in Saudi Arabia. These cultural indicators, despite being imperfect cross-context measuring tools, would nonetheless appear to represent the best available ones for assessing the equality of women in Saudi Arabia (Moghadam and Senftova, 2005). An important development for women in Saudi Arabia took place in the year 2000 when the government ratified the United Nations' Convention of Eliminating Discrimination against Women, known as (CEDAW). Although it also included restrictions in some sections, this still generated a lot of objections from conservatives and academics (Demuto,

2005:261; Islam, 2014; Metcalfe, 2011). This development has brought systematic change in government's policy towards women's issues in order to comply with its article.

Despite the government making this crucial step, Karam and Afioni (2014) argue that numerous reports show that Saudi women are still suffering from restrictions resulting from "patriarchal biases embedded within cultural, religious and legislative tradition" (Karam and Afioni, 2014:506). As Matcalfe would put it, "cultural practices [still] inhibit women's participation", as deeply embedded practices impact on women's effective involvement in society (Matcalfe, 2011:133). In addition, for many conservatives, this convention is a Western model, and as Al-Sarrani and Alghamdi (2014) argue, not only is Western feminism not suitable for explaining gender issues in Saudi Arabia, but it has also triggered a great deal of suspicion about applying Western models within the Saudi society. For instance, according to Hamdan (2005), the Council of conservative religious scholars wanted to withdraw from the United Nation's conference on population and development in Cairo in 1994 due to what they considered to be violations of Islamic beliefs contained in the proposals it was making, such as promoting the use of birth control and abortion.

As noted, women in Saudi Arabia are at the centre of the conflict between the conservative and progressive interpretations of what is written about women in the Qur'an. As expected, any reforms regarding women face religious conservative opposition. As Doumato (1999) argues, the conservatives have constructed an image of an 'Ideal women' that is based on their traditionally assigned role of bringing up children and looking after the home. She explains that although this ideology has been constructed by conservative religious scholars, it has also been stressed by the state and incorporated into public policy. This outlook has been at the core of the state's dedication to protect Islamic morality and values under the male guardianship norm (Doumato, 1999:187).

The approach to women's issues in Saudi Arabia is strongly associated with Islamic discourse and, in fact, using Islamic discourse to address women's issues has a more effective impact than addressing them without the use of Islamic justifications has. Islamic feminism provides a means through which women can use Islam to justify progress, eliminate discrimination and claim their rights from within Islamic teaching. This philosophy is also based on the conception that many Muslim women have about Islam itself being just towards women, and their beliefs that all practices against women are grounded in interpretations of Islam that have been distorted by cultural and social realities. However, Islamic Feminism is an approach that has many different aspects and permits of numerous interpretations, depending on the contexts in which feminists are working. Interestingly, in Saudi Arabia, the term 'Islamic Feminism' is not fully embraced and used, even though its values and ideology are practised. That is, regardless of the label, women in Saudi Arabia have been either intentionally or unintentionally using Islamic discourse to justify social progress in society. Moreover, like with the widespread rejection of Western Feminism, whilst Islamic Feminism is practised, the term is not welcomed, as it is often associated with the West (El-Saadi, 2014; Grami, 2014). Whether to use the term 'Islamic Feminism' or not is a sensitive issue in Saudi Arabia, and creates confusion and uncertainty.

Feminism, as an approach developed by women in the West to claim equality, has been used globally through the most appropriate and effective means. Muslim women are keen to adopt a similar approach, but one that incorporates Islam, as they are convinced of the justice of Islam. As Anwar (2014) argues, it is possible to find liberation within the framework of Islam, and Muslim women are increasingly demanding justice and the elimination of discriminatory practices in the name of Islam through critically studying and

interpreting the Qur'an and fiqh (Anwar, 2014). Davids (2015) cites Badran's (2009) argument about Islamic feminism being a "fundamental alteration towards an egalitarian Islam, which in fact makes it distinctly different from secular feminism". According to Badran, Islamic feminism comprises an interpretation of Islam and gender using 'ijtihad' [independent analysis] of the Qur'an and religious texts (Davids, 2015:313). Islamic feminism critically examines the Qur'an, the Sunnah, Al hadith [the saying and acts of Prophet Muhammad] and the fiqh [jurisprudence]. However, the dilemma facing this approach is that Muslim women continue to be marginalised due to the fact that the public space is 'predominantly' defined by male interpretations of Islam (Davids, 2015:314). Islamic feminism represents a threat to the privilege that many men enjoy in patriarchal societies. Moreover, many women oppose it because it calls for a change in gender roles in society (Grami, 2014:325).

Although the label of Islamic Feminism, with all of its connotations, is not viewed positively in Saudi Arabia, its approach and its values are nonetheless used in every claim for women's rights there. According to Fakhro (2005), Saudi Arabia is a country with deeply constructed traditions and norms that are intertwined with every aspect of a person's life. These traditions date back to before the rise of Islam. As a religion, Islam praises good values and norms, and encourages behaviours that fit with them, while banning and discouraging other practices. Some of these concern the status of women. In the Arabian culture, women were considered to be part of the 'household things' and it was only later that Islam gave them rights, which are explicitly stated in the Quran. During the earlier Islamic period, women were pioneers in several fields, but many Arabs considered them to be weaker human beings in need of the protection of men (Fakhro, 2005). Arabian society has, for centuries – before the existence of Saudi Arabia as a country – been dominantly

patriarchal. Men are dominant in public life, while women mostly remain inside their homes or in female-only places.

Traditionally, women's roles and statuses in Arab-Bedouin cultures were well-defined, being related to their belonging to an elite family or tribe, then, after marriage, to their ability to bear children, especially boys, as this would add to their status within their families (Abou-Rabia-Queder, 2007). With the sudden discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia, however, major changes occurred that affected the whole social structure. Bedouin tribes were encouraged to settle in large Bedouin settlements, which led to a complete change in lifestyle. After the oil boom in the 1970s, there was a vast increase in the country's resources and people's incomes, with educational and employment opportunities also increasing significantly. Education came to be seen as favourable for both men and women, and educational opportunities thus became widely available for women (Fakhro, 2005). Nevertheless, Fakhro (2005) also argues that many women did not consider work to be an essential step following their educations because they had financial security with the increasing incomes that men were bringing in.

In terms of roles, men are seen as the providers for their families in Saudi Arabia, while women take care of domestic duties and the bringing up the children. Protecting his family's honour is part of an Arabian man's duty or a male guardian's principle (Doumato, 1999). However, because men are responsible for providing for their families, this has created a tendency for Saudi women to be completely dependent on male support, not only financially but also with regards to other conduct outside their home. This has created a lack of desire among women to acquire knowledge about their own rights and laws. In some cases, when a woman deals with real life challenges or loses her male guardian's support, she develops an independent life and acquires more knowledge concerning her

legal rights. In addition, education has brought awareness and ambition to younger female generations, whose members often desire to be more independent. However, women who are more independent face greater challenges and constraints than average Saudi women do (Fakhro, 2005; Welsh *et. al.*, 2014).

These cultural conceptions are rooted in male and female behaviours and thoughts (Abu-Kaled, 2014). Specifically, Saudi women have not only adopted these cultural behaviours, but regularly enforce them, with women influencing their sons' attitudes and behaviours towards their own sisters. Moreover, women are often cautious in dealing with their own male relatives and spouses. For example, some women go to work while their husbands are at work, but come back to prepare lunch for them. Moreover, many working women do not ask for help from men to do the housework chores, instead hiring help for the house (Fakhro.2005). However, Fakhro (2005) argues that working women face additional psychological and physical burdens in undertaking both the responsibilities of the home and work, and suggests the importance of revising policies regarding working women in order to suit their new living conditions and their growing share of the workload in the labour market.

The concept of sex segregation has also played an important role in women's statuses. The principle of sex segregation has been adopted by society as a public policy, and is even seen favourably by many women, who prefer to enjoy freedom in "women only" places. According to Le Renard (2008:614), sex segregation started in educational institutes under the influence of "official ulama" who introduced and "institutionalized the concept" in order to offer "legitimate public spaces for women", and this idea of segregation gradually extended throughout the country. In her study on sex segregation in Saudi Arabia, Le Renard (2008:615) argues that the concept has been "re-invented" by women in the

country. She contends that although sex segregation is often seen as a sign of the “repression” of women, women have also successfully used this concept to create their own social category in Saudi Arabia, and to distinguish themselves from the rest of the population.

Women in Saudi Arabia are the main subject of the ongoing discussion about reform, and there has been noticeable progress in relation to female participation. Interestingly, the Human Development Report (2009) noted that Saudi Arabia is ranked as a highly developed country based on the income of individuals. However, in the same report, Saudi Arabia ranks 106 out of 109 countries on the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), which indicates whether women take an active part in economic and political life. This shows that, in spite of the obvious social changes, women still need to play more effective and active roles in the development process in Saudi Arabia (Human Development report, 2009). In 2004, three female academics were appointed to the Mujlis Al-Shura (consultative council) as advisors on women’s and family issues (Doumato, 2005:268), and The Human Rights Watch (2010) refers to the symbolic gesture by King Abdullah, who posed for a photograph with 35 female participants of the National Dialogue. Le Renard (2008:617) argues that familial and societal roles and the participation of women in Saudi society is no longer a “taboo” subject in Saudi Arabia, and this issue has been discussed widely and publicly by government officials, ulama personalities and male and female intellectuals. Only as far back as 2004, the National Dialogue on Women was considered to be the first public discussion of women’s issues in Saudi Arabia, and many Saudi women regard this dialogue as representing a major step forward (Le Renard, 2008:617). At the beginning of 2013, thirty Saudi women were appointed to the Shura Council, and now represent 20% of its members. This decision by King Abdullah was historic, because Saudi



women were previously excluded from the political scene in Saudi Arabia. The importance of this step is also seen in relation to the role of this governmental body, which discusses laws and legislation and offers consultations for the king and the government (<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2013/01/11/259877.html>). Hatem (2014:12) argues that by appointing women in visible public positions the government “controls gender agenda” and improving their reputation internationally. However, women still face many obstacles that prevent them from fully participating in the social development of the country, including a lack motivation; a lack of information (many women simply do not know about their legal rights); and the cultural and social constraints that their families and public policies place upon them.

### **2.4.1 Education**

Education is a qualification that helps to determine the status of women. Being educated equates to a higher status, being highly valued by society (Fakhro, 2005). One of the first frames introduced to approach women’s empowerment issues was education, as it is considered to provide a gateway for women’s achievements (Metcalf, 2011). In 1956, a proposal for a private girls school was introduced to King Faisal by Saddikh Sharafalden, who was supported by her father-in-law, known for his passion for education. The permission was issued and six months later Iffat Al Thunayan – King Faisal’s wife – opened Dar Al Hanan Private School for Girls in Jeddah. At this time, in his attempt to legitimise his education reforms for girls, King Faisal managed to convince the opposing religious leaders of the importance of education in general, and the importance of education for girls in particular from a religious point of view (Coleman, 2010; Islam, 2014; El-Fassi 2014). Before formal schools were opened, many families sent their children to schools in

neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan (Hamdan, 2005). In 1960, the General Directorate for Female Education was established under the supervision of a commission of senior religious scholars, and the number of public schools rose from 15 primary schools in 1960 to 34 women's educational administrations and 150 regional educational institutions in 1999 (Fakhro, 2005). In 2003, the General Directorate for Female Education was separated from the commission of religious scholars, and a new female minister is now the director. In 2009, Nora Alfayez was appointed as the government minister for girls' education (Islam, 2014).

In 1967, the Faculty of Economics opened the first women's campus in King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah, and a School of Medicine was opened in 1975. In 1979, the first campus for women in Al-Riyadh was opened at King Saud University (Hamdan, 2005). The government encouraged university attendance by providing (male and female) students with a monthly allowance. Only a limited number of universities have female campuses, and these are for subjects including art and humanities, business and management, and medicine and science. A number of subject areas have remained restricted to men, including engineering, law and journalism. This division of university education provision between men and women was undertaken in direct relation to employment, based on society's perceptions of women's jobs and where it would be appropriate for them to work (Bosbait and Wilson, 2005).

After a number of years at public universities, some girls have chosen to study abroad to receive better educations in their desired subjects. As a result, many families began sending their daughters overseas for their degrees in the previous decade. To address the growing concerns of families who prefer to keep their daughters close, new proposals for private colleges for girls were made, and the government approved the first two of these in 1999

and 2000 in Jeddah (Hamdan, 2005). These colleges attracted upper class girls through providing academic majors that were not offered in public universities, and which had a very high standard of education, based on American curriculums. In other words, these private colleges are American colleges in term of the language in which courses are studied (English), their atmospheres, administration and curriculum choices. Engineering, special education, law, graphics and interior design are among the academic professions that have been offered in these private colleges (Coleman, 2010).

In order to improve the qualifications and skills of university graduates, the Ministry of Higher Education provided numerous scholarships for both men and women for higher degrees abroad (Islam, 2014). This governmental policy has two reasons underpinning it: firstly, most of these students return highly educated and more open to other experiences and cultures; and, secondly, the government hopes that by being generous to these students, their gratitude will eventually bring them back to Saudi Arabia, and with visions for change. Another critical step involved the establishment of King Abdullah University for Science and Technology (KAUST) in 2009 (Al-Rasheed, 2013). This university is one of a kind, offering a very high standard for Saudi Arabia. It provides not only educational opportunities, but also a new social environment, being the first mixed campus in the country (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Coleman, 2010). The King supervised its construction and has rejected criticisms from religious figures concerning its mixed environment. Education for women has been and still is a gateway for many initiatives regarding women, and provides a legitimate arena within or through which the discourse of women's empowerment can be raised (El-Fassi, 2014). The ongoing claims about the importance of education provide the government's ticket for promoting women's empowerment through schools and

universities, both inside Saudi Arabia and through their scholarship programme for studying abroad.

### **2.4.2 Work and employment**

Whilst the previous section discussed education for women, this section is concerned with the second step after education –paid employment – and this has also become an increasingly the centre of reforms (Metcalf 2011). Women began to work in Saudi Arabia at the same time that education was introduced for girls (Demuto, 2005). Like education, employment has become a legitimate area for women to develop and participate. This was no coincidence, as among the first jobs for women in Saudi Arabia were as teachers in the girls' schools that opened, as these required female teachers. After the oil boom in the 1970s, growing educational and employment opportunities allowed for work for both sexes (Demuto, 2005). According to Fakhro (2005), women first joined the labour force as teachers and social workers, before entering the main fields of employment at a later stage. The number of female school teachers has grown significantly, from 5,000 in 1970 to 200,000 in 2001 (Fakhro, 2005:394). One of the most important issues regarding work and employment has been that women are still viewed by society as being the main caregivers for children and as holding the sole responsibility for household matters (Karam and Afiouni, 2014:511). The majority of working women have to balance their family and work responsibilities, and the vast majority have domestic maids to help them maintain the household and children. In addition, extended family members, especially grandmothers, help to monitor and care for young children. However, the use of domestic labour in Saudi households has other consequences, such as that many working mothers rely on maids to take care of their children most of the time (Fakhro, 2005).

However, as mentioned earlier, employment for women was restricted to only a few jobs. In addition, Al-Rasheed (2013) notes that the major transformations in social and economic levels resulted from the oil boom, and that these transformations affected Saudi society. Fakhro (2005:401) argues that the number of women that have joined the labour force has had a large impact on the structure of the family, and that this has led to a rise in the concept of partnerships between men and women in the decision making process. Recently, women have become more visible in public life, which has led to many debates, with reformists backing the participation of women, but conservatives considering these steps to represent a threat to their authority and traditions (Al-Rasheed, 2013).

One of the main focuses within the current development plan addresses unemployment among recent male and female graduates. This number is increasing as large numbers graduate each year (Fakhro, 2005:404). Minimising the reliance on foreign labour was one of the main strategies adopted by the government through the call for “Saudiasation” – a strategy that aimed to replace foreign labour with Saudi labour in both the private and public sectors. The Ministry of Labour imposed regulations and legislation on Saudi labour in the private sector to encourage private cooperation and more jobs for Saudi men and women. Shalaby (2008) explains that the government, through its Saudiasation plan, is struggling with the dilemma of employing cheaper efficient foreign labourers on the one hand, and creating jobs for its own citizens on the other.

The government’s tendency to promote women’s employment is obvious from the different laws that have been issued by the Ministry of Labour. According to Nazer (2009:160), the Council of Ministers “adopted a nine-point program that aims to increase the role of women in workplace” in 2005. The Ministry has encouraged female employment in both female sectors, and has received general cooperation for this issue. The concept of sex segregation

has been weakened by the introduction of a new law that permits companies to hire Saudi females within their companies. In particular, the Ministry has offered cash incentives for companies that hire Saudi females inside all-male companies. New small private businesses and projects are also starting to emerge and take shape. These businesses, planned and owned by young ambitious women, have taken advantage of the recent support from the government (Nazer, 2009). It is also important to note the role of family support, which plays a major part in Saudi life. In fact, most families are supportive of women's educations and work, although there are a few more constraints on women's employment than on education. However, family support varies on this matter, between being highly supportive and very strict and restrictive (Welsh et al., 2014).

In 2012, the Ministry of Labour issued three laws regarding women's work that relate to hiring women in lingerie shops, as cashiers and in children's play parks. After years of employing foreign male workers in these jobs, women will now be employed in these roles instead. It is interesting to note that these laws were issued as a result of campaigns by businesswomen, who were the main force behind the government's decision (<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/07/18/227045.html>). This was followed by two pieces of legislation in 2014, one of which made 'working from home' jobs official, and another that provided arrangements regarding nursing mothers (<http://twasul.info/118325/>). The Ministry of Labour has responded well to calls from businesswomen and other NGOs regarding women's work, and these laws were officially applied to the workplace, with a resultant increase in women's employment in retail shops that were previously dominated by men.

### **2.3 Women and legislation**

As an Islamic country, Saudi Arabia is strictly governed by Islamic law (Shari'ah), which directs all aspects of life, and includes the Personal Status Law. The Personal Status Law deals with issues of marriage, divorce, guardianship and the custody of children. However, judges are able to make decisions according to their interpretation of this law (Hamdan, 2005). According to Demuto (2005), women face many more legal restrictions in courts than men. The Criminal Law also has an effect on women's rights in Saudi Arabia, remaining unsuitable for the new positions and roles occupied by working women, including provision for dealing with sexual harassment, kidnapping and rape. According to Al-Awadhi (2005), the Criminal Laws tend to mitigate the punishment inflicted upon men who commit so-called "crimes of honour" (husbands, fathers and brothers), despite the fact that such crimes deprive women of their fundamental right to life due to mere suspicion or social reasons" (Al-Awadhi, 2005:435).

The legal system also discriminates against women by preventing their Saudi nationality from being passed to their children when they marry non-Saudis (Demuto, 2005). This creates difficulties for many women, but due to the patriarchal nature of the society, laws remain very rigid. By not being treated as Saudis, the children of Saudi mothers and foreign fathers could be prevented from accessing social services. However, sons will be given Saudi nationality at the age of 18, while daughters will *never* acquire Saudi nationality. Conversely, the law gives Saudi nationality to non-Saudi woman who marry Saudi men within five years of marriage. The judicial system reforms, however, have begun by passing new laws to restructure the system, focusing on creating independent courts and providing training for judges (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, the other area that has witnessed a lot of mobilisation regarding legislation is women's employment. The Ministry of Labour has been active in responding to advocacy demands regarding women's employment, and also in making sure that these laws are actively enforced through their follow-up and monitoring system (Metcalf, 2011). In addition, some of the obstacles that were preventing women from work were phased out through legislation, such as the requirement to have a man representing any business woman (<http://www.alarabiya.net/articals/2011/10/03/169890.html>). Legislation regarding women is still undergoing a lot of changes, with NGOs mobilising further improvements, such as the recent involvement and participation of women in the legislative body (*Majlis Alshoura*). Daily news items report that new laws are being issued, while existing laws are being adjusted and removed.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

As more and more social changes occur, issues concerning women and women's rights have become a paramount focus in Saudi Arabia, being regularly discussed in public. It is noticeable that many of these changes have occurred since 2005 – that is, after King Abdullah's reign began. It is interesting to observe social changes and how different people preserve tradition in accordance with their personalities and their perspectives on change itself. The researcher feels that Saudi Arabia is now more ready than ever to implement changes in social policies regarding women. The gradual development of such readiness will be essential for preparing people for the coming changes.



In discussing issues relating to women's empowerment, if one adopts a Western point of view, it may appear that women in Saudi Arabia are suppressed or weak (Coleman, 2010). Moreover, one could argue that some women fail to demand their own rights. However, many women are now developing new and more robust outlooks and history is changing, even while this research is being conducted. The literature review undertaken here showed that some Saudi women have acquired certain rights through official institutes or women's organisations. It is worth noting that they tend to express their ideas and claim their rights through legitimatising their arguments by using shari'ha language and appealing to Islamic laws. These (and other issues) should be studied in more detail so that the dynamics of social changes that are taking shape, especially concerning women, are fully understood. The author feels that women's organisations are being successfully utilised as strategic tools by women, through which they can express and demand their rights. However, as has already been discussed, there is still a long way to go here, with many challenges yet remaining.

## **Chapter Three: Women and NGOs in Saudi Arabia**

New trends in Saudi non-governmental organisations (NGOs) practises have emerged through the use of new tools (such as the internet) and new strategies for advancing the efficiency and effectiveness of these organisations. NGOs represent a legitimate environment within which women can lead, plan and make a difference in Saudi Arabia. Studies show that NGOs play a major role in advancing social and economic development there, as well as in stimulating change (Staudt, 2005, Metcalfe, 2011). Defining NGOs' functions and dynamics is important for determining how these organisations act, which helps in identifying their goals, whilst evaluating NGOs' strategies helps to provide an understanding of their impact on the communities and people they serve. In Saudi Arabia, NGOs that engage with issues surrounding women's status and rights have recently gained attention as "major agents" in social reform (Montagu, 2010:68).

This chapter will review the literature on NGOs in general and the dynamics of women's NGOs in particular, as well as focusing on indicators of women's empowerment. In doing so, it attempts to capture a thorough overview of the relevant NGOs, blending studies of Middle Eastern, Arab and Muslim NGOs along with other gender/feminist studies of women's empowerment and the dynamics of women's NGOs.

### **3.1 Non-governmental organisations**

Firstly, the term Non-governmental organisations was employed in this study as an operational term but does not necessarily represent the current status of NGOs in Saudi Arabia as no organisation is non-governmental as the government oversee their activities

and approve their events. Before defining NGOs, it is important to briefly address the term “civil society” because of the particular association it has with NGOs. In Saudi Arabia civil society has played a limited role in political development. However, as Pool (2005) argues, it is highly influenced by Islam and the oil business. The Islamic characteristics of the government have provided constraints and justifications to the role of civil society. In other words, civil society is controlled by the fulfilment of Islamic duties, and thus the establishment of organisations needs to be justified in relation to Islamic reasons (Pool, 2005:289). Due to its status as an oil-producing country and the associated consequences of this, as mentioned earlier, its civil society can be described as being “passive” (Pool, 2005:291). Marina Ottaway (2005) differentiates between civil society in developed and developing countries, arguing that civil society organisations are better organised and more capable in industrial countries than they are in developing ones, where they are in subordinate positions. Civil society organisations serve a number of functions, including creating social capital, representing population demands and interests, and providing services for the population (Ottaway, 2005: 122). According to Elbayar (2005:1), civil society organisations include, “charitable foundations, civic associations, non-governmental organizations, volunteer groups, trade unions, professional organizations, and social movements that make up the third sector of the modern life”.

A definition of civil society provided by Farida Al-Allaghi (2005:78) focuses on “the political, economic, and cultural organizations operating in their respective fields, independent of the state’s authority, to achieve different objectives”. However, neither definition describes the situation of the civil society correctly in the context of Saudi Arabia, because here, *all* organisations are subject to state supervision. In fact, in Saudi Arabia (unlike in many other Arab countries) the Western concept of civil society is not

well developed in either the public or the governmental arenas. Montague (2010) argues that civil society is not well studied, not well known and not understood in the same way in Saudi Arabia as it is in the West. She argues that the western theory of civil society, as an area between the government and society, does not apply to Saudi society, which exists in an involuntary, informal and traditional way. Furthermore, 'civil society' is a political and links directly to the tribal nature of the society. Hence, the western model of civil society that does not fit appropriately with the structure and roles those NGOs have and play in Saudi Arabia.

Elbayar (2005:1) suggests that there has been little analysis of the nature and impact of civil society in the Middle East. He argues that despite the fact that the repressive nature of governments in the Middle East is widely known, this area has experienced many recent reforms and developments that will impact on the future of civil society in these countries. It is very common to use the concept of 'philanthropy' to describe charitable or voluntary activities in Arab countries, and Ibrahim (2008:2) refers to it as the concept of "voluntary contributions to causes that serve the public good". Philanthropy is an important aspect of Arab culture, and Ibrahim argues that it is still strongly related to religious frameworks, although it has also come to be used more strategically for addressing and resolving social problems. Organisations that have the ability "to have a cumulative impact, form alliances, and take a long-term view of social change" are often given more attention (Ibrahim, 2008:2).

In the Arab world, individuals seek to institutionalise their "giving" to increase the impact it will have and produce a long-lasting legacy and, more recently, the idea of cooperative social responsibility has gained popularity in the private sector there, as the responsibility is shared between serving the public good and meeting governmental requirements

(Ibrahim, 2008). Ibrahim (2008) therefore provides a thorough explanation of the development of NGOs by defining the common practices which relate to helping people in the Arab world through to the professional organisations that have a significant impact on Arab society.

Non-governmental organisations exist under the broader concept of civil society. Mitlin (1998:83) defines NGOs as “professional, non-profit, non-membership intermediary organizations which are independent of the state and which undertake a range of activities”. James (2010) explores the reasons for the failure of international NGOs with reference to their development capacities. He suggests that these agencies must control their vices, such as greed and self-interest, and replace them with the virtues of honesty, determination and compassion in order to achieve good practice. Furthermore, capacity development is a complex, human and internal process that involves the actors that are responsible for changes, as well as something that is influenced by the changing dynamics of context and culture. James (2010:14) adds that good practice in capacity development is thus locally appropriate,

explicitly adapted to the particular context and culture, and uses and develops skilled local capacity building providers. It is well planned and managed which [means that it]: pursues a carefully planned and “situational” strategy, focuses on [the] implementation of the change process, has developmental resourcing, and systematically assesses and learns from [its] experiences.

James (2010) further explains that good practice in NGOs should, firstly, be appropriate for the local cultural context, which requires developing local capacity; secondly, should follow well planned strategies for change; and thirdly, should use a people-centred

approach, which provides people with the responsibility for change. These checklists should ideally be used in planning and assessing NGOs projects. However, these projects could be very complex, especially when associated with cultural and religious contexts. Lewis (2001) suggests that NGOs have to manage four tasks: their mission, linking diverse actors within NGOs, strategic planning, and decision-making. NGOs undertake one or more of these tasks in their roles as implementers in delivering goods and services, as catalysts inspiring and contributing to organisational or individual changes, as partners working with governments, and as donors/funders in the private sector. In many NGOs, some or even all of these roles can overlap.

Bano's (2008) study on NGOs in Pakistan compared NGOs whose main work relates to international aid and Voluntary Organisations that work more locally. She based the comparison between these organisations on three factors: their mobilisation of members, the motivations of their leaders and their organisational performance, with each of these factors having several indicators. The motivation of leaders used indicators such as the presence of volunteers, leaders' salaries and socio-economic backgrounds, the organisation's origin and spending, and their commitments to their beneficiaries.

Bano developed five indicators for measuring organisational performance. Firstly, empowerment vs. dependence: i.e. whether organisations aim to make "people stand on their feet". Second, advocacy vs. service delivery: i.e. if organisations have political advocacy and can mobilise their members, or whether they just focus on workshops and seminars. Third, agenda setting vs. agenda following: whether organisations are under pressure from their donors or follow a set-up plan. Fourth, sustainability vs. fluctuation: i.e. whether there are dramatic changes or there is stability in an organisation's budgets. Finally, elite domination vs. grassroots representation: i.e. what the socio-economic

backgrounds of the leaders of an organisation are. The latter indicators for measuring organisational performance are useful for addressing NGO performance. It is also important to assess the strengths and weakness of an NGO by evaluating a number of elements, including the Client; whether there are competing or complimentary organisations in the community; whether there are other organisations with a similar purpose; what relationships they have with government institutions and the media; and the influence of the political, economic and social climates (Hayes, 2003). These organisational performance indicators could be used directly as indicators to assess performance in other studies, and for creating a critical view of the NGO's structure and dynamics instead of just a list of what they do. Having this layer of comparison between two opposite positions would create a good starting point for discussion.

### **3.2 NGOs in Saudi Arabia**

According to the International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (2015), charity organisations are just one kind of civil society organisation that exists in Saudi Arabia. These charity organisations undertake voluntary work such as assistance for the poor, improving living conditions, training and educational programmes, and other social services. All charitable organisations are supervised by the Ministry of Social Affairs. However, according to Shalaby (2008: 73), charitable organisations in Saudi Arabia are divided into five main forms: “corporate philanthropic organizations, royal decreed associations, associations and foundations of the Ministry of Social Affairs, associations and foundations under other ministries, and international philanthropic [organizations]”. Moreover, Shalaby (2008) claims that about 65% of Saudi associations were established after the year 2000, and that there is a rising trend to go beyond charitable giving, to provide technical training schools,

support productive families' projects and finance social projects. Their organisational missions were developed for different aims, addressing issues related to the environment, human rights and health, which are all "examples of associations branching out to [provide] more diverse approaches to social change" (Shalaby, 2008:72). Shalaby also classified NGOs in Saudi Arabia according to the following five categories:

1. "Corporate philanthropic organisations" – corporations that are involved in philanthropic activities and adopt a corporate social responsibility approach.
2. "Civil society organisations" – royally decreed organisations that are under the King's direct support because of their unconventional philanthropic activities: they were proposed to the King in a tolerant environment instead of being banned, and then approved. For example, the National Society for Human Rights was established by royal decree in 2004 (Shalaby, 2008:73–76). In this category, the term 'civil society' is used to describe organisations that are not philanthropic or governmental at the same time. However, Shalaby does not offer a definition of the term, except to provide an explanation of how they are established.
3. "Associations and foundations of the Ministry of Social Affairs" – these include about 500 organisations that are all subject to the Ministry's regulation and supervision.
4. "Associations and foundations under other ministries" – these include registered, specialised non-profit organisations such as autism associations and HIV/AIDS associations.
5. "International philanthropic institutions" – these offer philanthropic activities around the world and include the UN, the Coexist Foundation, the Al-Mansouria Foundation and the King Faisal Foundation (Shalaby, 2008:80–81).



In the above classifications, Shalaby (2008) uses the term “philanthropic” to describe voluntary charitable activities. However, in reality, the term philanthropic is generally used in Saudi Arabia to refer to good deeds of giving, but is nevertheless broad and unspecific.

Montagu (2010) provides another classification of NGOs in Saudi Arabia, classifying them according to their activities. Montagu refers to the voluntary sector when describing civil society in Saudi Arabia, and divides this into four areas:

1. “Associational life” – this is divided into two kinds: “government supported”, such as the National Dialogue and National Association of Human Rights; and “professional associations”, such as the Saudi Journalists Association, which recently set up women’s branches.
2. “Specialised services charities” – these are concerned with mental and physical disabilities. These organisations were first initiated by merchant families in Jeddah with inherited disabilities. Some of these charities are run by women and for women, other by women for both sexes, and some by men and women for both sexes.
3. “Traditional charities” – such as the Al-Bir association, which collects and distributes donations and provides assistance for the poor and for orphans. However, some charities have “moved from the traditional reactive charity model to being proactive, such as Al-Nahda, with women’s factories in south Riyadh” (Montague, 2010:79). Montague refers here to women’s NGOs that go beyond simply receiving and providing assistance to those that also adopt a more productive role in helping poor and disadvantaged people through helping and guiding them to take the responsibility for supporting themselves.

4. “Activism and call for reform” NGOs – these focus on arranging campaigns on issues such as women’s empowerment, changes in family law, poverty and the environment: “Political and human rights reforms come from the activists and the associations; social reform from the activists and the specialized charities” (Montague, 2010:80).

Montague (2010) also refers to the ‘activist roles’ that some NGOs have started to take in Saudi Arabia. Despite the conservative character of these organisations compared to their counterparts in Western countries, they nonetheless call for reforms and use strategic methods in their campaigns.

Afif (2009) divided civil society organisations involving women’s participation as volunteers into six fields: philanthropic, cultural, scientific, advocacy, professional and cooperative. The findings of her study show that the leading areas of volunteering for women were in the areas of social, youth, religious and health services, which all fall under the remit of philanthropic organisations. The lowest participation of women was in the cultural, scientific, advocacy, professional and cooperative fields. However, this study – which is still relatively new – only focuses on women’s participation in the voluntary sector through identifying the areas in which they are most active. In spite of this, the research is still very relevant, because it should help in understanding women’s NGOs’ activities in terms of the percentage of women participating in each type of activity.

Newly emerging internet groups are another type of NGOs. These rely on the internet as a means to connect and communicate with users. According to Bernardi (2010), a number of NGOs have been established by younger generations using new tools to attract the younger population groups. Social networks such as Facebook and blogging groups have been widely effective mobilising tools among the Saudi youth. Social groups on Facebook are

attracting younger generations and volunteers into community much more than traditional NGOs that provides services for the community. For example, Change Your Life is a non-profit organisation that promotes volunteering activities, and the newly established group, the Young Initiative Group (YIG), aims to produce positive change. Both of these NGOs have Facebook pages on which they promote their activities (Destination Jeddah, 2010). All these examples could be referred to as entrepreneurs who are increasingly gaining popularity.

Examples of Saudi NGOs, including the National Organisation of Human Rights – a well-respected NGO that was established in Saudi Arabia in 2004 by a group of reformers who demanded a public space for citizens to critically assess their government. According to the Human Rights Watch Report (2010), this group was established through the initiatives and sacrifices of the reformers, and has led to a growth in human rights activities in Saudi Arabia. The National Human Rights Association is led by a female executive, and investigates human rights cases, producing reports on each case and offering solutions for them. In fact, this organisation has made progress in terms of defining problems and raising issues to the state and to the public. However, there are still many cases on their waiting list as a result of a lack of legislation preventing human rights abuses and cultural barriers (The National Organization of Human Rights, 2011).

To help domestic violence victims, a female Saudi doctor – Dr. Maha Munif – established the National Family Safety Programme for victims of domestic violence in 2005 with the help of other human rights activists. This programme provides services for victims, including specialised units in hospitals that are used to identify and help victims (Human Rights Watch, 2010). However, in 2013, the government has been unable to pass a law that makes domestic violence a crime

([http://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2013/08/130828\\_saudi\\_domestic\\_violence](http://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2013/08/130828_saudi_domestic_violence)).

Another NGO established in Jeddah, called the Himaya Association for Family Protection, was inspired by the National Safety Programme, and offers awareness workshops and shelter for victims. Unlike the National Safety Programme, which reports domestic violence within hospitals, the Himaya association reaches out to people in other NGOs to raise awareness about domestic violence (Okaz Newspaper, 2011).

The National Dialogue Centre is a Saudi NGO established in 2003, and was the first organisation to address the most controversial issues in Saudi society. They organise an annual conference on particular issues and then follow this up with workshops and meetings around the year (Human Rights Watch, 2010). The main aim behind this organisation is to tackle the freedom of expression problem, and organise gatherings where both men and women have the opportunity to present their ideas about particular issues. Despite its limited ability to actually affect the implementation of policies or change laws, the National Dialogue Centre has gathered widespread acceptance and respect around the country. For instance, domestic violence was considered to be a taboo topic until it was recently discussed publicly through the National Dialogue Centre. Moreover, all of the discussions and presentations that it holds are broadcast live on national television, and thus the public are exposed to new topics and matters that may relate to their experience.

The Khadija Bint Khuwaid Centre is a female organisation that has been successful in generating gender reform through focusing on the economic empowerment of women in Jeddah. The centre was established under the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry by Dr. Nadia Baeshen – the first female consultant in the Chamber, and has carved out its position among Jeddah's economic elites, training female professionals for the private sector. Furthermore, it provides government ministries and other government institutions

with regular feedback and information on issues regarding women's status and rights and human resource development (Hamilton, 2010:1). The organisations identified above are just some of the NGOs that were studied in the fieldwork for this research. NGOs providing these types of services did not exist in Saudi Arabia ten years ago, with the formation of NGOs there in general being fairly new, and the type of services they provide having shifted from basic assistance to the needy to the provision of social and human developmental.

### **3.3 Women and NGOs**

In male-dominated societies, women can organise themselves in a professional manner without representing any kind of threat to the state (Catty and Rabo, 1997). As a result, women in such societies tend to gather in formal groups to serve charitable humanitarian missions that do not represent a threat to state powers. In traditional societies, the primary sources of gender relations are developed through family and kinship ties, which extend to include other institutions (Kabeer and Subrahmanian, 1999:14). In the Middle East, organised groups in general are considered to be threatening to the state, and are therefore "very carefully monitored and controlled" (Catty and Rabo, 1997:17). Historically, women gathered in groups formed through kinship ties to help and support each other. In urban areas, women would gather in informal groups to seek the support of other women rather than from the male authorities (Catty and Rabo, 1997). According to Moghadam (1997:25), the Middle East is home to a large number of women's organisations, most of which are charitable and led by middle-class elite women. However, there has recently been a switch in the development agenda from a focus on economic concerns to a focus on more political

and social ones, such as human rights, good governance, environmental issues and gender issues.

Each of these three studies agrees on the traditional idea that women gather in formal and informal ways in order to overcome their isolation and/or segregation from the public sphere. In fact, in a traditional society such as Saudi Arabia, it is almost impossible for women not to gather with their families, neighbours and friends, and in professional environments. Sex segregation is a result of the society's cultural demands, and is generally viewed favourably by both men and women in Saudi Arabia. It has also facilitated the establishment of modern professional women's NGOs in the region (La Renard, 2008). Women's NGOs need to be included within the discussion about women's status in Saudi society because, as in other areas, these organisations are "for women only", and provide services concerning social, familial and personal issues that affect women. This is directly connected to sex segregation, as women need their own places to be productive and active without male guidance or interference. One could argue that these organisations, regardless of their functions, have enabled women to lead, plan and produce services for other women. Another important issue concerns the justifications for establishing such organisations, which always cite religious and cultural reasons (such as charity) to gain official support and public acceptance. Despite men dominating every aspect of life in Saudi Arabia, women have thus been able to establish their own spaces that men are not interested in intervening in because they want to avoid getting involved in "women's issues" (La Renard, 2008).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Middle East experienced a change in its development vocabulary when it began to include concepts such as "integrated", "sustainable" and "bottom-up policies" for women. This period also witnessed the growth of women's groups

that were active in the economic and political arenas (Catty and Rabo, 1997:11). However, women's groups have not been successful in gaining a significant formal presence in the political arena, and have thus had to adopt more creative ways to operate in this domain. Ottaway (2005) provides an example of how women's organisations that do not represent a threat to the government can form successful relationships with the government. However, she argues that women's organisations can provide the government with a degree of expertise on related issues, and "lobby the government for specific policy reforms" without presenting a threat (Ottaway 2005:129). Furthermore, Ottaway (2005) argues that it is possible for women's NGOs to successfully liaise with and support the government by offering consultations for reforming certain policies regarding women's status and rights.

### **3.3.1 Women's NGO in Saudi Arabia**

In Saudi Arabia, women's involvement in public affairs is generally limited to 'women's issues' and 'family affairs' (Staudt, 2005:114). Moghadam lists several factors for the expansion of women's NGOs in the region, including demographics, economics and political and international factors. In terms of political factors, Moghadam (1997:30) stressed the close ties between human rights organisations and women's NGOs, which have a "common interest in legal and civil rights issues", and such organisations tend to have women in leading positions. Female-led NGO societies were the first civil organisations to be officially registered because of the traditional notion of the role of women in the arenas of social work and charity. The activities of women's organisations can be linked to three

stages observed in Saudi society (Fakhro, 2005). Firstly, in the pre-1960s traditional stage, community services were limited to charitable activities run by individuals or families. Women played an important role in enhancing religious awareness in this stage through providing assistance for needy families, widows and orphans. In the second phase, between 1960 and the late 1980s, women's educational and employment opportunities were established. The Ministry of Social Affairs provided supervision offices for female associations and social institutions for women so that they could work solely with needy families, care for orphans and the handicapped, and raise awareness on health, cultural, religious and social issues (Fakhro, 2005). In the third stage, from 1990 to the present, the focus has been on developing organisations into community services and other organisations for women. These associations identify the importance of addressing major issues facing Saudi society, including poverty and unemployment. The main motives of Saudi females in the academic, social and media sectors focus on an "increasing level of openness to external Arab and international experience, broader knowledge of social work principles, and the emergence of female leaders from the royal family and from the elite" (Fakhro, 2005:405).

According to Fakhro (2005), women's organisations began to arrange a series of annual meetings in 2000 that aimed to address issues relating to women's rights, wellbeing and status in Saudi society. These meetings were held in smaller cities to raise awareness of women's issues, including on legal rights and domestic violence. These meetings met with protests from conservative religious forces, although they had a positive impact on public opinion and generated more appreciation and acceptance. At the governmental level, a supreme commission for civil organisations was created – this including a female one.



Despite such progress, women's roles are still limited with regards to their impact on political and social decisions (Fakharo, 2005:405–406).

However, Al-Awadhi (2005) argues that in Arabian Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, where women have not yet activated their role in the political process, they work on “active endeavours” through civil society organisations in order to gain their rights. Globalisation is making it harder to deny women equal status as they acquire academic, social and economic achievements in the developmental process (Al-Awadhi, 2005:431), and the active participation of women in their communities is made possible through their family and neighbourhood networks, as well as through women's associations. However, this participation largely relies on women's families, and their levels of education, skills and abilities (Doumato, 2005:270).

King Faisal's wife Iffat established *Al Nahdah AlSaudiayh* in Saudi Arabia during the 1960s. This was one of the first progressive Saudi associations that provided free classes in Riyadh for illiterate women, in areas including hygiene, childcare, languages and typing. This organisation provided Saudi women with opportunities to participate in their communities (Hamdan, 2005), and female societies were the first civil organisations to be officially registered (as already noted) as a result of the traditional notion of the role of women in the community, which allows them to be active in the areas of social work and charity. Fakhro (2005) cites the reasons for the expansion of women's NGOs as being based in their relations with Arab and international NGOs, together with the academic gains in the field of social work. Thus, elite women are essential for the development of women's NGOs. These factors are very relevant to the current research concerning the establishment of women's NGOs and the factors that led to this.

According to Moghadam (1997), the emergence of women's NGOs is tied to change, ranging from political needs to strategic gender interests. Moghadam divides women's organisations in the Middle East into several categories (some of which can overlap with others):

1. Service organisations, which are mostly charitable and are led by elite women who deliver services to the poor and disabled. They also provide essential functions for women in terms of education and health.
2. Professional associations in which women seek equity within their professions.
3. Development research centres and women's studies institutes, which provide academic research on issues relating to women's rights, wellbeing and status.
4. Human rights organisations, which are another kind of women's NGO, and are involved in issues concerning women's rights.
5. Women in Development (WID) organisations, which provide technical assistance and expertise on sustainable development.
6. Women's NGOs affiliated to political parties.
7. Worker-based/grassroots organisations, which are concerned with welfare and equity issues for women workers without holding any explicit feminist goals (Moghadam, 1997:32–40).

These classifications will help with us to develop an understanding of the different types of women's NGOs available, especially within the Arab world and in Saudi Arabia. Some of these organisations may not fit within the Saudi context, but it is impossible to determine whether this is the case before undertaking the research.

In order to understand effective working services, it is important to assess the programmes that NGOs provide. The efficiency of programme implementations in women's NGOs can

be measured through: NGOs' adoptions of developmental approaches; comparative assessments of NGOs; the internal dynamics of NGOs; NGOs' abilities to attract funds, volunteers and members; and NGOs' roles in influencing policy (Moghadam, 1997:49). Staudt (2005:116) also suggests that there are several questions that must be answered in the evaluation process for any NGO programme, including: what are the programme's outcomes or what has been achieved as a result of the programme's intervention? who benefits from the programme? and how were the programme's goals accomplished? Programme evaluation involves measuring inputs (staff, time and money), comparing this to outputs (efficiency) and outcomes (the effectiveness of the programme), and then making the desired changes (Conner, 1993). The evaluation of NGOs is crucial because it assesses the stage at which the programme is now, what it has achieved, and what its shortcomings or problems are and how they can be addressed. These evaluation criteria could therefore be very useful as a research indicator for measuring the performance of women's NGOs.

### **3.4 Barriers for Saudi Arabian NGOs**

Non-governmental organisations face many obstacles in Saudi Arabia. Elbayar (2005:24) offers an analysis of laws relating to NGOs in selected Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, where a series of political and social reforms have recently begun as a result of international pressure. Elbayar states that there is no legal framework for establishing NGOs there, and that all NGOs are subject to governmental control. However, according to the International Programme of the Charity Commission (2011), a new legal framework for NGOs was issued in 2008, and a new independent regulator – the National Commission for Charitable Societies and Associations – has also been established.

There are around 470 charity associations in Saudi Arabia that are supervised by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Despite the number of NGOs there, civil society “remains underdeveloped” and lacking in effectiveness and diversity according to the International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (2011). This monitor of NGO law also concluded that a weak legal framework of NGOs and limited experience in the field are among the reasons why civil society organisations in Saudi Arabia remain weak. It pointed to a number of barriers that exist to forming civil society organisations, including: 1) barriers to entry: each organisations’ work has to be approved by the Ministry of Social Affairs and each organisation must have at least twenty Saudi founding members; 2) barriers to operational activity for organisations: each organisation must obtain approval from the Ministry if its activities were not included in its registration; 3) the prohibition of advocacy organisations; and 4) that communication with other international NGOs must only be undertaken with the approval of the Ministry.

More specifically, there are also a number of constraints and hurdles that women’s NGOs face in the Middle East, including poor coordination between extant NGOs, inadequate documentation, legal constraints put in place by the state, and social constraints that arise because “women’s NGOs challenge the patriarchal order in rather profound ways” (Moghadam, 1997:43). In addition, a number of oral statements made by a group of women called the “Saudi Women for Reform” at the 40<sup>th</sup> CEDAW session identified five main issues facing women in Saudi Arabia: the denial of their legal capacity; their weak participation in public affairs; Saudi education policy concerning female students; work limitations; and family law. The statement also includes recommendations for each issue (International Women’s Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific, 2011). However, the CEDAW

convention has also generated huge hostility among the conservative population, being viewed as a Western product that contradicts Islamic values in many of its sections.

Barriers create obstacles for the creation of effective NGOs in general, and to women's NGOs in particular. In 2008, the Civil Society Conference in Brussels included a paper on the civil society in Saudi Arabia that presented several recommendations, including: the creation of laws for NGOs; expanding the freedom of NGOs; that NGOs sign international agreements; and that partnerships with international NGOs be sought and activated (Al-Sharif et al., 2008).

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Before concluding, a few points need to be addressed and taken into consideration. First, the general term "civil society", which includes NGOs, is used to describe organisations with an autonomous character that separate them from state institutions. There are debates over the definition of NGOs in Saudi Arabia since they are, at times, under the supervision of the Saudi government. As a result, there will always be some controversy about the status of Saudi NGOs. Another challenge involves the use of explicit feminist terms in women's NGOs, because these terms may not be suited to (or accepted in) this complex social context. Finally, it is important to gather new up-to-date information about women's NGOs in Saudi Arabia because their emergence and expansion has only occurred recently – within the last five years – and hence they currently remain in a period of rapid change and development.

Some limitations on the study of Saudi NGOs have also been raised in this chapter – in particular that only a small number of studies have been conducted on NGOs in Saudi

Arabia, whilst those in other Arab countries, such as Egypt, have received much more attention. Moreover, the concepts of civil society and NGOs have not been adequately defined in studies that have been conducted in Saudi Arabia, and thus their status in this context remains somewhat vague and contested. Although the idea of NGOs is well rooted, the modern conception of them, as Western literature acknowledges, remains at a developmental stage. Another limitation concerns the current stage of the development of NGOs in Saudi Arabia. Due to their nature – not being stable or static – it is difficult to classify and describe them, and it is likely that NGOs in Saudi Arabia will undergo a number of changes in the near future as a result of the newly construed laws that still need to be tested and evaluated.

The literature identifies a number of classifications of NGOs, each contributing significantly to the understudy of the complex classification of organisations present in Saudi Arabia. Sahalby (2008), for instance, suggests five categories of NGOs, from which three subcategories emerged – civil society organisations, organisations under the control of the Ministry and international institutions. This classification is particularly insightful in separating these organisations in terms of those responsible for regulating and funding their activities. As the discussion of Montague (2010) also highlighted in this chapter, these organisations have different tools at their disposal, and Montague (2010) classifies these different organisations according to their character, aims and the activities they provide, distinguishing between those “which are concerned with providing assistance to the poor and needy, and those aiming to promote activism and increase awareness and participate in this area”. Both classifications were insightful in describing and identifying the various different characteristics of NGOs in Saudi Arabia, and how these NGOs have been established over the years.

In conclusion, this chapter provided an overview of NGOs in general, and then focused in on women's organisations in particular. NGOs in the Middle East were described and categorised, and then these classifications were applied to Saudi Arabia. As has been mentioned throughout the chapter, all the studies that were examined are relevant to the current research about women's NGOs, and a set of indicators could be drawn from each one. Other studies offer analysis and explanations concerning the relevance of the social and political context of Saudi Arabia in relation to the development and practice of NGOs there. In particular, the last section identified several studies about the mobilisation of women's NGOs and their structure in conservative settings like Saudi Arabia, and these studies provide insight and inspiration for further research.

## **Chapter four: NGOs' Strategies for Empowering Women in Saudi Arabia**

A discussion of the internal and external dynamics of NGOs must be addressed in order to understand the empowerment strategies that they adopt. This chapter focuses on strategies employed by NGOs to promote women's empowerment through the use of guests and events, building alliances, the media, religion, and the framing of issues relating to women's empowerment. Closer examinations of the use of religion and feminism as strategies in traditional societies, the framing process in which they present their issues within NGOs, along with other strategies, such as the use of events and guests, the media and alliances will then be undertaken in the chapters that follow.

An examination of NGO strategies in Saudi Arabia brings the discussion to their planning processes in the first instance. According to Macdonald (1994), gender planning is related to five aspects of an organisation – their policy formulation; institutions; information; programmes and projects; and partnerships and networking styles. All of these aspects are essential in the planning for gender development, but Macdonald's emphasis is placed on policy formulation. She refers to this as the process and outcome to use for modelling gender issues. However, the formulation of gender policies in NGOs faces many obstacles, such as shortages in professional staff that are trained to address gender issues, and the dependence on personal efforts. Another problem involves whether to prioritise policy over other immediate problems such as poverty. This leads to the problem of potential resistance from the community (Macdonald, 1994). This gender planning process helps us to recognise the base in which NGOs are working towards women's empowerment and identify the different approaches that take regarding women.



This chapter discusses the literature on NGO strategies, focusing on the use of the five main strategies identified in this study: guests and events, the building of alliances, the media, religion and women's empowerment. Unlike the previous chapter, this chapter will be specific in identifying studies that talk about the use of these strategies, and how NGOs have employed them to empower women.

#### **4.1 Women's Empowerment in NGOs**

After a brief explanation of NGOs in general, this section will then go on to examine women's empowerment in NGOs. Empowerment has increasingly become a part of NGO activities in Saudi Arabia, and NGOs there are proving to be major catalysts for empowerment (Devriese, 2008, Elbers *et al.* 2014:1). Lewis (2001) understands empowerment as a process that starts with the individual and an understanding of one's life dynamics, and then involves developing the skills needed to have better control over one's life, before one is finally in the position to support the empowerment of others ( Lewis 2001:71). Cornwall and Edwards (2010:2) define empowerment as involving "pathways for positive change that lead to collective action and institutionalised mechanisms [and which] aim to change structural relations and individual circumstances". This understanding of empowerment is dependent on the availability of new technologies, and is related to the current constraints and opportunities that individuals have.

Cornwall and Edwards (2010) argue that development agencies can provide mechanisms for enhancing women's empowerment, such as participation in elections, education, economic initiatives, legislative changes and non-governmental public action. Furthermore, they refer to the importance of women's organisations and the progression in

their roles regarding the development of new strategies for advocacy and for mobilising issues relating to women's empowerment. Cornwall and Edwards (2010) stress the importance of considering the context of each form of empowerment and perceiving empowerment as a journey involving constant negotiations and challenges rather than as a readymade product. This study is relevant to the pursuit of empowerment in Saudi Arabia, especially women's empowerment, which requires time to develop, together with patience and compromise, and needs to be understood in relation to features of the Saudi context rather than through an imported model.

According to Villeval (2008), the concept of empowerment NGOs use has two dimensions. First, it concerns the object of empowerment – is it an organisation, a network or a movement? Second, it concerns how the process is to be carried out – through partnerships or capacity building (Villeval, 2008)? Moreover, Dawson (1998) suggests a framework for measuring women's empowerment in NGOs that consists of five stages: Identification/analysis, Designing/planning, Appraisal, Implementation, and Evaluation. She also lists the World Bank's four areas for empowerment in practice: 1) people's "access to information"; 2) the "inclusion and participation" of the people involved; 3) "accountability"; and 4) "local organisational capacity" – the ability of people to organise themselves, mobilise their resources and solve problems. As mentioned previously, these four areas could be used as indicators of the level of women's empowerment in NGOs. However, it is also interesting to note the emphasis that Villeval (2008), similar to Cornwell and Edwards 2010), places on the importance of local resources and the participation of people in the empowerment process.

A closely related model that must be covered in discussing women's empowerment in the Saudi setting is Dawson's Gender Sensitivity framework. The Gender Sensitivity

framework is used as a checklist to ensure that culturally sensitive issues are covered by asking questions concerning “whether the choice of specific objectives influence relations between men and women, whether they distinguish between who [is] meant to benefit from the intervention, [and] whether outputs are specified separately for men and women and are consistent with the needs of each...” (Dawson, 1998:200). According to Dawson, the first stage in measuring women’s empowerment in NGOs is the identification stage, in which NGOs need to take the main needs and problems facing women during the planning process into consideration before the project is undertaken. It is also useful, at this stage, for planners to determine whether women’s needs are practical or strategic through considering these women’s own perspectives and their local contexts. The second stage is the planning stage, which relies on the identification stage to establish indicators base on women’s needs. It also important to mention that although NGOs must decide whether they are going to aim to meet the practical or strategic needs of women, it is not always the case that this can be easily achieved as this may require another set of factors to be considered apart from the local context. For example, factors such as how the NGO is committed to the empowerment issue and how it prioritises it may be relevant. In addition, targeting the strategic needs of women largely depends on the socio-economic backgrounds of the people involved, together with their levels of awareness and knowledge (Dawson, 1998).

After this comes the ‘appraisal stage’, which assesses whether an NGO’s programme achieves women’s empowerment through promoting women’s welfare, women’s participation in decision-making, women’s access and/or women’s control. The third stage is ‘implementation’, which concerns whether the project is carried out by both the staff and the beneficiaries. Finally, the evaluation stage involves assessing the impact of NGOs’ projects on women lives, and includes one or more of the following three types of evaluation: self-evaluation, consultant evaluation or external evaluation (Dawson, 1998).

These five stages for assessing women's empowerment in an organisation are quite straightforward, but require more than just ticking off a list of boxes as it might be extremely difficult to identify the early stages of planning in any organisation. As a researcher going into the field to investigate women's empowerment, this might be useful in the appraisal, implementation and evaluation stages, and can be used as a guide for studying women's organisations. In contrast, the identification and planning stages might be useful for constructing and planning an NGO with an empowerment agenda. However, this study provides the researcher with scientific methods for measuring women's empowerment in NGOs, and the gender sensitivity framework can be fruitfully used for research on women in Saudi Arabia. Yet, the model of women's empowerment in Saudi NGOs is not well developed to reflect this level of planning Dawson pointed.

From a feminist perspective, and more specifically in the Middle East, Moghadam and Senftova (2005) note that women's empowerment was the prime focus for feminist researchers prior to the Beijing women's conference. These researchers were interested in developing qualitative and quantitative methods for women's organisations to measure women's status and equality with men for both research and advocacy purposes. Some of the topics that the research focused on were women in development (WID), gender in development, and the sociology of gender. Moghadam and Senftova (2005:390) define women's empowerment as "a multi-dimensional process of civil, political, social, economic, and cultural participation and rights". Several indicators of women's empowerment were thus utilised to measure empowerment here, including: 1) socio-demographic data; 2) health and bodily integrity data; 3) educational levels; 4) economic participation; 5) political participation; and 6) cultural participation. Moghadam and Senftova (2005:399) also included cultural indicators, such as the expression of art and technology, media companies owned or controlled by women, and female NGOs. Cultural

indicators are crucial for this research, but are very difficult to measure. However, Moghadam and Senftova's (2005) research provides detailed sub-categories for each indicator that should prove useful for examining Saudi women's NGOs.

With regards to the same issues, Kabeer's study (2000) describes empowerment as the ability to make choices through three dimensions: resources (preconditions), agencies (processes) and achievements (outcomes). This should prove useful in assessing women's NGOs under the following conditions: before the implementations of their programmes, during these programme, and in the assessment of the impact of these programmes. According to Kabeer (1999:32), in order to make development projects more gender-aware, two policy approaches can be adopted: 1) "integrationist tactics", which aim to integrate women's discussions into development projects, and 2) "transformative agendas", which provide strategies that help to change the settings being developed in gender-oriented plans rather than merely integrating women's discussions into extant development plans.

While Moghadam and Senftova (2005) provide a more detailed definition of female empowerment, which includes all areas of women's lives, Kabeer (2000) focuses on women's abilities to make choices as representing the core indicator of their (level of) empowerment. Moreover, Moghadam and Senftova focus on measuring empowerment from different perspectives through stressing its cultural aspects, whereas Kabeer's vision of women's empowerment sees it as a process, and therefore enables us to follow this process and identify factors contributing to empowerment at each step. However, although these approaches are used in women's empowerment around the world, not all of the mechanisms they propose are applicable to the Saudi Arabian context. For example, the integration strategy would make a more useful approach than the transformation strategy,

as the latter is a Western ready-made model for women that would be rejected by Saudi women before even being tested. The Saudi public has a great deal of suspicion regarding gender empowerment agendas, and this is especially the case among Islamic feminists, who warn against Western ideas of women's empowerment.

On governmental level, a supreme commission for civil organizations, including a female one, was created; however, there are still limitations with regards to their role and its impact on political and social decisions (Fakharo, 2005: 405-406). However, Badria Al-Awadhi (2005) argues that in some Arabian Gulf countries, such as in Saudi Arabia, women have not yet activated their role in the political process; they are therefore working in an active role through NGOs to gain their rights (Al-Awadhi 2005: 431). The active participation of women in the community is possible through their families, neighbourhood networks and women's associations; however, this participation will largely depend on a woman's family, her education and her skills and abilities (Doumato, 2005: 270). It is the combination of all of these dynamics among educated Saudi women that has stirred public opinion and attracted policy makers' attentions to issues relating to women's status and empowerment. In another words, instead of remaining within the boundaries mapped out by traditional NGOs, these women have been creative, making a difference in their communities and making their voices heard in relation to public policy concerning these issues.

In explaining the importance of NGOs, Jad (2004) argues that there has been a noticeable increase in the number of women's NGOs in the Middle East in particular. This increase must be viewed in the context of the growing trend of NGOs that focus on producing social change and democracy. Support from international actors, particularly from the US government, for civil society and women's NGOs in the Arab region is very important for

female activists, and has added to the on-going debate about the role played by NGOs in the Arab region. Although the nature of women's NGOs varies from one Arab state to another, women's social movements and organisations in most Arab states have been encouraged by their battle for independence from colonial forces. Nevertheless, women are still struggling to "obtain basic political rights" in the Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia (Jad, 2004:35), where there have still been few changes in the laws protecting women's rights, although this does not reflect the changes that have been observed in the status held by many educated professional women. Thus, although a greater number of well-educated women are emerging in Saudi Arabia, more policies and laws are needed to protect their rights.

Women can gradually increase their roles in public affairs through women's associations: that is, through NGOs, women can push policy changes through academic research that leads to policy "deliberation" on such issues (Staudt, 2005:114). She provides strategies for women to 'mainstream' the government's efforts, including good leadership, adequate resources, strategic locations and strong motives for change, arguing that NGOs can play a major role in exerting pressure to produce policy responses and change: "gender-just policies and better accountability lies with [the] political engagement of NGOs" (Staudt, 2005:114). Furthermore, Staudt (2005:108) contends that NGOs and social movements can have a significant influence on social policy through the responses they generate from these types of collective efforts. In Saudi Arabia, the voluntary sector has been an effective tool in making women more visible and Montagu (2010:81), in her comparison between women's and men's NGOs, argues that the former are more academically committed, professional and well managed than the latter, considering themselves to be professional organisations with a great potential for impact.

## 4.2 NGOs' Strategies

Studies show that NGOs have developed both internal and external strategies for interacting in ways for achieving their desired objectives (Lewis, 2001; Dawson, 1998). This part of the chapter will cover some of the areas that have enabled NGOs to negotiate change through strategies, such as the building of alliances, the use of feminist approaches, the use of religion, the utilisation of guests and events, public appearances and the exploitation of the media. Arguably, each of these strategies has proved useful for implementing services and bringing about change.

Some of these tools have been used explicitly, whilst some have been used implicitly according to the vision, mission and capacity of each NGO, and the contexts in which they work. However, Lewis (2001) argues that managing “strategic change” is very complex because it requires a comprehensive understanding of both the cultural context and the dominant ideological thinking. As Lewis suggests, the word ‘strategic’ conveys complex calculated steps toward a goal, and it also implies the targeting of specific areas with considerable care, which means that it requires a higher level of understanding for the whole set of cultural dynamics that pertain, and an effective use of the appropriate gaps for making inroads without making obvious holes in the social fabric.

NGOs use “cross-cutting” strategies that make use of research, the media and networking to gain public attention for issues like human rights and women’s empowerment (Lewis, 2001). According to Abdullah (2003), NGO advocacy include four successful strategies – media advocacy, coalition and alliance building, the strategic use of information, and learning from others. Within societies in transition, NGOs engage in ongoing efforts to gain support and to mobilise public opinion, which means adjusting strategies and appropriating different frames along the way. The agenda-setting undertaken by NGOs is



a closely related procedure, because it allows them to form plans to move each issue forward through appropriate channels in order to engage the public and gain the attention of the “policy elites” (Devirese 2008:77). Devirese’s study focused on the Arabian Gulf, which makes it very relevant to the current research. She stressed how these countries use higher education as a channel for change for women as there is a lack of social activism. By using higher education for women, activists use existing institutions as a tool for change instead of attempting to introduce new ones (Devirese, 2008:84). The policy of using education to empower women continues to be a very effective tool for advancing women’s empowerment through established channels.

In relation to strategies for women’s empowerment, society at large must show indicators of acceptance and interest in women’s rights and participation, otherwise empowerment policies will not lead to social change (Paterson, 2008, Metcalfe, 2011). In other words, NGOs should monitor public interest in order to provide policies at appropriate times, when society is ready to receive and support them. Paterson (2008) describes a study that was conducted in a conservative area in Baluchistan, Pakistan, which offered strategies for empowering women that aimed to integrate the programme within the community to avoid generating resistance from it. Such programmes are provided by Mainstreaming Gender and Development (MGD), which offers lessons in social change in “unpromising environments” (Paterson, 2008:334), while other NGOs in the area face resistance from the community. Paterson (2008) lists the strategies offered by the programme as follows: to focus on the personal development of the participants by developing a sense of self; to manage emotions; to reflect on Islamic interpretations for justifying and validating their active participation in society; and to encourage critical thinking on the part of the participants, by reflecting on their situation with their families and communities. Here, the programme encourages women to see the possibilities open to them, rather than to focus

on how their options are limited. After this, the programme then encourages them to build alliances by engaging families and the community in the empowerment process. Finally, these women become activists for their own issues, and that is the ultimate goal of the MGD programme. In her conclusion, Paterson (2008) suggests that the most important lessons that can be drawn from her study are that in highly patriarchal societies: (1) women's empowerment and change are welcomed better if the proposed changes are presented in the right way, and a way in which men feel that they are "valued, informed and welcome"; and (2) instead of women stepping out of their "contexts" and generating more resistance, they can use families and communities as a tool of empowerment (Paterson, 2008:343). This study thus identifies useful aspects of the negotiation process that women's NGOs can employ in traditional societies, working within the local contexts for their success. Moreover, unlike many feminist approaches, Paterson's study offers a feminist model for women's NGOs that could be adopted in Saudi society, given its traditional nature.

Abu-Rabia-Queder's (2007) study of Bedouin-Arab Women and the role of NGOs in activism is also relevant to the current research, as it captures the essence of the dynamics of feminist activism in traditional societies. Her paper is particularly relevant to feminist activism in Saudi Arabia, as the Bedouin culture has been very influential on Saudi society. She argues that non-Western feminists differ from Western feminists in their approach to women's empowerment issues. Non-Western feminism has its "own type of feminism", which is adapted to the cultural context in question. Abu-Rabia-Queder (2007:81) provides three models of activism for empowering women in sex-segregated societies – the "formation of women's collectives, networking and the revival of traditional feminine skills". She also argues that women in Middle Eastern societies, particularly Bedouin ones,

view feminism and female organisations as a threat to their identities. Women's activism is a very sensitive issue for families, especially when it presents ideas about modernity, such as free choice and equality for women. As a result, female activists have created strategies to advance change in such societies without posing a risk to women's status.

The following section discusses each strategy for women's empowerment that is adopted by the NGOs under study, including the use of guests and events, the media and religion, the building of alliances, and the framing of women's issues.

#### **4.2.1 Guests and Events**

Hosting guests and holding events are essential practices for Saudi NGOs, and these two practices closely relate to one another. If an NGO is hosting an event, there must be speakers – a guest of honour and other professionals and experts. Choosing a particular kind of event and guest is likely to serve a particular agenda or strategy for an NGO. Guests could include one or more of the following: speakers that intend to give speeches, presentations or professional opinions. In making their strategic plans, NGOs have to choose the actors that are the most influential and effective for addressing particular issues (Joachim, 2003:249). Events hosted by NGOs may serve as opportunities to mobilise groups of people and, in these cases, the type, size, audience and setting of the event may vary according to each NGO's strategy. Types of event can include professional seminars, religious lectures, local conferences, international conferences and public shopping mall events, to name but a few, and these different types of event will have different sizes and audiences. Katzel (2007) notes the importance of events that are combined with special purposes, with planned strategies for achieving their desired goals, and explains each kind of event and its definition and purposes in detail.

Joachim notes a commonly neglected part of NGOs – their “normative component” – which includes their traditions, symbols, the ways that NGOs favour some actors or ideas while eliminating others, and the ways that they mobilise actors for collective action. Joachim (2003:252) examines the various roles that actors play and how they depend on the nature of issue, the common values of the society, and the agenda of the NGO, and argues that NGOs create political opportunities to seek acceptance and gain legitimacy in three ways:

1. By gaining access to and winning “influential allies” through “symbolic events”.
2. By using influential actors to legitimise their agendas and to provide resources such as “money, institutional privileges, or prestige”. (These actors include individual states, UN offices and the media.)
3. By affecting changes in political alliances and producing conflicts to create allies.

Guests of honour play an important role in NGO events. Inviting members of the royal family, elites members of the community or state officials are very common methods that Saudi NGOs use in an attempt to add prestige and legitimacy to their organisations (Hamilton, 2010). In addition, several studies note that a charismatic leader or founder of an NGO has been an influential person within the community (Lewis, 2001). This leader could be a religious figure who has accrued great respect and credibility from society. In a more strategic sense, as noted above, Joachim (2003) also refers to the importance of “influential allies” who can legitimise the agendas that NGOs pursue through providing them with resources, including “money, institutional privileges and prestige”, examples of which include state officials, specialised agencies (UN) and the media. Influential actors can be recruited through different events organised by NGOs, and thus access is essential for gaining influential allies, and events are crucial for utilising them. Joachim (2003) lists

actors that could be influential in framing particular issues for NGOs as including: government members for influencing policies and gaining prestige; the UN, as an international body, for creating pressure through its international relations, fairs and conferences; and the media, for influencing public opinion.

#### **4.2.2 Building alliances**

There are several different levels of NGO cooperation, including relationships with the government, local or international partners/allies, and with other NGOs. According to Lewis (2001), managing partnerships requires good negotiation abilities in order to mobilise different actors for the same mission or goal. NGOs have adopted numerous strategies to form relationships with the government, as such relationships can be difficult to establish, but are profitable for influencing policy. Consequently, every NGO faces problems, including the possible conflicts that may develop between actors, how to manage the different players in decision-making processes, and the struggle to maintain legitimacy through symbolising the values and norms of the dominant culture (Lewis, 2001:95). NGOs maintain the values of the dominant cultural not to gain legitimacy alone, but also to use this legitimacy to bring about change in society. By proposing the desired social changes inside an appropriate cultural frame, they become easier for people to embrace.

Political alliances can involve actors working together towards the same agendas, with political conflicts serving as a bridge for their agendas (Jouchim, 2003:252). The strategic framing process for NGO agendas can be accomplished through three stages: i) by defining the problem; ii) by proposing solutions to the problem and policies; and iii) through motivating and justifying political actions. Saudi women's NGOs mobilise actors by developing insightful strategic agendas which shed light on the internal dynamics of a

hidden process that is not always explicit to the average person. In terms of conducting research, these points are very important for understanding women's NGOs, especially those with advocacy policies and changing agendas.

Building alliances, as Ebyan suggests, is a strategy used by feminists inside NGOs to mobilise human and financial resources to address their issues. This strategy of building networks, especially with international organisations, must be undertaken through careful consideration to establish influential and trusting relationships with all the alliance members (Ebyan, 2010:68). Nazeen and Maheen (2010) argue that the choice of allies is essential for the legitimacy of the organisation. Forming an alliance between organisations depends on an unspoken principle of reciprocity in which each organisation offers an exchange of some type of resources to the other partner. Resources are what alliances are all about, and include the exchange of "information, connections, mobilisation potential, [and] visibility" (Nazeen and Maheen 2010:73). The exchange of resources benefits both parties when and because they provide what the other organisation does not have. For example, one organisation may offer connections, and its ally could give information in exchange. Going beyond the level of resources, any organisation should gain some sort of power through combining with one or more other organisation. Working with others who have similar or interrelated concerns is more effective than working alone.

Paterson (2008) offers another type of alliance building strategy, which involves engaging families and community members in NGO activities. This approach to building alliances is especially critical for conservative societies, because it serves as a strategy that can be used to secure the desired changes whilst maintaining the support of women's families and communities. Paterson argues that in order to be effective, "social change needs deep roots across the society", and also suggests including women from different socio-economic

backgrounds to produce a greater impact (2008:339). Their programmes for building alliances with families and friends include sessions about learning how to communicate and how to claim public spaces. In learning how to communicate, women were encouraged to talk about their own ideas, then to engage with their families in order to record cultural stories, traditional songs and get across their own reflections. This strategy is important for societies in which there are close family relationships. Paterson (2008) argues that the inclusion of families is essential for succeeding in collective action on women's empowerment. This kind of alliance – building on the community and the family level – fits the Saudi context very well. The traditional nature of the society, with its strong family ties, is an appropriate place to begin in seeking women's empowerment, as regular family meetings discussing any issue arising within the family are common.

In terms of international alliances, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations Development Programme addresses issues of women's economic empowerment within a range of activities around the world, including projects in Saudi Arabia. In its 2008 publication, "Innovative Approaches to Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment", the MDGs implemented the Local Urban Observatory project in Saudi Arabia, which provided data for agencies at local levels using surveys with "gender-specific questions" and household surveys for policy-makers. The project also organises conferences and workshops that highlight social and economic challenges that it would be useful for the government and civil society to engage with. According to the MDGs publications, some of the key ingredients for the success of such a projects are: 1) the observatory directors being committed to advocating gender equality; 2) the fact that local women are integrated in the data-collection and analysis process; and 3) that they are supported by local authorities (United Nations Development Programme, 2008:97). This UN project, as well as offering practical data about how people react to such projects and

what the outcomes of the projects might be, also shows the impact that international organisations can have on local NGOs, and how these local NGOs can benefit from such international experiences.

### **4.2.3 The media**

The media is a tool that is widely used by NGOs around the world. The media can be used as a tool for promoting empowerment inside NGOs in various ways, such as for promoting activities, for publicity, for raising awareness and for making an impact. As Sakr argues, the media has been employed by Saudi NGOs to educate, inform and enlighten women (Sakr 2008). Information provided by the media can help to engage, motivate, persuade and empower people (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Wall (2002) looks at how the use of the internet has effected NGOs, showing that it has changed how they communicate in several ways, including the speed at which information they can circulate information, a reduction in the boundaries they experience, an increase in efficiency, and a lowering of costs. In addition, NGOs internet communications enable them to enhance social change through practices such as creating knowledge, encouraging self-empowerment and providing dialogue opportunities for website users (Wall, 2002:28). In the Saudi context in particular, the introduction of social media on the web has added to this power by providing a media format that is not as restricted by censorship like the traditional media is (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

Hilbert (2011) argues that new technological forms of communication have transformed social, political and cultural structures globally, and that they have altered our ways of interacting and communicating with each other. A study by Seo, Kim and Yang (2009) talked about the contemporary power of the media and how the new platforms it offers



have been utilised by NGOs to switch their focus from a local to a global one, within which different forms of information can be very powerful. Social media has recently been introduced within the Saudi setting and, interestingly, has spread far and fast (Benardi, 2010). It has created a social shift, becoming widely used among the younger generations within a short period of time, and has added a new dimension to the identity of Saudi women who, after being highly protected and restricted by their roles within the family structure, have begun expressing their opinions in public more, becoming better informed individuals through the links that social networks provide.

The continuing changes in media tools mean that NGOs have adopted all different kinds of media for achieving particular goals. Abdullah (2003) discusses the role of the media within NGOs, and argues that “media advocacy” is one of the successful advocacy strategies employed by NGOs. Through media advocacy, NGOs are able to mobilise the public, thus influencing the social-political climate, and Abdullah (2003) notes that most NGO advocacy strategies are concerned with the issue of violence against women.

Seo *at al.* argue that “new media tools” have allowed NGOs to mobilise and communicate with people across the world, offering “interactivity and independent distribution of information” (2009:123). They cite examples of the new media used by NGOs as including websites, blogs, video casts and wikis, and examine how NGOs choose the type of new media to use according to the function it serves and to whom they are seeking to broadcast their message – whether they are directly targeting the public on specific issues or indirectly approaching the mass media to affect the public. According to Seo *at al.* (2009), the new media has five functions for NGOs: promoting the NGO’s image; fund-raising; interacting with the public; establishing connections with other NGOs; and offering NGOs access to information (Seo *at al.* 2009:124). This study showed the power that new media has, how

NGOs globally have switched their focus to the new media, and how powerful information can be under different shapes or forms. NGOs use information as a tool through the new media to engage, motivate, persuade and empower people.

#### **4.2.4 Religion**

Religion has been and still is a powerful tool for influencing, mobilising and persuading people to become involved in women's empowerment, especially in the Islamic world. Islam creates an ethical and moral framework for Muslims and is deeply embedded in their daily rituals, choices of dress, interactions, speeches and actions (Sholkamy 2011; Seguino 2011). In the NGO world, Islamic values have played a major role in motivating and guiding activities, and as an inspiration for a better world. In Saudi NGOs, religion is a major component of the planning process, and is used in setting goals and in implementing policies. This is true even for non-religious NGOs, which often utilise religion in some way or another to gain legitimacy and credibility.

Ali *et al.* (2008) stress the importance of religion in many women's lives. However, they argue that negative aspects of religion are the focus of most of the literature about religion, and that there has been a lack of empirical study and theoretical understanding on the issue of religion in people's lives. In their study, Ali *et al.* (2008) focus on the strength-based aspect of religion in women's lives, and argue that religion needs to be considered in the study of women's lives in order to produce a comprehensive understanding of them (Ali *et al.*, 2008). White (2010) refers to the complex nature of the relationship between Islam and women's empowerment, arguing that most literature on this topic connects it to modernity and the western features that accompany it. According to her, gender is used as an indicator for modernity through an examination of women's visibility, education, dress, and political

participation. Under such measurements, Islam appears to be opposed to modernity. At the same time, Muslim women are expected to adopt a certain set of moral values, and managing this fine balance between modernity and Islamic moral values has put women in the “cross fire” between religious conservatives and pro-modernity feminists (White, 2010:338).

Incorporating gender issues in religious discourses is never an easy task. According to Devriese (2008), the attempt to do so in Saudi Arabia started to gain popularity during the 1990s through what is now known as ‘Islamic Feminism’, which adopts an Islamic Framework from a feminist standpoint. Women from around the Muslim world have begun to mobilise in order to reform legislation regarding women and the family through interpretations of Islamic texts. The success of their initiatives can not only be attributed to their adoption of a specific religious ideology, but also to their strategic analysis and understanding of socio-political situations. Many Islamic feminists have been able to introduce legislative reforms that have secured women’s human rights within the framework of Islam and within the contexts of their cultures (Devriese, 2008:82). Mariz Todros (2011) explains that religion has been utilised to address gender issues by feminists, human rights activists and international donors, and states two factors that have been important in doing so. Firstly, they have advanced a “progressive religious agenda”, and second religion has been used to adopt a culturally sensitive approach for bringing about social change. She adds that many feminists and human rights activists seek to form alliances with “progressive clerics” in order to mobilise religious idioms and symbols. However, such alliances require finding a compromise between pro-empowerment and pro-religious agendas, and negotiating and initiating social change from within a shared religious framework provides a good starting point for doing this (Todros, 2011:1). Islam has thus been used both as a justification for women’s rights and a means to oppose women

rights, and this results from the complexity and diversity of different beliefs, practices and interpretations of religious texts in the Muslim world (Kucinkas, 2010).

Taking a more detailed look at the use of religion inside NGOs, Abu-Rabia Queder (2007) states that one of the strategies NGOs use is to invoke Islamic religious texts to challenge taboos that are not publicly discussed. Another strategy is to invite religious speakers, and male figures such as Shieks or Judges in particular, to offer religious justifications to ground women's rights and reforms to women's roles. One strategy icalled "re-Islamising patriarchy", in which feminists use religious texts to address issues that are considered taboo and have not been discussed publicly before. Under this strategy, feminists also use male religious figures to provide religious justifications for changes that will empower women in order to gain legitimacy throughout the community.

Paterson (2008) also describes how women were encouraged to interpret and translate verses of the Quran with a respected scholar in MGD sessions in Balochistan, and by doing so gained in confidence and developed the ability to discuss religious interpretations with their communities. These different interpretations of Islamic texts will continue to compete with each other, and the power of such interpretations depends greatly on social and political support they receive, as this confers a perceived authenticity on them (Mir-Hosseini, 2011:77).

This discussion about the influence of religion within NGOs is unavoidable in the Saudi context. However, the complex nature, influence and diverse application of religion makes it hard to assume and predict the influence it will have in the absence of research on a specific time and context. The present situation around the world – and particularly in Islamic countries – is heated in this area, as there is a growing concern about how to deal with globalisation without undermining Islamic values. It is becoming more and more

challenging to set limitations on anything with the widespread accessibility to information the internet provides, and religion is finding itself placed in the middle of open debates about what is right and what is wrong. More particularly, the Saudi society is standing on the doorstep of globalisation, and this has created a huge split between conservatives on one side and moderates and liberals on the other, with Islam placed at the centre of the debate because it represents the shared language that can be interpreted to suit the goals of both parties (Al-Rasheed 2013).

Adding to these ideological differences, there are also variations between regions, and in each region between individuals with different social statuses and perceptions on Islam. The most visible manifestation of these differences can be seen in men and women's appearances, which is a symbolic representation of their perceptions. However, others view Islamic values to be contained within, and don't necessarily display them. In the end, there is no doubt that, as much as these various scenarios do exist, religion plays a powerful role in people's lives, and will continue to be a part of future discussions about women and NGOs.

#### **4.2.5 Framing Women's issues**

Paterson (2008) suggests that women's empowerment within NGOs should start from personal development and the development of a sense of the self through women's expressions of their feelings, after which they have to learn how to manage their emotions and then utilise programmes that focus on critical thinking. Abou-Rabia-Queder (2007) differentiates between feminist activity in Western and non-Western societies, arguing that in Middle Eastern societies feminist activities have had to adapt to the different context, and have thus developed a particular form of feminism. Women in these societies have

adjusted the Western concept of feminism to suit their cultural identities in order to seek a status in their societies that is desirable and achievable. This feminism, particularly in “patriarchal societies”, consists of unique aspects such as silencing, elimination and active and passive resistance. Abou-Rabia-Queder (2007) goes on to emphasise feminist activism in NGOs, which seek legitimacy through religious law and nation-building development. Religious texts have been utilised to gain cultural legitimacy for the proposed social changes for women, and this enables activists to integrate modern concepts of feminism, human rights and gender equity to the local context by using highly legitimate texts that are universally accepted as authoritative in the Muslim world.

Abou-Rabia-Queder (2007) argues that feminists in NGOs within tribal societies had to explore strategies for balancing modernity and traditional collective values without risking women’s statuses. According to her, women in tribal patriarchal societies do not use the terms “feminism” or “gender equality” in their activism – instead they transfer these concepts into the idiom of their cultural context (Abou-Rabia-Queder, 2007 82). Thus, instead of using explicit feminist terms, such as “liberalism and gender equality”, which are perceived as “western and dangerous”, they use tools that mix cultural and modern aspects by appealing to scientific facts to explain psychological aspects or to sections from the Quran that refer to women’s rights and free choice. However, there are also “rebel” women’s activist groups that refuse to compromise and thus take the harder path. These groups have support from their families, but are not usually accepted among society at large (Abou-Rabia-Queder, 2007:80). This study provides some very practical research indicators for women’s NGOs, because their strategies are closely related to the Saudi context.

As Coleman (2010) suggests, that term ‘feminism’ has a strongly negative association in the Middle East, which has led to the rise of Islamic Feminism, in which the activity of promoting women’s rights is undertaken from within the Islamic framework. Devriese (2008) argues that feminist research often meets with suspicion in the Arabian Gulf in particular, where there is a wide resistance to feminist practices because of their association with Western colonialism. Unlike other empowerment literature, Paterson (2008) argues that women’s empowerment should embrace the local tradition of women’s lives. In the same vein, George (2007) states that NGOs are culturally framed to produce meanings and form issues in a way that suits the cultural identity of their audiences and participants. This includes gender-based analyses of women’s NGOs that convey specific regional national norms. However, according to George (2007), these cultural frames are not totally fixed, but vary significantly according to when they are implemented as well as the implementing NGO’s vision and structure. Moreover, the effect of these frames also varies, and may produce “uneven” results due to the nature and ideology of each community and their gender dynamics (George, 2007:686). This cannot be stressed enough in the Saudi context, due to the diverse gender dynamics among the different communities there.

Nazeen and Maheen argue that negotiating with the state can grant NGOs access to it. However, NGOs must avoid controversial issues, and should be critical and careful in the naming and framing of their issues (Nazeen and Maheen, 2010:72). However, NGOs are able to influence the state by the way they present their issues, or what is termed the ‘framing process’, which involves stating the problem, offering solutions to it, and providing justifications for the importance of the particular issue (Jouchim, 2003:253). Framing an issue involves intentionally selecting particular events, facts, news or terms in order to shape and represent that issue in a more legitimate and persuasive way (Allan et al., 2010). The strategic framing process depends on two factors: building powerful

alliances with the political structure and working with international institutions; and mobilising the NGO's structure through the use of organisational entrepreneurs, international constituencies and experts (Jouchim, 2003:253).

Successful policy changes to produce women's empowerment depend on the nature of the civil society and the status of gender advocacy within it, as well as the nature of the political system. As Staudt (2005) and Mantague (2010) both contend, women are able to use their roles within NGOs to affect policies by taking strategic steps to ensure that the government and the public favour their decisions. For instance, Jouchim (2003) conducted a study about how women's NGOs acting in the international context have successfully placed women's issues at the forefront of the UN's agenda, analysing how women's NGOs mobilise their efforts to affect policies and agendas in their favour.

Studies have shown that women's NGOs have adopted several tactics regarding their use of feminist terminology. According to Devriese (2008), using the appropriate local frames is the most important element for NGOs in gaining legitimacy. These local frames include the language, terms and symbols used by women's NGOs, which allow them to not only become legitimate actors, but also to minimise their previously marginalised statuses in order to become part of an ongoing dialogue with their opponents. This strategy of linking the feminist perspective with the existing cultural religious discourse frequently meets with success. Devriese (2008) provides an example of the Middle Eastern feminists' strategy of abandoning the secular human rights language in favour of existing Islamic frames which are considered to be more and more popular. The framing perspective is used by NGOs to add meaning to relevant conditions in order to mobilise constituents. The success of the framing process will be more achievable if NGOs can link and relate to existing frames rather than creating new ones, as mentioned before in the example of higher education in



the Arabian Gulf (Devriese 2008). As noted earlier, education for women has been and still is seen as a legitimate right, and is thus used as an appropriate frame for initiating change for women in the Saudi society.

Nazeen and Maheen (2010) discuss “naming and framing”, which is a method used to mobilise NGO members and form alliances. However, whether naming and framing is appropriate depends on the organisational ideology, the nature of the allies and the impact the particular terms will have on the audience. This strategy is crucial for gaining support and legitimacy, so a special consideration of the language being used is necessary for the approach to be successful with the NGOs members and allies. They provide an example of an NGO that has chosen a “legalistic approach” with the aim of creating an area for negotiation and to “avoid any accusations of being anti-Islamic” (Nazeen and Maheen, 2010:72). Choosing the right word for a particular audience within a specific context and time is vital for attracting widespread support and for avoiding unwanted hostility.

In addition to choosing the right language and terms, NGOs sometimes make broad statements regarding women’s empowerment. Rosalind Eyben (2010) states that NGOs use a range of strategies to negotiate changes surrounding gender mainstreaming. Negotiating change includes several tactics for avoiding conflicts with other NGOs, such as the deliberate use of vague language to refer to a common goal. This “strategic ambiguity” allows others space to interpret these general statements in their own ways. Feminists deliberately avoid clarity about women’s equity to enable them tactical room to manoeuvre in complex, dynamic societies.

Eyban (2010) offers a more detailed explanation of the ‘vague statement’ tactic used by most actors that address women’s issues in Saudi Arabia. For example, NGOs may talk about ‘women’s participation in the society’ which, as Eyban notes, can incorporate a range

of different meanings and implications, from the support for women's traditional roles to encouraging their political participation. This tactic allows NGOs to enhance change without undermining the dominant culture. However, there are a wide range of feminist approaches, from conservative to liberal, and one of the aims of this research is to explore some of the feminist approaches that take place within NGOs with special attention to their tactical natures.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

The previous chapter discussed NGOs in general, whilst this chapter has discussed the connections between NGOs and women's empowerment in particular. The issue of women's empowerment, as it has been presented in this chapter, is closely linked to the context of the study. The definitions provided talked about empowerment in terms of an overall process or journey that focuses on enhancing resources and skills. This chapter also presented the literature that connects empowerment to NGOs' activities, which provides the basis for the examination of NGOs strategies in the data collection phase. It is important to notice that the context of the studies that were examined played a major role in determining the strategies of the NGOs, and the current research is based on a similar context to these studies, and therefore the findings are not generalisable to other NGOs around the world.

Later in the chapter, each of the strategies NGOs use for women's empowerment was explained using the literature. The key use of the strategy of inviting guests and holding events was found to be for promoting NGOs' empowerment initiatives. The strategy of building alliances used the cooperation with other institutions, including governmental ones, for various reasons, such as giving NGOs access to networks, resources and

mobilisation. The use of the media by NGOs involves strategically selecting the best media tool for a particular audience, whilst their use of religion involves interpreting religious texts and choosing religious guests to provide religious messages and principles that will give the NGOs legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the public. Finally, the strategy of framing women's issues is used by NGOs to discuss women's empowerment in a way that is locally appropriate, and thus to again gain legitimacy and acceptance among the local population.

## **Chapter Five Methodology**

This chapter outlines the methodological approach and the research methods adopted for the study. It begins by describing the process of selecting a research design and then summarises the data collection methods that were used. As the study aims to explore and better understand the factors that contribute to women's empowerment strategies in NGOs, the research is guided by an overall exploratory focus. The chapter opens with an overview of the research questions and the aims of the study, and subsequently describes the research mixed-method, explaining why it was a useful method for exploring the phenomenon under study. This chapter also describes the methods that were used for data collection, which consist of document analysis, interviews and a survey, followed by an outline and explanation of the research design and the ethical considerations that arose in the context of the study. The research setting, timing and sampling methods are then discussed, and the chapter finishes by outlining the limitations of and the difficulties encountered in the data collection process.

### **5.1 The aim of the research and researcher's perspective**

The primary aim of this thesis is to explore the strategies that women's NGOs adopt for presenting and advocating issues concerning women's rights and empowerment in Saudi Arabia. This is achieved through an investigation of how NGOs mobilise their resources and adopt particular strategies to promote empowerment initiatives for women. The research findings aim to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning the role that

NGOs play in influencing Saudi society. The study has an overall exploratory focus, and is guided by the following research questions:

1. What strategies do Saudi NGOs use for pursuing women's empowerment?
2. How do these strategies play a role in women's empowerment in NGOs?
3. What factors influence the choice of particular strategies for promoting women's empowerment in NGOs?
4. To what extent are the women's empowerment strategies adopted by Saudi NGOs effective?

While the study is informed both by the existing literature on empowerment and the complex socio-cultural context that Saudi Arabia has in relation to issues concerning women's roles, status, rights and empowerment, it nonetheless explores a particular phenomenon that has been under-researched to date. As a result, research methods that would enable a better understanding of this phenomenon were adopted.

This research was influenced by the researcher's perspective on women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia. Reflecting on this perspective was crucial in the planning process so that the most appropriate methods to fit the Saudi context could be utilised. In fact, the researcher had to pick and select different methods and sources of literature to create a methodology that would not only be appropriate to use in such a private society, but also effective. For instance, the choice of NGOs as data collection settings was influenced by the researcher's perspective on the sensitivity of the subject discussed, and how approaching such a private issue would be seen as more appropriate in a formal setting. In addition, during the data collection process, the researcher was constantly adapting questions and wordings to fit the pace of the respondents. It was important for the researcher to be flexible and to allow the respondents to use their own words and terms,

and this approach yielded some important and surprising results. The researcher's perspective was also crucial in the analysis process, as this related directly to herself in many aspects of the research. Being an insider was an advantage here as it provided a deeper understanding of the issue through allowing individual reflection on the relevant issues during the analysis.

The research was also influenced by an Islamic feminist perspective, as the researcher found that this fit the Saudi context well. The researcher found herself explaining many aspects of the research from an Islamic point of view. Analysing a subject relating to women in Saudi Arabia has to be linked directly to Islam and, in this case, on how religion often empowers women and can be used as an empowerment tool in Saudi Arabia. The research analysis, as stated above, had to take religion into account, as its role constantly arose throughout the data collection.

## **5.2 Research methods design**

The research methods adopted for the study include document analysis, interviews and a survey. While the former two methods involve qualitative analysis, the latter is also analysed qualitatively, and hence utilised quantitative analysis. The addition of a quantitative data collection method allowed a larger number of participant responses, thus further adding to the validity of the findings. The research hence uses a mixed-methods design, consisting of interviews, documentary analysis and a survey. The following sections discuss, in greater detail, the considerations that informed the selection of the design, the methods that were adopted, the participant setting, and the sampling for the study. This research predominantly focuses on capturing the 'mobilising structure' women within different NGOs have chosen to use. In other words, it asks what strategies women

in Saudi NGOs are using to empower women. These strategies vary considerably from one organisation to another, and are sometimes implicit and perhaps unintentionally adopted by women in NGOs. Empowerment has and continues to be a highly debated issue in Saudi Arabia, particularly with regards to the economic and educational empowerment of women. Furthermore, the idea of women's 'empowerment' is controversial because the term itself is associated with a Western product that is arguably unsuitable for women in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the studies considered in the literature review are essential for providing an understanding of the dynamics of women's NGOs, especially in the private, complex and conservative society of Saudi Arabia.

By dividing the information from the literature review into specific themes, the researcher was able to identify the different strategies that NGOs use. Although it was anticipated that these themes might have to be adjusted in accordance with the results that the fieldwork generated as it progressed, the research strategy was nonetheless developed to provide a structure for the data collection and analysis. This research also investigates how the strategies of these NGOs have been implemented and addressed. A special focus has been given to the selective mechanism that women's NGOs adopt for choosing particular strategies. Thus, as explained, this research will use a theoretical framework and identify themed categories of empowerment in order to explore women's NGOs. The following section will now explain the data collection methods in detail.

As previously mentioned, the phenomenon of women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia remains under-researched, few studies that have been conducted on similar issues being predominately qualitative. While qualitative research methods are arguably best suited for exploring and understanding such issues, they lack reliability as a result of the small sample sizes they are typically limited to. Adopting a mixed-methods design can help address this

particular weakness, and also yield greater insights when cross-referencing the results obtained through different data collection methods.

### **5.2.2 Document analysis**

Document analysis was one of the first data collection methods used here, as documents were consulted prior to the interviews and the survey. Document analysis has the advantage of providing ways for examining phenomena that cannot be directly observed (Mason, 1996). In relation to this research, it helped to inform the researcher of the aims and aspirations of the different NGOs and the activities they perform, as well as providing an opportunity for the researcher to become acquainted with the staff and participants of the NGOs, providing contacts for further interview appointments. This foundational step was essential for understanding the main features of each NGO.

When examining the documentary evidence, it was noted that each NGO has its own publications, in the form of annual or monthly reports, brochures, advertisements and other public written forms, including media and website publications. Looking at those documents allowed the researcher to observe how women within the NGOs not only present themselves, but also how they advertise their NGOs and identify information to include and present in the documents they produce for the public. The data from the document analysis included statistics, mission statements, goals, targeted populations and activities. However, the analysis of these documents was not in-itself detailed enough to capture the whole perspective of the NGOs studied, and thus interviews were also required to provide further insights and information. The researcher utilised the same indicators for the document analysis as those used for the interviews. Data was compared after the initial analysis and any contradictions or inconsistencies in the data obtained from the other two



methods was identified. Some of the advantages of conducting document analysis are that it is economically efficient and can have no immediate negative impact on respondents (Babbie, 2004).

### **5.2.3 Interviews**

Interviews aim to generate information about interviewee's attitudes, opinions and points of view (Bichman and Rog, 2009). As a qualitative research tool, interviews can produce a large amount of raw data. The current study adopted semi-structured interviews to allow a variety of follow-up questions and answers and an in-depth set of raw data. Matthews and Ross (2010) suggest following several steps after gathering raw data. The first step is to become familiar with the data by reading or listening through each interview, transcribing them, and writing notes alongside the data when there was missing data or where comments were pertinent. The second step is to make sure the data is complete by checking interview recordings and reviewing documents. The following step is to organise the data using different techniques. First, answers should be identified by setting codes or variables that will produce sets of answers and information, which can then be divided into groups or themes and labelled. It is useful to attach an identifying number to the labelled data, including all the codes, variables and data produced by the interviews. It is also important to clearly identify each code. In addition, an index that includes information on the numbered data can help in accessing information easily in order to compare different answers (Matthews and Ross, 2010).

In their discussion about handling qualitative interviews, King and Horrocks (2010) argue that there are different ways of analysing transcripts. First, there are ways of analysing the whole transcript, such as word-by-word analysis, and analysing the "full verbatim" of the

interview, including speakers' pauses, tones, overlapping statements and nonverbal gestures. Then there is 'thematic analysis', which involves dividing the interview into themes and categories. In this kind of analysis, the researcher has to make decisions and choices about what he is going to include and exclude from the interview. The researcher should be looking out for themes through focusing on what these interviews share in common, if there are certain kinds of repetition, and how these interviews are different. King and Horrocks (2010) contend that these themes must be well defined and clear to be useful, and need to be divided into descriptive codes that directly relate to the researcher's research questions. They also suggest starting this process by listening carefully to the whole interview before highlighting its important parts and then finally defining the descriptive codes.

In this research, sixteen face-to-face interviews were conducted with NGO managers on fourteen NGOs. All the interviews were pre-arranged, and were conducted in semi-formal environments, both within and outside NGOs. The interviewees were given brief descriptions of the research and a consent form to sign. In addition, they were asked for their permission to record the interviews, which all the participants gave. Each respondent was interviewed using a set of questions that fell within specific themes. The interviews were hence semi-structured and included some open-ended questions, which allowed participants to elaborate on issues or themes that arose. The interviews provided deep insights into the managers' and planners' visions for their organisations and for women in Saudi Arabia, as well as capturing the attitudes and views of the participants and beneficiaries.

The interview was chosen as a research method because it would allow respondents to elaborate on their views and attitudes regarding women and empowerment strategies within

NGOs. Interviews also allow respondents to put things in their own words, which can capture their experiences accurately and provide a more detailed range of responses than surveys or questionnaires, which have a more restricted range of answers. In addition, interviews, unlike surveys, allow for the redirection or clarification of information by respondents.

Furthermore, being a female researcher helped me to gain acceptance and build a rapport with the interviewees, providing a good possibility that they would elaborate and offer the kind of detailed explanations that are best secured through face-to-face interviews (Babbie, 2004). However, open-ended responses can be difficult to summarise and data can be misinterpreted, thus special care had to be taken when analysing the interview data. A further disadvantage of interviews is that they are time-consuming and expensive because they take a lot of preparation and require follow-up work (Bichman and Rog, 2009).

Unlike document analysis, interviews can target the attitudes and preferences of the interviewees. Whereas the data analysis of documents can generate facts, such as NGOs' mission statements, courses and activities, interviews can offer information on feelings and thoughts from the participants, regarding their positions, obstacles and hopes for the future. Interviews with managers, CEOs or founders were focused on the purposes, goals, political opportunities and resources of the NGOs, on how they negotiate with others, on how they prioritise their agendas, on the strategies they adopt, and on their achievements for women in Saudi Arabia thus far.

#### **5.2.4 The survey**

After substantial consideration, I decided that I would construct and distribute a questionnaire for NGOs' clients in order to solve the problem of how to reach out to the clients of NGOs. During the pilot interview I could not find any clients or recipients inside NGOs, and I kept asking how I could interview clients given that they would not necessarily be there when I was. This led me to consider what the best way of reaching out to them would be. I ultimately decided, for two main reasons, to produce a questionnaire that included all the themes and categories of the research. First, this target population was difficult to reach, but questionnaires could be given out to clients at any time without them having to be present at the NGOs. The questionnaire could be left at the NGO's reception, and could be filled in and sent back at any time, which could save a lot of time for the researcher. Second, questionnaires could overcome the problem of the broad socio-demographic characteristics of different respondents by enabling a broader range of respondent views to be captured than interviews could reasonably allow for. By having 5 to 10 questionnaires per NGO instead of 2 to 5 interviews this adds value and variety, as two in-depth interviews might not have achieved the desired depth through not capturing the range of socio-economic or socio-demographic characters of clients.

On the other hand, the choice of interviews for managers was appropriate as this method could be expected to provide a good depth of information, given their positions, qualifications and knowledge. Gathering such information from NGOs' clients through interviews could not be guaranteed, however, because their levels of experience may have varied greatly, and there was a chance that I could have invested a substantial amount of time and effort into interviews that did not end up adding much depth or value to the research.

About two hundred surveys were manually distributed among the fourteen NGOs studied in this research. However, only 100 responses were received and, out of these, only 43 surveys were fully completed. As a result of this poor response rate, a version of the survey was also created online, which generated 65 responses in a short time. The total number of surveys from both manual and online surveys was thus 108.

Arguably this difference in responses between is changing in the Saudi society due to the social media. The responses were better using social media because it is easier to fill and also because of the private nature of the society who because of the privacy of being anonymous in social media provided the responses were higher. Here the cultural and political difficulties are present due to the shortage in social research and lack of knowledge of the values and ethical consideration put into these researches. It is also important to note that this survey only represented an additional means through which to explore public opinion, with the academic quality resting much more centrally in the in-depth interviews. Surveys of NGOs' participants, volunteers and beneficiaries focused on their opinions about the NGOs and why they chose them, including questions concerning the extent to which the relevant NGOs have impacted on their lives; their thoughts about women's empowerment; and their thoughts about the most effective strategies that NGOs can employ to address issues regarding women's rights and empowerment.

### **5.3 Location and timing**

The research took place in Jeddah city on the west coast of the Red Sea in Saudi Arabia – the researcher's home country. Saudi Arabia has some unique features, being the birthplace of Islam and the home to two holy cities: Mecca and Medina. In addition, it is one of the

most important oil producers in the world, with the largest oil reserves of any country. Jeddah city was chosen for this research for several reasons. Firstly, because it was familiar to the researcher; secondly, because it is the second largest city in Saudi Arabia in terms of its population size and national importance; and thirdly, Jeddah has served as the gate to the holy cities for hundreds of years – even prior to the existence of Saudi Arabia as a country – and, as a result, it is a place where many different cultures and ethnic groups have gathered, not only during the pilgrimage seasons, but also to settle. Moreover, unlike any other city in Saudi Arabia, Jeddah has been a dynamic city for centuries as a result of the number of people travelling through it from around the world. This has produced a city with a highly multicultural population that benefits economically from increased trade in the pilgrimage seasons. More specifically, the women in Jeddah are known to be different from those in other cities in Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Consequently, the city of Jeddah has a number of women's NGOs, which were initially established by elite families in Jeddah. More recently, NGOs have been created by young educated women, and consequently the initiatives and activities undertaken by women in Jeddah have diversified and increased, with these women thus putting themselves on the map of change in Saudi Arabia.



**(Image 1) Map of Saudi Arabia**

Source: [http://www.wordtravels.com/images/map/Saudi\\_Arabia\\_map.jpg](http://www.wordtravels.com/images/map/Saudi_Arabia_map.jpg)

The data for this research was collected in phases because the researcher needed to travel overseas to conduct it. Thus timing was an issue that had to be considered as well, as further arrangements and adjustments that may have needed to be made during the actual data collection had to be built in to the planning. The collection of data was divided into parts in accordance with the UK school holidays of the researcher's children. This factor was also part of the researcher's decision to divide the field work into parts. In addition, the timings in Saudi Arabia also needed to be considered, as no field work can be conducted during official holidays. Each phase and visit for the field work required advanced preparation, which involved contacting the staff of NGOs and other respondents in order to minimise the amount of time that was wasted in arranging the interviews.

## **5.4 The sampling method**

Saudi NGOs vary from large well-established professional organisations to fledgling voluntary ones. This variety captures information on different kinds of NGOs structures that are operating in Saudi Arabia. The research focus fourteen different NGOs, comprising international, national, regional professional, internet-based and religious charity organisations. The NGOs were selected based on the literature review, which identified the different kinds of NGOs operating in Saudi Arabia (Shalaby, 2008; Montague, 2010; Afif, 2009). It was essential that various kinds of organisations were included within the research in order to identify whether there are differences or similarities in their strategies and activities.

This research has utilised non-probability samples that were intentionally chosen to incorporate the different types of NGOs that focus mainly on women, and which offer women's programmes. This sample will include Saudi national (more governmental), advocacy, professional, and internet-based NGOs. Managers from each NGO were interviewed, with a total of sixteen interviews being conducted as two interviews were conducted in two NGO with two managers total of fourteen female and two male between the age of 30 and 65. The selections were continuously subject to change through up-to-date information emerging as the fieldwork progressed. Table (5.1) below identifies the NGOs that were studied in this research, and lists their areas of speciality and interest, the number of interviews conducted in each NGO (and with whom); their number of Twitter followers (to help in understanding their impact on social media); and their official status or natures. All of these NGOs operated in Jeddah.



**Table 5.1**

<b>NGO</b>	<b>Specialised Area</b>	<b>Number of interviews</b>	<b>Twitter followers (2015)</b>	<b>NGO's Nature</b>
1	Youth empowerment	1 Female manager	8074	Non-for-Profit company
2	Survey and research	1 Female manager	2713	Social Charity
3	Charity housing	1 Female manager	1045	Social Charity
4	Facebook-based	1 Female manager 1 Male manager	10.9K	Non-for-Profit company
5	Women's empowerment	1 Female manager	6283	Social Charity
6	Aid relief	1 Female manager	NA	Non-Governmental Organisation
7	Scientific/Islamic studies	1 Female founder 1 Female manager	23.7K	Non-Governmental Organisation
8	Women's empowerment	1 Female manager	8822	Non-for-Profit company
9	Advocacy and lobbying	1 Female manager	2145	Chamber of Commerce
10	Social development	1 Female manager	1158	Non-for-Profit company
11	Women's empowerment	1 Female manager	259.9K (Manager)	Non-for-Profit company
12	Human rights	1 Male manager	218K	Non-Governmental Organisation
13	Domestic violence	1 Female manager	2074	Social Charity
14	Health/Breast Cancer	1 Female manager	14.4K	Health Charity

## **5.5 Fieldwork preparation**

This section will explain the work that was done during my fieldwork visits to Saudi Arabia. I started by calling four family members who had contacts in and knowledge about local NGOs. They made a few suggestions and gave me some contact numbers. Then I made a visit to the department of Charity Associations in the Ministry of Social Affairs to request information. The Ministry required a written letter explaining what the researcher needed and an official letter from the University of Leeds before they could give me permission to conduct fieldwork in any NGO registered with them. I tried to make interviews with the oldest two NGOs in the city of Jeddah. However, these traditional organisations were more difficult to arrange meeting with them than the rest of NGOs. One of them requested another letter from the Ministry of Social Affairs in addition to the one I had already presented them with. And the other one did not attend the arranged meeting.

After a few visits and calls I made the decision to include fourteen NGOs. Three organisations were under the control of the Ministry of social affairs: NGO 5, NGO 2 and NGO 3. And two NGOs were newly established ones that are not under the Ministry of Social Affairs, but are registered at the Ministry of Commerce as business companies. Both were one-year old at the time they were chosen, and both had big plans. The first one was a perfect match, NGO 8 is a consultation group for development projects, and the other – NGO 10 – was founded by a young female law graduate who decided to establish an organisation for social development. Both initially agreed to be part of my fieldwork.

The other NGO chosen was – NGO 4 – an internet-based NGO who reaches out to its audience on-line, and offers help for needy people by fixing buildings and cleaning sea shores in Jeddah. This NGO was chosen for two reasons: first, as it is internet-based, it uses its website and Facebook page to interact and communicate with people. Also, one of its

recent campaigns to clean Jeddah sea shore was videotaped, and showed tens of young men and women cleaning, with interviews being made on site with the many young college girls and boys. I made email contact with this NGO and they agreed to participate in the research. In addition, NGO 9 is an advocacy, which aims to make it possible for women to participate in development work and projects. One of these NGOs targets women's empowerment through training and enhancing skills, and is registered as a company for training and project development under the Ministry of Commerce. There also NGO 12, 13 and 14 all are advocacy organisation on human rights , health and violence.

NGO 11 is a women's business centre that focuses on economic empowerment for women and states its goal to eliminate obstacles facing business women and to increase community awareness explicitly on its website. It is a very competitive, liberal and well-known centre for women in Jeddah. The last two is NGOs 6 and 7 both are traditional old NGOs, one is concerned with rising Islamic awareness and the other is an Aid relief.

### **5.5.1 Fieldwork materials**

I managed to talk to several people about my research during my trip to Jeddah. The fieldwork started with pilot interviews, with the first being performed with a lady who owns a consultation company. I booked an appointment and carried out a formal interview with her, and found her to be very cooperative in her responses during a one and a half hour interview. She signed the interview consent form and I was able to record her. She also suggested two other NGOs that she thought it would be useful for me to arrange to meet, and I took their contact numbers from her. In addition, I was able to undertake another two pilot interviews with NGO managers. Both were very easy to arrange, with just one phone call being required, and the interviews were arranged for the following day.

Both managers were keen to talk about their NGOs instead of their personal achievements. However, I found it very awkward to ask for their signatures and their permissions to record the interviews, so I was very nervous at the outset, with the experience being very different from my first interview with my cousin. After fifteen minutes or so I was able to ask if I could record the interview, and they agreed. Another problem that I encountered was the endless questions that I had to ask, which involved going back and forth with paper, and this was very confusing and distracting for both the interviewer and the interviewee. However, this made me aware of exactly what I needed to do for an interview, and I realised that I had underestimated the amount of preparation I should put into each and every interview. Asking questions about women's activities within NGO settings is a suitable topic, and the NGOs offered a mutual ground in which the researcher was able to avoid embarrassment or intrusion into women's private lives, as would be the case in any other private spaces.

There were several similarities revealed among these three pilot interviewees. First, all the interviewees were happy to have their names mentioned in the research, and thus to have their identities exposed. Also, they all spoke on behalf of an organisation, with little concern about their personal identities. Moreover, they all referred to their documents (e.g. 'as you will see in our documents') during the interviews to clarify and support their explanations. In addition, all three women were very confident, and clearly had a professional experienced attitude from the way they spoke.

These interviews produced not only useful information, but also revealed several flaws in the way the interview was being conducted, and in the organisation of the questions. It would have been nearly impossible to foresee these flaws without using these pilot interviews to make the required adjustments to their structure and organisation. As a result,

a number of changes needed to be made in preparing for the fieldwork interviews. First, the organisation of the questions needed adjustment, and some questions needed to be merged with other ones. For example, there were several general questions that had a number of other sub categories, so each general question had a number of related categories. Another change that was required was to prepare one sheet for each interviewee that included all the general and sub-categories to prevent anything from being missed or skipped during the interviews. In addition, the layout of the questions was confusing and distracting for the researcher, and so the questions needed to be shortened to include only the keywords of the categories required, and needed to be put in a better order to ensure the interviews flowed smoothly. Finally, this pilot interview experience allowed the interviewer to develop a more professional and confident interview manner.

The few people I met during this preparation phase asked me what questions I intended to ask them, but I could not give them any particular questions. I made sure that they would be contacted again with the proper papers and consent forms, and the final set of questions. However, the difficulty that I faced here was that I needed to adapt and adjust the questions in relation to each NGO. Several considerations were taken into account, such as their descriptions of their goals and missions (documents/ website materials), their target groups, their sizes and their ages (new, old).

## **5.6 Data analysis**

This study followed a parallel mixed methods design, consisting of two processes – quantitative data analysis using descriptive statistics, and qualitative data analysis using thematic techniques in the narrative data (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009:266). There are a number of different stages within the analysis process, including a reduction of the data

prior to evaluating it. Firstly, the data for the document analysis was listed and categorised into a coding sheet according to the research themes. Then these codes were analysed in terms of their relationships to the research indicators/themes, and compared to those produced in the analysis of the other NGOs studied. Finally, this document analysis provided a base knowledge for the interview process, which was revisited and compared with the interview results at different stages.

The interviews were recorded with interviewee consent. Each interview was categorised according to specified indicators, with the interview responses being reduced to information contained on clear categorised sheets. The data were then analysed for each NGO, and compared to that generated for other NGOs. A further comparison was made between the interview findings from the NGO managers and the surveys of NGO beneficiaries in order to provide insights regarding different points of view. Finally, the findings from the document analysis and the findings from the interviews were compared to provide an indication of how the information presented in the documents compared to real world experiences.

The data analysis revealed some indicators that were repeated throughout the data collection process – by NGO documents, managers and beneficiaries. This overlap increases the reliability of the data by identifying specific categories that were agreed upon or disagreed upon. It also offers a reflection of different points of view for each topic discussed in the interviews and the NGO documents.

Data analysis aims to discover patterns in the data gathered. Babbie (2004) suggests several points that enable the researcher to discover patterns within data, such as frequencies (how often the information is repeated); magnitudes (at what level the information is important or relevant); structures (what different types of information there are); processes (whether

there is order among information); causes (what the causes of the findings are); and, the consequences (what affect the information can have). Discovering a pattern in the collected data is crucial to understanding the topic using the study's indicators. For example, were political opportunities ever taken within the different NGOs? And how have the findings about the NGOs been compared with each other? All of the other indicators must be repeated, in the same pattern, including the local resources, the religious impacts, gender terminologies and public engagements. In addition, SPSS software for analysing quantitative research was used in this study.

### **5.6.1 Transcribing the interviews**

This process will cover different responses for sixteen interviews regarding events and guests by shedding light on the nature of such events, the kinds of people participating in them, and the reasons behind them. Links will be made to other interviews and to the literature review. For example, events in NGOs may include conferences, forums, discussion groups, parties and lectures. Guests may include speakers, experts, academics, elites, celebrities and preachers. Listening to interviews is an essential part of the data analysis process as it helps in making sense of the data. By going through all the interviews, this enables the researcher to see patterns, and the time involved is often well spent as the researcher becomes more familiar with the data, setting the foundations for the data analysis. However, translation is a major limitation, and it is an important step that cannot be ignored, although it will be a good investment for producing quotes. Three months were spent on this process, comprising six weeks for transcribing, translating and grouping data; and another six weeks for writing up and analysing discussion based on the information that was generated during the first six weeks.

During the transcription stage, memos and comments were taken for interesting comments and questions. After this, tables were developed to group and organise the data according to codes. Finally, an analysis of frequencies and connections were transferred into a discursive document.

## **5.7 Ethical considerations**

A number of ethical considerations arise for this research about women's empowerment in NGOs in Saudi Arabia. Firstly, the sensitivity of the topic was an issue, as the concept of empowerment may have a different affect and meaning on how different people and women understand and perceive it. As was mentioned earlier, the debate about women's empowerment has been discussed and addressed lately in Saudi Arabia. However, the researcher must still pay special attention to the use of gender terms, as there is widespread suspicion among women about adopting terms that are seen as Western imports. It was important to handle this sensitive matter appropriately throughout the fieldwork in order to avoid rejection of the researcher by the respondents. This meant that the researcher had to sometimes leave the labelling of terms and the framework in which the discussions occurred to the respondents, and base her responses on their expressions and reactions to particular terms.

Secondly, the researcher had to ensure that all respondents signed a consent form before participating in the research, that they understood that they were free to leave at any point, and that their anonymity and confidentiality was maintained. All participants' identities were anonymised from the beginning, with their names being replaced by initials or numbers. All data from the field work were saved on an encrypted flash drive, and all



manual files of personal contacts were secured in a suitcase with a password lock. As soon as it was possible to, data was saved to the University's M drive. I would have aimed to handle any objections or complaints from the respondents or the organisations to their satisfaction in order to ensure that no harm was done (Babbie, 2004).

Thirdly, the research was conducted in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, and in the native Arabic language. This meant that most of the data were translated into English, and thus that there was the potential for some specific meaning to be lost during the translation process. Words and terms were carefully translated, however, to ensure that their specific meanings were not lost. As mentioned previously, the researcher provided each NGO with a letter which explained the main ideas and purposes of the research, and this document was also used to obtain permission from the respondents for their participation in the research. In addition, each participant needed to provide their informed consent and be made aware of the fact that all information would be kept confidential prior to their participation in the research, and that they and their NGOs had the right to not participate in the research and to withdraw at any time (Bichman & Rog, 2009)

Finally, in terms of funding this research, the researcher was sent to the UK with a full scholarship by the Saudi government, with all of her fieldwork expenses to be covered. In terms of access, people in Saudi Arabia appreciate education, and most welcome researchers that are conducting academic study, and thus the researcher was confident that access to organisations and respondents would be obtained. However, the researcher still anticipated the possibility of facing difficulties with bureaucracy and paperwork that could consume a lot of time during the fieldwork. It was also essential that participants' cultural and religious views and privacy were respected throughout this research. Also an ethical review approval was needed from the University of Leeds to ensure the all ethical issues

were addressed on behalf of the researcher. The ethical review was approved after completing all the requirements.

### **5.8 Personal implications**

There were a number of personal matters that required special consideration from the researcher. The researcher was viewed as an insider in two ways – firstly as a female, and secondly as a Saudi national. This had a two-fold effect: on one hand, it enabled the researcher the benefit of fully understanding the meanings, feelings and attitudes of the respondents; but, conversely, it could have coloured the objectivity of the researcher. Focusing on this issue beforehand provided the researcher with a reminder to maintain a professional personality throughout the research.

The researcher utilised personal reflection to maintain a professional stance and to monitor her behaviour in order to ensure that the wide range of responses from the respondents were documented appropriately. The researcher used personal contacts from her family, friends and colleagues to obtain access within the field, and comes from a well-known, educated family in Jeddah – which helped to establish her credibility as a researcher in Saudi Arabia.

### **5.9 Limitations of the study**

A number of possible limitations to the study were taken into consideration during the collection and analysis of data. These included:

- 1- The lack of a clear definition of NGOs in Saudi Arabia, which could mean that concepts such as organisations, associations, training centres and civil society might intertwine.
- 2- That all organisations have some form of relationship with the government in Saudi Arabia, and thus that no organisations there are *totally* non-governmental.
- 3- That due to the private nature of the Saudi society, this research was intentionally conducted within a professional environment to avoid any inconvenience to the participants.
- 4- Those difficulties could be experienced in trying to define gender concepts or in presenting some explicit gender notions, and thus the researcher needed to be aware of the terminology used by the different women in the various organisations.
- 5- That the constantly changing nature of Saudi society, including new legislation, policies and reforms could potentially cause an issue, but recent changes relating to the topic will be reported upon.
- 6- That the research sample was small, and the research was conducted in only one city, and so could not be seen as being representative of the whole of Saudi Arabia.
- 7- The difficulty of obtaining meeting with managers was an obstacle, as many of them cancelled at the last minute after months of preparation.
- 8- Translation as a real limitation as it was a time consuming process. Transcribing all interviews from Arabic to English was both hard and slow process. Also translating all documents and other material took time and effort to achieve.
- 9- Travel logistics was time consuming and difficult to arrange to match my children school time in England.

## **5.10 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the plan for the fieldwork that was undertaken for this research. The research design had an exploratory focus, relying predominantly on qualitative data collection and analysis through interviews, document analysis and surveys. However, to check the validity of findings, the mixed-method was employed to compare results collected from different data sets. It was important to use a mixed-methods data collection process in order to understand the phenomena from the various dimensions. The research strategy followed the theoretical framework suggested and explained above. This chapter also explained, in detail, how the data was collected in terms of the locations used, the timings and the sampling methods.

## Chapter Six: Guests and Events

The hosting of events featuring invited guests is a major feature of most NGOs' practices. As chapter 4 showed, every NGO that was studied for this research has hosted an event of some sort – small or big, formal or informal – and each event has speakers, presenters and/or participants. In fact, events and guests are so closely related and intertwined with one another that it would be impractical to attempt to separate them. This research considers the use of events and guests to be an important strategy that Saudi NGOs adopt to achieve their objectives and goals, mobilise resources which provide a way to empower women in NGOs. Events allow NGOs to pursue goals and objectives such as community development, to further foster their causes, and to engage in fund-raising (Moufakkir and Kelly 2013:130). Moreover, events are increasingly becoming an important part of people's daily lives as they "mark important milestones and achievements", and different organisations, including governments, recognise the potential of events to bring in resources (Pernecky and Luck 2013:1).

Whenever an NGO hosts an event, speakers, guests of honour or other professionals and experts will inevitably be invited, and the particular kind of event and set of guests is likely to serve a specific agenda or strategy that an individual NGO has (see Chapter 4 – NGO strategies). Events in NGOs may include conferences; forums, discussion groups, parties and lectures, and guests may include speakers, experts, academics, elites, celebrities and preachers. The use of guests and events by NGOs for pushing their agendas forward has been extensively discussed in the literature (e.g., Joachim, 2008; Katzel, 2007; Abou-Rabia-Queder, 2007; Montagu, 2010; Roggerband, 2014). As Bowldin *et al.* (2011) argue, events have become increasingly central in contemporary culture, with governments and

businesses promoting them as part of their strategies. Moreover, all events have an impact on their audiences, and have to be well-planned to achieve the desired results.

This chapter reviews the findings from the thesis survey and interviews, and makes cross-references with the literature on the role of guests and events in NGOs. It is divided into two sections, with the first focusing on NGOs' guests – comprising academics, royals and elites, community leaders and sponsors, and the second focusing on NGOs' events – comprising conferences, forums and public events.

## **6.1 NGO Guests**

This part of the analysis will look at the different type of guests in the NGOs under study, and provide theoretical explanations for their presences at the events to which they are invited. As mentioned earlier, in the NGO setting, guests might include any persons or representatives from institutions that have professional opinions to offer. Such guests can provide NGOs with professional opinions, prestige, access to institutions and resources, training and funds (Jouchim, 2008), and are invited to NGOs as guests of honour, or to give speeches or training. These invitations are made with the hope that the guests will contribute to the achievement of the particular NGO's overall activities and objectives. The guest or speaker that is chosen for an event will attract a particular audience, as table (1.6) illustrates, with the survey revealing that 59.4% of respondents agreeing that their attendance of an NGO event depends on the guests or speakers that will be present.

**Table 6.1**

<b>Does your event attendance depend on the speakers attending</b>			
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>Yes</b>	63	59.4
	<b>NO</b>	14	13.2
	<b>Sometimes</b>	24	22.6
	<b>Don't know</b>	5	4.7
	<b>Total</b>	106	100.0

As the statistics above show, guests are an important factor in members of the public's choices to attend NGO events, and NGOs thus need to pay careful attention to which guests will make the most of a particular event. This strategy of matching guests to events will now be considered in the context of Saudi NGOs, where guests include academics, specialists, royals, elites, state officials, community leaders, celebrities and sponsors.

### **6.1.1 Academics and professionals**

The guests most commonly invited to the NGOs under study are experts, specialists and academics. This group is distinguished by the fact that they all have some kind of professional qualification and specialist knowledge in a particular area. The analysis of the types of guest that each NGO has invited shows that 11 out of the 14 NGOs studied invited academics or experts to speak on a particular topic that was being discussed by the respective NGO. A number of NGO managers provided their reasons for inviting academic

and experts during the course of the interviews. Representatives of three NGOs said that their primary reason for inviting academic and experts is to provide clients with a scientific and reliable source of information on the relevant topic. Four NGO managers indicated that using specialists makes NGOs more reliable and trustworthy in the eyes of clients than if less specialist sources of information are routinely used. For instance, the founder of NGO 11 states:

People are looking for somebody [that] is reliable and trustworthy, such as professionals and experts. We try to host a different person for every event [and] some are religious, but our main focus is social change – anything to do with improving developing awareness and attitudes.

(Female, academic, 60s)

This quote provides a clear reason for inviting specialists to NGOs – that people attending events run by them want the truth, and believe that they will receive this from such sources. Moreover, as the manager in NGO 5 noted: “We mostly invite academic(s) and experts in our field [because] we want to offer a professional service”. Thus, both of these NGOs clearly care about the image their clients form about them, and want to offer good quality services for them. This shows their adoption of a marketing point of view in which they seek to present themselves in a professional way.

However, not all managers were forthcoming about their reasons for inviting experts and academics to their NGOs, including the manager of NGO 12, which invites “mostly academics, lawyers, doctors and religious figures”, and the manager of NGO 10, whose “forum offers workshops and lectures [and] has forty-four speakers in different area [of]



interest, including Saudi and other international experts". The manager of NGO 10 thus refers to the large amount of guests that were invited for one event, including many local and international figures, as well as the fact that each guest would contribute to their area of knowledge according to the issues being discussed. Joachim (2008) explains how various types of actors could be chosen as guests, depending on the nature of the issue that is to be discussed, the common values of the society, and the agenda of each NGO. Within their strategic plans, NGOs have to decide which of these actors will be the most influential for the particular issue they will be addressing (Joachim, 2003:249). Similarly, Roggeband (2014) also emphasise on the crucial role actors play in providing ideas, information and expertise which enhance the mobilisation process for women's NGOs. Most of the above managers mentioned inviting guests that have some sort of qualification in order to present a reliable source of information to the audience and gain their trust. Thus, choosing a guest requires consideration to determine which ones will best serve the NGO's objectives by promoting effective engagement with the relevant issues.

It is common for NGOs to focus on particular issues, especially on topics that matter to women, and some NGO managers cited this as a reason to invite particular guests. For example, a manager at NGO 6 noted: "We also have weekly lectures on various subjects such as religion, health, women's legal rights, economic and self-development issues presented by specialists, doctors and academics". This NGO recruited experts or academics for each topic to be discussed, allowing them to provide a forum for professional opinions to be given on the topics under discussion.

Two managers implied that inviting academics and experts offered a way to raise awareness. The manager of NGO 2 reported that they invite specialists to explain and discuss the issue of unemployment to groups of low-income employed young men and women. The

intention of this NGO was thus not only to raise awareness and understanding about an issue, but also to address these people's employment issues as well. Similarly, the manager of NGO 1 regarded the invitation of specialists for a conference on empowering children and raising their awareness to have the purpose of enabling these children to interact with experts and gain information from them. She explained: "For example, every child has his or her own advisor, each according to the subject they are searching about. One girl made her research about divorce [and] had a lawyer to explain the process and the legal procedures".

In Table (2.6) below the survey results showed that the highest percentage 36.8% of the respondents said that they preferred to listen to guest speakers that hold a professional qualification. The most favoured form of guest is thus the academic or professional, which shows the audience's preference for acquiring information from somebody with specialist knowledge and qualifications. This result agreed with the interview analysis which showed that professionals were the most preferable among NGOs.

**Table 6.2**

<b>Do you prefer the speaker or guest would be</b>			
		<b>Responses</b>	
		<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>x1(a)</b>	<b>Royal or elites</b>	29	19.1%
	<b>Professional and academic qualification</b>	56	36.8%
	<b>Religious figure</b>	28	18.4%
	<b>Celebrity</b>	36	23.7%
	<b>Don't know</b>	2	1.3%
	<b>Other</b>	1	.7%
<b>Total</b>		152	100.0%

However, the use of academics and professionals depends on the event planned. For example, it would be more relevant to have professional speakers for lectures, workshops and courses than for informal festivals, for example, where their presence is less vital or relevant. As the above analysis illustrates, academics and specialists are favoured over other guests because of the reliability and credibility they provide. NGOs invite them for the reliable professional knowledge, information and expertise they provide, which implies that people value and trust information when it comes from a reliable source.

### **6.1.2 Royals and elites**

Other types of NGO guest that are popularly sought by NGOs are royal family members and elite members of society. They represent the 'guest of honour', who plays an important role in many Saudi NGO events (Hamilton, 2010). Inviting members of the royal family or elite members of the community is a very common practice in Saudi NGOs. In fact, Queen

Effat wife of King Faisal had played a major role in influencing the king to establish education for girls (Hatem, 2014). As Hamilton (2010) argues, having the support of a royal member adds prestige and legitimacy to an organisation. Moreover, Montagu (2010) adds that both male and female royals in Saudi Arabia are channels for change, and significantly help to achieve the goals of the NGOs they are involved with. Table (2.6) from the previous section showed that royal guests were only preferred by 19.1% of the public, compared to the 36.8% that preferred academic guests, coming third in respondents' favourite type of guest after academics and celebrities.

Although audiences are keen for the reliable sources of information that academics provide, NGOs nonetheless value royal guests for the resources they bring with them and the impacts they can have for certain events. For instance, royals and elites are valued highly for NGO (annual) fund raising parties. The study found that four NGOs invite royal family members to their events, and NGO 7 invites "society ladies" or elites in the society to their events. NGO 7 indicated that they usually invite female royals to their annual fundraising parties, with the King's daughter having been invited as a guest of honour for the opening of the latest conference. However, this NGO has a connection to the high society of elites and royals that grant access and prestige in the society. Joachim (2008) also notes the benefits of NGOs having "influential allies" that can legitimise their objectives through the provision of resources, including "money, institutional privileges and prestige". In any charity event, royals will provide generous donations and access to resources alongside the prestige that they confer (Glosmeyer, 2004:152).

NGO 9 also had the King's daughter as a guest of honour in their forums, and she has now become a member of the board of executives there. This switch of role is significant for this NGO because it marks the transformation from the king's daughter being merely a prestigious supporter to her being an actual player, and this could dramatically increase the

NGO's access to resources, its mobilisation and its legitimacy. Hamilton (2010) has described this involvement as constituting an initiative that is tacitly led and supported by a female royal. In addition to the aforementioned benefits, having the King's daughter as a member confers the added benefit of providing a source of direct influence over the King.

As mentioned above, this female royal willingly participates in NGO 9 as an executive due to the influence she has. However, another NGO (NGO 14 – a breast cancer group) had a young female royal lead a group of Saudi females on a women's to climb Mount Everest as part of an international climbing group. The informal participation of a princess added value in terms of publicity, credibility and resources for this NGO. The founder of NGO 13 has emphasised the important contribution that royals can make to any NGO: "I'm telling you that when you have royals or elites on your board of directors it will be very beneficial". She added that their NGO prefers elite guests over experts because of the funding opportunities and access they confer. Thus, for this NGO, royals and elites are prioritised over academics as they are seen as providing greater benefits in terms of resources. At the end, it depends largely on each NGOs agenda.

Male royals are also invited as guests of NGOs. NGO 10 has had royals as guests of honour in their Social Developmental Forum, where they were part of the male section and were acting as state representatives. Such a guest has a two-tiered impact – as both a state official that provides the NGO with access to resources and legitimacy, and as a royal that provides prestige and connections. Joachim (2008) explains that such actors can have an impact on the framing of the particular issue that an NGO is interested in discussing as well as conferring prestige on the NGO in question. For instance, if such actors are government members, they may influence state policies.

NGO 6 has targeted not only local royals, but also international elites, playing host to ambassadors' wives in their last annual fund raising party. The manager of NGO 6 asserted: "We have invited to our annual party consultants' wives in Jeddah on the honour of the King's wife. We had presented our achievements nationally and internationally and we also brought live success stories of women has been trained our NGO". The manager of NGO 6 was able to secure both the first lady and a group of ambassadors' wives for this fund-raising, which would not have been easy, but this old and well-known NGO had done so before. Access and publicity matter greatly for them, as they are aiming for an international impact, and the manager of this NGO added: "Outside Saudi Arabia we are working on correcting our image by displaying what we are doing for people around the world and even for non-Muslims in natural disasters, for example". In addition, the manager stressed the impact of presenting the success stories of women that have been funded, guided and trained by their NGO. According to this manager, it was very touching to see the impact of donors funding and it has transformed the lives of these women.

As previously noted, elites and royals can play a major role for NGOs, but establishing a connection with such figures does not happen automatically for an NGO, as the newly established NGO 3 indicated. Due to a lack of adequate connections, this NGO's invitation to a member of the royal family was rejected, and they were forced to switch their strategy for seeking support, instead inviting as many young men and women as possible to attend an event in to gain publicity and volunteers. The manger of NGO 3 explained:

When the royal guest option was refused, we changed our strategy to invite as much young men and women to attend – about 1,000 – [as] they can contribute in

volunteering and also they will spread the word through the social media to [a] larger number of people. (Female, 30s, Manager)

This quote is explicit concerning this NGO's shift in tactics from seeking royal guests or high-ranked officials to using members of younger generations that are eager to volunteer in order to boost recruitment and publicity once they realised that securing their first choice of guest was untenable.

All of the afore-mentioned NGOs with the exception of NGO 3, had the connections necessary for reaching royals, and their strategic planning sought the benefits that such arrangements confer. NGO 7, for example, had royal connections from being one of the first charities in the country. NGO 14, however, would have needed less strong connections to secure a young female royal to support breast cancer because of the nature of the project, although securing such a royal would have added legitimacy to the project. Also, in the long-term, the image of this young royal climbing Mount Everest will give the younger female generation a role model to look up to, which indicates the vision this NGO has for Saudi girls and women. There are, however, many NGOs that are not able to gain access to such privileges.

### **6.1.3 State Officials, Community leaders and Celebrities**

Another range of guests that NGOs seek are society's leaders, religious figures and celebrities. All of these have in common the fact that they are famous within a particular society and thus have some influence over the people there. Joachim (2008) here focuses on actors that could have an impact on the framing process of the particular issue NGOs are interested in raising, such as the members of government that could influence policies

and gain prestige; the UN office that could create pressure through its international relations, fairs and conferences; and the media. The main reasons for NGOs to invite such guests are to, first-off, attract people to their events, and then to use them to produce an impact. According to Lewis (2001), several studies refer to the influence that charismatic leaders and founders of NGOs have in the community. Such leaders include religious figures or celebrities that have respect and credibility in a particular society.

NGOs invite these types of guests for their influence on people. As the manager of NGO 1 (youth empowerment) explains, they use “politicians, religious figures, [and] famous people to let the children get in touch and not be afraid to ask these people”. NGO 1 focuses on connecting these influential figures with the youth in an open discussion environment in contrast to the widespread tradition of separating community leaders off because of their honoured positions into a space where they lack direct contact with ordinary people. NGO 1 had the vision to use community leaders not only as an inspiration for youth, but also to directly connect with youth on a personal level, allowing children to have the chance to communicate freely with persons who are usually distant and hard to access. Similarly, NGO 10 has had large numbers community leaders and international figures in their forums. NGO 14 also got involved in using the influence of celebrities, which were You-tubers and TV presenters, to appear on their breast cancer Champaign as mentioned later in media chapter.

NGO 8 invited Erdogan – the Turkish Prime Minister – to visit Jeddah, and showed him around the city. He was reportedly impressed by how much Saudi women have accomplished there and, interestingly, the job of showing this official around and representing Saudi Arabia was handed to Saudi women. NGO 2 also invites state officials



to its events. In the last discussion group it organised, state officials came to talk about the issue of unemployment. As the manager of this NGO explains:

On unemployment workshop we invited all unemployed young men and women from a district we have covered and also we have invited decision makers, specialists and the developmental fund. (Female, 50s)

This NGO not only provides information on the issue being discussed, but also invites executives that have the authority to make decisions from potential employers who can hire them on the spot. This represents another case of an NGO inviting influential actors to practically address a particular issue – in this case decision makers, experts and an employer. The NGO that initiated this workshop, even though it is a research NGO that conducts social research, was thus keen to actively contribute to the well-being of the youth in that district. It is no easy task to attract unemployed men and women together with recruiters to make such an event work. However, the manager was surprised by the low attendance of unemployed people, especially as arrangements had been made for transportation, with two buses waiting to collect people from the local area. As the manager puts it: “they just had to show up”. The manager also noted that most of those that did attend were women that were seeking employment and, in return, thirty women were hired on the spot.

Stressing the effect of community leaders on NGOs, Paterson (2008) explains how MGD (Millennium Gender Development) uses research as a channel to legitimise women meeting with leaders, officials and community member within a culturally conservative context in which women’s participation is generally low (2008:340). Thus, conducting

research and holding workshops provides a legitimate area within which women's NGOs can initiate meetings with officials and decision makers. As well as such events providing a legitimate area in which these women can hold meetings, they also allow the types of guests to be chosen, and Joachim describes this as a "mobilising structure" (2008:252). Numerous influential actors can be recruited through different events organised by NGOs, and thus the access that such events enable is essential for gaining influential allies. Joachim (2008:249) highlights the ways in which NGOs favour certain actors and ideas whilst eliminating others and mobilising actors for collective action.

### **6.1.3 Sponsors**

Sponsors are also considered as potential guests by NGOs because of the funding resources they offer. It is always beneficial for NGOs to have sponsors such as companies, institutions or persons that can provide funds or support. In their attempt to attract funds, four of the NGOs studied said that they have invited guests to their events because they were either potential or real sponsors. NGO 1 (youth empowerment) invites sponsors and possible sponsors to their events. The manager of NGO 1 pointed out that her NGO had not initially been very keen to invite guests because they had wanted to concentrate on children and how to make them enjoy the event, but they soon realised that they needed funding for these events, and had thus adopted the strategy of reaching out to sponsors. She added: "Now we always invite a wide variety of guests including possible sponsors, media and academics and, of course, parents". For this NGO, the main reason for inviting guests (sponsors) is to generate funds and support. The manager there also explained that, "many times, we [have] had institutions and companies that offered us funds after they saw the success of the conference". After the success and publicity of their first conference, sponsors have been reaching out to offer this NGO funds.

Similarly, although the main concern of NGO 6 is to generate funds, however, they need to also reassure sponsors and donors that they have succeeded in achieving the required targets that they asked for their support to reach. The manager of this NGO explained that it is very important to show donors where their funds are spent, and that they do so by presenting live success stories of women that have been funded by their NGO to the donor audiences. These live examples are highly effective because donors can see the results of their donations right in front their eyes. The manger of NGO 6 said, “we invite all sponsors and everyone [that] has supported them to the event so they can feel and see their own effort in reality – it is like seeing your own child graduating”. As noted earlier, this NGO focuses on the emotional, human side of sponsors – who, in many cases, will be women that give financial support to this charity – by displaying and presenting the final results and accomplishments of such support. As the manager of this NGO explains: “There is nothing like presenting a live model and a real experience for an audience [so that] people would see the result for themselves.” Having a live model and success stories has provided a very successful way for not only maintaining the support of these donors, but also for attracting more donors as well. In support of the same claim, NGO 3 stressed the idea that showing donors and sponsors documents and evidence about where their funds have been spent both proves their credibility and encourages future funds.

As have been illustrated in this section guests are an important part of NGOs activities. Each NGO have their preferences on which guests will fulfil the purpose of activities and mobilise their agenda. Some NGOs chose guests that offer reliable information and expertise, some wanted the access and contacts and some were interested in drawing attention to their issues by having more resonant names. The following section is about events in particular and it is clearly closely related to the guests section.

## 6.2 NGO's Events

As the previous section showed, Saudi NGOs often use the strategy of inviting respectable guests to gain credibility and promote their activities, and the type of event that these guests are invited to is an equally important ingredient within this process. Events hosted by NGOs serve as an opportunity to mobilise people, and the type, size, audience and place of an event that are used to attract people will vary according to each NGO's strategy or objectives (Katzel 2007). NGO events include, amongst other things, professional seminars, discussion groups, religious lectures, local conferences, international conferences and promotions of the organisation in public shopping mall stands. Katzel (2007) refers to the importance of holding events with special purposes and planned strategies to achieve the NGO's desired goals, and explains each kind of event and its purpose in detail.

As mentioned earlier, all events have some kind of impact on their audiences, and an increasing number of organisations are putting greater investments into events so they can serve a particular agenda. The use of events also fulfils other NGO requirements, such as "including government objectives and regulation, media requirements, sponsors' needs and community expectations" (Bowdin *et al.* 2011:230). Moreover, Moufakkir and Kelly (2013) also note that social events not only matter in terms of meeting requirements and producing direct outcomes, but extend to the importance of fostering a cause and drawing the attention of decision and policy makers as well, as the example (mentioned earlier) of the employment workshop undertaken by NGO 2 that included decision-makers shows. In this sense, events can enable mobilisation when actors from policy and decision-making arenas are involved in the facilitation of opportunities for participants.

NGOs have to develop a strategy for each event by selecting the appropriate speakers and audiences required that will best support the cause they are fostering and the impact they are seeking. The structuring of NGO events thus has a form of complexity that relates to their purpose and the community for which they are selected (Moufakkir and Kelly 2013:131). The next section will now outline the different kinds of events that have been used by the NGOs under study, which comprise conferences, forums, annual parties (fund-raising), lectures, workshops and public events.

### **6.2.1 Conferences and Forums**

Katzel (2007) describes a conference as an “event used by any organisation to meet and exchange views, convey messages, open debate or give publicity to some area of opinion on a specific issue” (2007:7). Conferences can be very useful events for NGOs because they can act as a channel for disseminating information and enhancing knowledge. The analysis of the interviews undertaken for this thesis show that six of the fourteen NGOs have organised and hosted conferences or forums – NGOs 1, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 14. The manager of NGO 1 indicated that conferences are considered to be at the core of its work – youth empowerment. This NGO utilises events such as conferences as tools for empowering youth, and provides basic knowledge and training that can lead these children to participate and be actively involved in such events. NGO 1 has held three conferences, and as their main target is youth empowerment, they have organised their conferences to take place on an annual basis to cover a different topic each year chosen by youth that attend. Each topic is then extensively discussed by a group of experts, parents and children. The manager explained that the vision of this NGO is to enable children to have a voice, express their opinions, and to deliver a public speech. Within this NGO, children were

trained to do research on a topic, and were then encouraged to express their findings and have a public discussion about that issue in the annual conference. Because of its status as a youth empowerment NGO, as mentioned earlier, NGO 1 has invited inspirational figures such as celebrities, religious leaders and lawyers to their conferences in order to discuss the chosen issues and communicate directly with the youths, and the topics covered thus far have been the media, education and poverty. The manager of this NGO (Female, 30s) said, “We want the children [to] share their ideas about particular problems”.

Thus, as the manager of NGO 1 clearly states, conferences can provide a way to encourage children to take part in and learn the skills of public speaking. She added, “the first conference was a huge success because it was the first of this kind in Saudi Arabia. The other two have drawn much more attention and, all of a sudden, we were known all over Jeddah”. A more immediate result produced by such conferences is the impact that they have on people, as news about the success of the first youth conference in Saudi Arabia has spread on social media sites. These conferences have thus proved to be very effective as a source of publicity for this NGO as they have successfully promoted their goal of having an impact on the public, as well as producing other resources such as more funds and clients.

NGO 8 also drew attention to an event that they have organised for children. The manager explained that they have undertaken a theatre project for children in which they present women in a positive way. The manager, referring to their discussion of women’s issues, said: “We want to present these issues in a simple fun forty minute show that [is] directed at young children from seven to twelve years”, the purpose of which is “to correct the preconception about women and to construct more positive image of women in Saudi to the new generation that are far more open to media”. This NGO is keen to reach out to a

younger audience in an attempt to portray women in a better way and to create a new mindset. It was astonishing to realise that this manager had understood that addressing a younger audience is equally important as attempting to engage with and correct existing misconceptions about women.

The selection of topics to be discussed in the NGO conferences is vital. NGO 8 mentioned that they host events and conferences that invite speakers for debate to discuss controversial issues regarding women in Islam. As will be discussed in greater detail in chapter nine, this NGO has strategically discussed controversial Islamic quotes and texts about women with religious sheiks, and has since received approval from the high religious committee on a particular issue. Their approach has been referred to as a form of activism because it uses Islamic texts to challenge patriarchy in organisations (Abou-Rabia-Queder, 2007:76).

NGO 7 also organises regular conferences, both locally and internationally. The manager there reported that they had organised a “conference recently in Turkey, three ... exhibitions in France and Toronto and book fairs in Geneva”. She seemed very proud of these international conferences, as this NGO is keen to spread its message internationally. Interestingly, this NGO is a religious one that specialises in scientific verses of the Quran, and its motivation to spread its message internationally emerges from its aim to correct misunderstandings about Islam. The newly established NGO 11 is planning to organise conferences in the near future, with its manager noting, “We ... participated in a sociology conference in Algeria under the name of this centre. I have presented my latest work on sociological theory, and I had a huge response from people over there”. This NGO also organises other events, such as monthly intellectual gatherings to discuss Malek Bannabi’s work on promoting change, and another monthly discussion group for researchers on academic articles discusses and reflects on a particular topic. Although this NGO focuses

on academic areas, it is also keen on maintaining Islamic identity. Interestingly, the manager was very critical of international conferences on women, and said that one of her visions is to train Saudi female delegates to participate in these conferences in a way that presents the Islamic view on women's empowerment. She argued that there are a lack of educated women that are ready to debate in such conferences and displayed resent towards what she saw as Western intentions to change Islamic women's identity through conventions such as United Nation's Convention Eliminating Discrimination Against Women CEDAW.

Another type of event that Saudi NGOs organise is forums, as stated by Nazer (2009) "women have even taken advantage of business and economic forums to air their concerns" and they have utilised different platforms to discuss their issues (Nazer 2009:158). Pointing out the difference between forums and conferences, Katzel defines a forum as "an open discussion between [an] audience, panel members and [a] moderator" (Katzel, 2007:8). The analysis of the interviews revealed that four of the NGOs studied had organised forums, with NGO 9 having run two. The first of these was in 2010, and looked at women's participation in national development, with speakers looking at success stories of women in the Saudi society. The manager commented that "this forum was a great chance to discuss and reflect on women role in Saudi Arabia." According to the manager, the audience of this forum comprised both men and women, and many women spoke about their experiences to the audience. Whilst the forum run by NGO 9 had broad discussions, NGO 10 has developed a more professional forum about Social Development, which will run every two years. This forum offers specialised workshops and lectures and had 44 speakers the last time it ran, including both Saudi and international experts. Guests included a royal family member, high officials, experts and celebrities. This kind of forum targets a more professional audience, and its focus is at an international level, but it was planned



and organised in Jeddah by Saudi woman. Thus, although both NGOs have organised forums in this area, NGO 9 has focused more on women's empowerment by presenting success stories of business women (Destination Jeddah 2010), whereas NGO 10 prefers a more professional approach focusing on building both capacity and knowledge by offering professional workshops.

### **6.2.2 Public Events**

This section is about any event conducted outside NGOs for purposes of publicity, fund raising or raising awareness. Three NGO managers reported conducting public events outside their NGOs. The recently formed NGO 3 used a shopping mall stand to advertise itself, with its manager explaining: "we had a stand in the Red Sea mall to let people know about our association and to attract fund and assistance." The selection of the time and place to advertise itself was carefully considered by this NGO, as shopping centres are very popular, and they chose the month of Ramadan, when Saudi Muslims donate more and like to do good deeds. This manager also mentioned that they had attracted many people, especially women, by letting children talk and present at their NGO's stand. Whereas, NGO 5 also had a stand in a shopping mall during Ramadan, but it is one was managed by men. As will be explained further in chapter nine, this NGO *chose* not to have women advertising their NGO.

Interestingly, both NGOs 3 and 5 thus have similar aims concerning attracting funds and people to their NGOs, but they display a major difference in the way that they present themselves. In NGO 3, the female manager was not only present at the stall, but was also wearing a brightly coloured cloak instead of the traditional black one. On the other hand, women from NGO 5 were not present to promote their NGO's activities, with men doing

so instead, even though they were holding a banner asking ‘for a better role for women’. When the female manger of NGO 5 was asked about the mall stand, she explained that there was another stand at the entrance to a women’s mosque that was in a women’s only area. However, the contrast between these two NGOs’ approaches is very interesting, and relates to people’s preferences, NGOs’ different orientations, and the different target audiences and groups.

NGO 4 also organises public events, but they recruit volunteers by communicating through social media. The cleaning of the Jeddah seaside and debates for raising awareness in the Red Sea mall represent two public events that were organised by this NGO. The manager (Male, 30s) of this NGO elaborated on the dynamics of conducting public events with both male and female contributors when explaining the seaside cleaning campaign, “When we were cleaning the seaside, we tried to keep the girls and boys on each side, and I was putting an eye on boys not to bother the girls”. According to the manager, the event went smoothly and focused on getting things done rather than just representing a social gathering of volunteers. However, it is interesting to note that although this NGO (which is Facebook-based) is mostly moderate, the manager has nonetheless spontaneously made arrangements for segregating the sexes in order to avoid any unwanted comments about members’ behaviour in the public event. The manager claimed that because he did not know the intentions that all the contributors had for volunteering, he had to be conscious of maintaining order during the event. However, this NGO’s regular private meetings, which are for the leaders rather than the public, are mixed meetings of men and women. The manager’s position was given support by the female manager of NGO 4 on a separate occasion, when she mentioned the seaside event, noting that there had been an incident of boys annoying girls on the seaside, but that the male manger had made sure that everybody kept to their assigned areas. The male manager of NGO 4 also mentioned that they always

take a government representative on their public events just to be on the safe side and to keep the government on their side: “in events we always have to take an official representative with us to avoid any possible incidents”. This NGO is keen on displaying caution, notifying officials of any activities they are undertaking, which is a good strategy for avoiding any undesirable future repercussions relating to their organisation’s activities.

For NGO 14, public events have generated both national and international publicity. The first event they held in 2010 called for women to wear pink and to stand together in large numbers to create the breast cancer pink ribbon in a public stadium. This pink ribbon stand set a Guinness world record for the largest man-made ribbon (Destination Jeddah 2010). The event was published in the local media and was widely talked about, and eventually achieved the wanted outcome of publicity and raising awareness outcomes. As will be mentioned later in media chapter, this NGO has another event for breast cancer awareness which is a claiming trip to Mount Everest consisting of a group of Saudi girls for the first time. Thus, choosing a public activity is one strategy for NGOs to attract people’s attentions, which will often then lead to these NGOs attracting funding, recruiting further volunteers and raising awareness of their missions and agendas. However, different NGOs seek different images, and there are thus substantial variations in their attitudes about what they should or should not do or how they should or should not present themselves, depending on the individual orientations and agendas they hold.

Events represent a big part of what NGOs are doing on daily, weekly and annual basis. Again choosing particular event serves certain agenda for NGOs and also depends on resources each NGO can afford. Also the huge mobilising possibilities that these event could offer considering the guests involved and media used within.

### 6.3 Difficulties and Obstacles:

NGOs face a number of potential difficulties and obstacles in relation to the organisation of events, such as the need for permits and cultural or traditional oppositions and barriers to various activities. The analysis revealed that the main difficulty they face in organising events is in gaining permits – an issue raised by two NGOs. Permits are official letters or statements that allow NGOs to conduct events, and are requirement for any public event in Saudi Arabia. Both these NGOs had problems with getting permits issued to allow them to conduct conferences. NGO 1 stated that their problem with applying for permits is that it is a time-consuming process that requires a lot of paperwork and so it can take months to secure one. This has set them back in achieving their exact visions and delivering events on time. The manager also pointed out that even if they received a registration certificate from the Ministry of Commerce, they would still have to get a permit issued for each event, and sometimes this permit has to be sought from different places according to the planned topic or activities, making the process of attaining one even more complicated:

The problem with events is issuing permits for conferences as it [can] take six long months of bureaucratic work and [it] has to be issued from the ministry charged with the topic being discussed – from the Ministry of Media or Commerce or Social Affairs.

(Female, 30, youth empowerment)

For NGO 1 last conference, the permit was not issued on time, and they decided to go ahead with the conference inside a private university. Unexpectedly, as a result of the event's widespread promotion, the Minister of Media wanted to attend, but his request was rejected. The manager explains:

We told him that it would be an honour to have him, but [asked him] if he would ... come in person without any official representation. He said, 'no I would like the media to cover this attendance'. We said 'we just can't risk this because we are already risking everything by going on with the conference without an official permit'.

(Female, 30, youth empowerment)

This stance shows a lot of courage and determination from such a young female manger. She added that, after the conference, she presented a video of the event to the minster and discussed the conference with him. NGO 13 also mentioned the difficulty involved in getting permits: "any event we want to do, we have to have permission to conduct such [an] event [and] that takes months for permits to be issued".

Corruption is also a problem that NGOs in Saudi Arabia face. NGO 8 were on the receiving end of such problems when officials cancelled their Conference at the very last minute. The conference was to be attended by numerous experts from around the world, and all the appropriate permits had been issued and fees paid. The event, titled "Choosing your Career Conference", was scheduled for mid-April 2012. The manger explained during an interview:

After such publicity and preparation I was stunned to [receive] the news. I was devastated, [and was provided] with no explanation for a whole two days until I received a call from a high official in the Ministry of Education saying that he is the one who cancelled the conference.

(Female, 30s)

After a lengthy two-hour discussion, she found that five years before, the Ministry had received an order from the King to establish an advisory centre for high school graduates that would provide young people with help and guidance on selecting a university degree programme. A budget was issued, but nothing happened until NGO 8 began organising a conference to help young men and women choose their careers. This manager was threatened that she would be charged with illegally gathering more than a thousand people in a mixed (men and women) environment if she did not cancel the event. The official also asked her 'who she was' to just come up with the idea that they have been working on for 25 years with no one to challenge them. She has said that she will organise the conference next year in Kuwait instead.

Like the manager of NGO 1, this woman was in her early thirties and showed a strong determination to continue her work despite all the threats that have been made against her. Both managers have the energy and determination to continue, and the manager of NGO 8 is planning another conference entitled "Women's Liberation in the Time of Messenger", although she notes that "there is no way we could do this in Saudi Arabia, not even in the Gulf – we will be doing it in Morocco by God's will". Interestingly, she is altering the talk on women's empowerment from a focus aimed at women in socially acceptable business fields – where women can make bold statements about female involvement – to presenting to the public a more liberally articulated notion of liberation within the Islamic framework.

Another difficulty facing NGOs is that of cultural barriers. For example, the manager of NGO 3 has encountered issues relating to her dress code in public: "I was ... wearing a coloured Abaya unlike the traditional black one and recorded a comment, for a conservative said, 'what are you wearing' and I replied back [that] I did not care who says that we should only wear black in our religion". This manager is another example of a woman in her early

thirties who was unafraid to defend herself against people criticising her for failing to adhere to gendered cultural norms.

Another problem for such NGOs is coping with working women, who often have young children to manage as well. When a manager from NGO 5 was asked about the other events that they undertake apart from courses and workshops she said: “Not much. You know, when we work with women, they have other responsibilities, like pregnancies, and hence it is hard to keep up with them. And, besides, we want the empowerment [to] work one step at a time”.

Similarly, NGO 1 work with children, and started out having weekly meetings with the mothers of those involved, but they soon realised that mothers would have many responsibilities that would keep them busy much of the time. The manager of NGO 1 said, “When we saw that many mothers had other obligations, we decided to make it every term for two days”. They thus adjusted their meeting schedule to fit more comfortably with the busy schedules of the mothers involved. Therefore, both these NGOs have had issues with busy mothers, and have changed their plans accordingly.

Another cultural barrier for NGOs in Saudi Arabia is the lack of enthusiasm that is seen among the younger generations. NGO 2 experienced this lack of interest with the attendance of their employment workshop. Although young men and women were invited to a free workshop with free transportation, the attendance was poor, and most of the participants were female, as the manager of NGO 2 comments, “Although it was an invitation, and we sent a bus to collect people, the participation was weak – there were 90 people registered as unemployed and the people [that] showed up were only 30”. This weak attendance indicates a lack of motivation among the younger generation, although it should not be forgotten that it was organised for one of the poorest districts in Jeddah.

## 6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed NGO events and the guests they invite for them, and how both of these are used as tools for empowering women. The organisation of events and the invitation of guests are equally important for NGOs, with the use of events being intertwined with the use of guests. The discussion of this chapter was split into two parts, the first talking about guests and the second about events. The ‘guests’ part explained the different reasons that NGOs have for inviting various types of guests to participate in their events. Among these guests are academics and professionals, royals and elites, sponsors and state officials and community leaders, with academics and professionals representing the most commonly invited group. Equally, the survey results showed the importance of inviting academics and professionals to events, as they were the most favoured group of guests among the respondents. This indicates that members of the public value and seek a reliable professional source of information and knowledge.

Sponsors were also found to be an important group of guests for NGOs as they are used for the purpose of funding, which is a large concern and problem for most NGOs. On the other hand, royal, elites, community leaders and celebrities offer more of an indirect impact, but are also important to NGOs and members of the public as they can add different types of value, including the prestige, access to resources and connections that royals and elites offer; and the inspiration and influence that can be provided by community leaders and celebrities. These all have their purpose, and serve particular goals held by NGOs. In addition to the funds they can provide, the outcomes of mobilisation, gaining access to resources and generating contacts were cited by NGOs as reasons for inviting guests and holding events, depending on the issue discussed and the guest invited.



The difficulties involved with organising events has also been discussed, and it was found that getting a permit issued for an event was a major difficulty that all NGOs have to deal with, as this is a time-consuming and complicated process. Finally, other cultural difficulties were examined, and dress codes and corruption were found to be barriers that caused setbacks in the work that NGOs undertake in Saudi Arabia.

## Chapter Seven: Building Alliances

This chapter will examine the interactions between Saudi NGOs and other organisations, looking at what kinds of relationships they form. These NGOs seek different kinds of benefits or supports from these relationships, including finance, expertise, connections, information and execution. However, NGOs' relations with other organisations take different forms, with some being purely philanthropic, others being collaborative and yet others being innovative (Jamali *et al.* 2011:377). The types of relationship that exist between NGOs and other organisations depend on the benefits that the NGOs are seeking from such relationships, such as funding, sponsorship, exchanges of resources, networking and connections.

Cooperation with other organisations can be undertaken at either the local or the international level, and this will be discussed in more detail in the analysis that follows. Engaging with local organisations is more convenient for NGOs than engaging with international counterparts because international engagement requires more effort to plan, and an NGO's vision and strategy can thus be seen in relation to its outreach for impact.

Alliance building, as Ebyan (2010) suggests, is a strategy that feminists working for NGOs use to mobilise human and financial resources. This strategy of building networks, especially with international organisations, involves careful consideration if alliances are to be built with influential and trusted organisations or parties (Ebyan 2010:68). Joachim (2003) argues that the success of the strategic framing process depends on two factors: establishing strong political structures, which includes building powerful alliances and

working with international institutions; and the effective mobilisation of the NGO's structure through the use of organisational entrepreneurs, international constituencies and experts (Joachim, 2003:253).

An important part of this analysis addresses government–NGO relations which, as studies have shown, can be cooperative and productive ones (Breed 1998). The analysis will identify four levels of cooperation between Saudi NGOs and the Saudi government, ranging from ‘no relationship’ to an ‘influential relationship’. This analysis will be divided into two parts: Saudi NGOs’ relations with other organisations; and their relations with the Saudi government, and each of these will explain the resources and support that NGOs seek from such relations. The exploration of the relationship between NGOs and other organisations will be split into three sections, examining their collaborations with organisations, networks and sponsors. The exploration of the relationship between NGOs and the Saudi government will be divided into four sections: seeking no relationship, seeking government support, collaborating with the government and having an influential relationship on the government.

## **7.1 NGOs’ Relationships with other Organisations**

As mentioned in the introduction, the relationships between NGOs and other organisations take different forms. According to Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff (2011:4), the primary motivation behind such partnerships is to access hard resources such as money and materials, as well as soft resources, such as information, contacts and credibility. Austin and Seitanidi (2012) note that such partnerships offer four types of value for both non-profit organisations and businesses alike: associational value, which includes outcomes such as “higher visibility and credibility, increased public awareness of the social issue and

greater support for organisational mission”; transferred value, which includes financial support and increased volunteer capital; interaction value, which includes expanding learning, knowledge and access to networks; and synergistic value, which relates to how innovation can enhance positive organisational and behavioural changes, and increase their political power within society (Austin and Seitanidi 2012:946).

Austin and Seitanidi (2012) thus provide a detailed explanation of the different rewards that NGOs seek through their relationship with other organisations, which are grounded in values beyond material resources. As much as material resources are highly important for NGOs, resources such as networks and visibility are also valued for their more strategic long-term benefits, and these benefits are pursued through cooperation with other organisations. Nazeen and Maheen (2010) argues that choosing an ally is essential for the legitimacy of the organisations involved. Forming an alliance between organisations depends on an unspoken reciprocity principle – that each organisation will offer some type of resources for other partners. Resources are the reason for alliances, with factors such as, “information, connections, mobilisation potential [and] visibility” mattering in the process of building alliances (Nazeen and Maheen 2010:73). Austin and Seitanidi also summarise potential fits for partnerships in relation to factors including the nature of the social problem addressed by the organisations, the identification of linked interests and resources, and the identifications of partners’ motives and missions (Austin and Seitanidi 2012:942). The choice of a partner in the NGO world is thus strategic, selective and planned, and is aimed at achieving the maximum possible value (Maxwell and Conway 2002).

When asked about their cooperation with other organisations, ten out of the fourteen NGOs studied here said that they had relationships ‘with many organisations’ (with ‘many’ simply indicating more than two organisations). From an overall point of view, all the

organisations reported that they have some sort of a relationship with other organisations. Clearly, it is thus common for organisations and companies to have relationships and connections with other organisations. However, some of the NGOs studied here elaborated on these relationships, whereas others did not. The following sections will explore these various relationships using the interview findings.

### **7.1.1 Collaborative Relationships**

Collaboration is one of the forms that relationships between NGOs and other organisations take. This term indicates a cooperative communicative relationship based on exchangeable benefits. Jamali *et al.* (2011) have argued that partnerships between NGOs and businesses are gaining popularity as a tool for addressing social problems, and explain that the terms ‘partnership’, ‘social alliances’ and ‘networks’ are used to describe the collaborative nature of this relationship (2011:375). However, choosing partners is never an easy task, as several considerations need to be taken into account. According to Austin and Seitanidi (2012), selecting the appropriate partnership depends largely on the potential benefits it promises, and they break down the factors that are relevant to a potential fit into shared interests and resources, and the identification of missions and motives. Such factors will help to determine whether the collaboration between these organisations will last, with the combination of good fits and adequate planning by the NGO leading to long-lasting and prosperous collaborations (Austin and Seitanidi 2012:934).

Collaborations are made with other organisations at both the local and the international levels. Collaboration with local organisations is very useful in terms of resources and connections, but collaborations with international organisations tends to produce more significant outcomes because it is considered as a westernisation tool for intervening in

women's issues. Collaborating with local organisations provides a strong means for enhancing NGOs' resources and capabilities. The analysis of the interview data showed that there are several reasons for cooperating with local organisations. Signing agreements is one way that NGOs and other organisations enter into agreements, and is mentioned by NGOs 2 and 3. Both NGOs have signed agreements with other companies that provide resources. For example, the manager of NGO 3 mentioned signing an agreement with a specialised institution, noting: "Each institution will offer something different – the Charity Storage will give us space for storing items, the Islamic Relief will offer clothing and Zamzam, a medical charity, will offer medicine". A similar arrangement was noted by NGO 2, which signs agreements with institutions according to their needs. The manager explained that they have made agreements with health charities to provide them with medicine, and with employment institutions to find jobs for those in the area they were researching employment in. These NGOs have thus strategically selected companies or organisations to provide them with different resources based on their resource needs, but still restricted to allocating and receiving resources only.

Evidently due to their limited resources, NGOs reach out to other organisations through contracts and agreements in order to overcome some of these limitations. This approach provides NGOs with a sustainable source of resources, with each and every organisation or institution having different kinds of resources. This source of resources has become increasingly essential in the wake of 9/11, as donations and funds have been largely restricted by governments due to concerns that money will be provided to Al-Qaida or other extremist groups (Montagu 2010). Similarly, Thomas Parks (2008) argues that donors have shifted their provision of resources to more strategic targets post 9/11 and that, even on an individual level, people tend to be increasingly cautious about their donations.

Negotiations between NGOs and other organisations focus on what these organisations can offer and what the NGOs need. As NGO 12 explained, they cooperate with many organisations and try to coordinate among charities to exchange benefits. When asked about the kind of support they are seeking from other organisations, the manager of NGO 4 (male, early thirties) stated that they are looking for “all kinds of support – time, materials, appliances, education, health and voluntary work, such as cleaning, building, packing and distributing meals”. All these NGOs are willing to receive any kind of support offered in terms of materials, funds or volunteers. And in many cases, NGOs are *forced* to seek any kind of resources, not just those that fit with their strategic vision for using the relationship to attain outcomes beyond funding and receiving material resources as showed by NGOs 2 and 3.

One local organisation – the King Khalid Foundation – was mentioned by three NGOs. This is a non-profit organisation that has been reaching out to local NGOs to offer workshops, consultations and discussion sessions. This foundation is offering more strategic resources for NGOs by promoting the quality of their work unlike other partnership where the material resources are the most available. The manager of NGO 5 (female, forties, conservative NGO) mentioned in passing that they have a relationship with the King Khalid Foundation, whilst the manager of NGO 10 (female, forties) has chosen it as their strategic partner. NGO 4 has been contacted by the King Khalid Foundation, and the female manager (early thirties) explained: “they have asked us to work with the national Youth Council – they are trying to empower us to do something”. The King Khalid Foundation has also offered to arrange discussion groups, and has reached out to NGO 4, where the male manager said: “We have been invited to a development discussion, but I stopped attending because there is nothing coming out of it. I would rather focus on working”. This manager thus showed little interest in engaging in the discussion session,

preferring to spend his time gaining resources to help them in their daily volunteering activities instead of listening to recycled talks about the importance of volunteering. The manager does not see an added value in going to some of the discussion groups. As Austin and Seitanidi (2012) have argued, partnerships have to be well planned to ensure that the best match is found. In the case of NGO 4, this was arguably not the case, as the King Khalid Foundation were not providing what they were seeking to get from a partnership.

All the afore-mentioned NGOs briefly referred to the nature of the relationship they formed with other organisations. However, the manager of NGO 10 went further, providing a detailed explanation of how such alliances are built. She referred to this process as one of “activating partnerships”, and said that her NGO used it to seek a wide variety of resources, including execution, information and funds. This NGO has signed numerous contracts with other companies, and the NGOs help each other out by seeking partnerships. The manager provided the following examples of these partnerships:

The last Social Development forum’s recommendations were handed to different institutions: one as a grand-maker; another as a facilitator – a catalyst to gather them; one for consultancy; and a collage with their partnership with Colombia University, [through which they] have designed a Social Development Diploma having five or even six alliances is something we keen to do all the time.

(Female, 40)

This manager stated that, in their effort to implement the recommendations of the forum they have organised, NGO 10 has decided to create a work-team consisting of six different organisations, using its relationship with other institutions to hand over roles and



responsibilities in order to work as a team to achieve one goal. This NGO needs sponsors for funds, consultants for planning, catalysts for recruiting people, and facilitators for execution, and they hand these different jobs to professional institutions to contribute their parts to the overall process. NGO 10 has the crucial role of organising this institutional teamwork – to coordinate between these different organisations in order to achieve the desired results, and to make this alliance successful. This approach is very similar to that adopted by NGOs 2 and 3, who also have multiple partnerships that are determined by their resource requirements (although NGO 10 appeared to be more strategic and to have a more cohesive plan for integrating all the partners in the alliance in order to achieve their goals). NGOs 2 and 3 have charitable objectives and seek resources that will provide them with immediate benefits, and are thus less strategic than NGO 10. In other words, they take whatever resources they are offered, creating a system of stable resources that is often essential for them. On the other hand, NGO 10 is selective in the partners it chooses, working towards specific goals and thus developing what Contu and Girei (2014) refer to as “true partnerships”, in which organisations work together towards a shared and mutual objective (Contu and Girei 2014:213).

The manager of NGO 10 noted that they seek consultations from colleges for planning and designing educational training programmes. Education is an acceptable arena in which to discuss women’s right for learning and knowledge (Devriese 2008), and educational institutions are one of the bodies that NGOs frequently work with. The interview analysis showed that several NGOs used colleges and universities for venues and consultation, and worked with them to provide training. NGO 9 also worked with higher education institutions, offering training for university students and providing them with speakers and advisors. NGOs 6 and 11 have worked with vocal training centres, providing certificates

for students who pass their courses. Not surprisingly, these NGOs work with educational institutes for the purpose of capacity building.

As I argued in chapter two, Saudi education continues to provide legitimate grounds for promoting female empowerment (Metcalf, 2011). Devirese's (2008) study on the Arabian Gulf stressed how these countries, which lack social activism, use higher education as a channel for improving women's rights. Through higher education for women, activists use existing institutions as a tool for change instead of trying to construct new ones (Devirese 2008:84), and this approach has been and continues to be a very effective tool for advancing women's empowerment there.

NGOs can use international relations as a mobilising tool for resources (Joachim 2003). However, in the Saudi setting, international relations are sometimes viewed with suspicion – as westernising mechanisms that are used to draw people away from their Islamic identities (Al-Sarrani and Alghamdi 2014). However, at the same time the government is influenced by the MGDs indicators and using it to promote women empowerment. Nonetheless, a number of NGOs – 6, 7, 9 and 10, for instance – reported cooperating with international organisations. NGO 7 had a relationship with a French publishing company that let them participate in their book fair in France. In fact, the manager (female, fifties, religious NGO) mentioned that were reaching the international audience better through this participation and by holding their conferences abroad. Their recent conference in Turkey was a source of “huge publicity” for them, as the manager of NGO 7 put it. Similarly, a female manager from NGO 6 (fifties, religious NGO) insisted on the importance of reaching out to the international audience in order to correct stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam. Both NGOs 6 and 7 have thus reached out to international organisations and audiences to increase the impact of their mission to present Islam in a

more accurate and positive light. Both NGOs have a large local audience, but also have an interest in expanding their message to spread a good and accurate image of Islam to the world.

Interestingly, the reason that NGOs 6 and 7 had for developing relationships with international organisations was based on their goal of correcting misconceptions about Islam and promoting its values. On the contrary, NGOs 9, 10 and 12 were keener to learn from international organisations and collaborate with them in providing and undertaking research and learning. NGO 9 formed alliances with the UN and the World Bank, and one of its managers identified the nature of this alliance as research and study-based. Moreover, NGO 10 also had a strategic partnership with Booz & Company, who mention them on their website as a strategic partner (<http://www.booz.com>). Interestingly, the manager of NGO 10 (female, early forties) was very explicit in explaining the whole concept of partnership, and had a good understanding of the strategic value that it provides. In addition, NGO 12 adopted some of the campaigns of international breast cancer charities, promoting the wearing of the pink ribbon every October – the international month for breast cancer awareness.

This section of the analysis has thus discussed collaboration between both local and international NGOs. Cooperating with other organisations is a widespread practice among NGOs for numerous reasons, but the analysis has revealed that cooperation with local organisations is more common and widespread among the NGOs studied here. Cooperation with international organisations is comparatively weak due to a fear that associations with western organisations will not be viewed favourably.

### **7.1.2 Networking**

NGOs also use networking and seek contacts and connections through existing relationships with other organisations to build alliances. Villeval (2008) cites Paul Starkey's (1998) definition of a network as "a group of persons or organisations who voluntarily exchange information and who implement activities to gather without reducing their personal autonomy" (Villeval 2008:247). She argues that this definition of a network refers to two important aspects of them: that the relationship involved is voluntarily entered into and that the participating partners respect the each other's autonomy.

According to Villeval (2008), people or groups join networks because they are facing the same problems, and are looking for solutions to these problems, support, recognition, advocacy and policy change. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, exchanging contacts can benefit both parties because it can contribute to what the other organisation does not have in terms of both resources and the combined power formed through alliances. However, it is important to point out the difference between a network and a coalition. Yanacopulos (2005) argues that NGO coalitions are long-lasting permanent links, whereas networks focus more on issues of advocacy. Networks are an important part of coalitions, and can exist without a coalition, yet "coalitions create a greater value and commitment together, decreasing costs through group specialization and increasing legitimacy and the power of speaking with one voice" (Yanacopulos 2005:95).

It is common practice for NGOs to build a network of useful contacts. The interview analysis did not show that this level of organisation existed among groups as opposed to networks of connections and contacts, in which the groups are keen to exchange benefits and access. As the manager of NGO 5 (female, forties) put it, "we are generating contacts and connections by communicating with other organisations". Through their relationships, these NGOs were able to create networks of contacts that brought them increased access

and resources. Goby and Erogul (2011) explain that entrepreneurs often use networks, and female entrepreneurs in particular use a wide variety of networks to generate contacts, and to connect them to other business capitals.

A female manager from NGO 4 explained how they build their networks with other organisations in this way: “this relationship is based on links – so we would announce that there is this case [and if] any donors were interested ... we [would] link it to another organisation, and so on”. This NGO is thus building networks by linking organisations together and exchanging details about potential donors. She also provided an example of how they contact companies and restaurants that are owned by relatives of NGO members and ask if they wish to donate meals and appliances for the disadvantaged. Because this is a volunteer-based NGO, they rely a lot on contacts that they or other volunteers may have for generating resources in their daily routine.

Networking is also an essential part of NGO 6’s practise. A manager from NGO 6 reported that the main reason that they invite different institutions to their events is to generate connections. This manager (female, fifties) gave an example of how many institutions and organisations they invite for one event, which included representatives from the Ministry of foreign affairs, girls’ education, universities, and professional women such as interpreters and translators. As the manager of NGO 6 notes: “This cooperation is useful but, at the same time, [it is] to spread the word about our work and to build connections for next time we need [them]”. For NGO 6, the main reason for this event was thus to create and attract connections. A similar approach is also adopted by NGO 1, which invites a range of well-known people to its events, including religious figures, academics, writers and sponsors. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, NGO 12 organised a gathering for all the charities and organisations they were working with in order to build a network for

exchanging resources. Importantly, the power of networking has been enhanced by the expansion of social media and social networking sites, which work as a powerful tool for collective action, as can be seen from the recent Arab spring revelations (Agarwal et al. 2012:100).

Through their events, these NGOs have thus been able to attract and target a wide range of connections from the public and private sectors. Their invitations provide the grounds for developing partnerships and increasing their access, influence and resources. Beyond the basic motivation to collaborate in order to secure benefits such as resources, networking enables NGO executives with extra vision to use this collaboration to go a step higher. Building networks is a practice that is part of what NGOs do and hope for, as networks bring potential contacts, access and connections that, in return, create the basis for their NGOs.

### **7.1.3 Sponsorship and Social Responsibility**

As the analysis revealed, it is important for NGOs to attract funding due to their limited resources, being mostly voluntary and philanthropic ventures by nature. While forming official agreements with other organisations will secure long-term resources for these NGOs, other NGOs seek financial support as their first priority. Generating funds from other organisations was also revealed to be an important reason why NGOs aim to secure sponsors, and the interview analysis showed that NGOs are constantly seeking to do this. For instance, NGO 1 frequently searches for sponsors through e-mails and lists of possible sponsors and donors, and attempts to get as many sponsors as possible by reaching out to companies that have social responsibility programmes. As its manager (female, early thirties) stated, “There are many companies that want to pay, but they want this contribution to be accounted as a social responsibility as the concept is increasingly emerging. Some

large companies support us financially with small funds”. Targeting companies that promote social responsibility programmes represents a clever move by NGOs as it enables both the NGOs and the companies to achieve their agendas. NGO 1 stresses the growing trend in business to make contributions to society (or the relevant stakeholders) as a form of socially responsible corporate activity.

Corporate social responsibility has gained popularity in recent years, with more and more companies and businesses playing their roles in contributing to a just society (Jamali *et al.* 2011). In Saudi Arabia, numerous companies provide both random and structured donations to NGOs as a part of their contribution to society. Johnson *et al.* (2011:134) define corporate social responsibility as “the commitment by organisations to ‘behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as the local community and society at large’”. According to Jamali *et al.* (2011), there has been an increase in the numbers of companies that meet their corporate social responsibilities through reaching out to NGOs and offering support. However, most of these businesses discharge their social responsibility via “philanthropic initiatives consisting of uncoordinated donations to worthy causes”, which produce rather poor social welfare outcomes (Jamali *et al.* 2011:376). The authors cite Kanter (1999), who argues that the traditional Charity model that corporations use is unlikely to foster innovation. Even with these problems, social responsibility programmes are nonetheless highly beneficial for NGOs (Jamali *et al.* 2011).

Adopting a more organised approach, NGOs 5 and 10 reach out to businesses for sponsorship by presenting proposals with set budgets to them. As a manager from NGO 5 (female, forties) said, “We are opening channels with many institutions and companies and we offer a proposal to the sponsor with the suggested budget and plan.” This NGO is

constantly on the lookout for support, and the manager explained that their NGO encourages women to come up with projects, but they have to give a strong presentation and provide a clear budget before they can present to possible sponsors. Similarly, NGO 10 explained that they prepare and present draft proposals of projects or courses of action that require sponsors in-house first of all. However, the manager pointed out that sponsors do not intervene in the execution process once the proposal had been approved. Presenting their plans and budgets reassures sponsors and donors that these NGOs know what they are doing. Both NGOs thus take the time and effort to prepare and present polished proposals to attract sponsors.

Agreements between NGOs and donors or sponsors concerning each other's requirements are often mutual, and lead to shared objectives being formed (Contu and Girei 2014). However, donors often give NGOs agendas to implement in return for their sponsorship. As Parks (2008) notes, donors have the power within this relationship, and they thus set the terms of the relationship. Donors have their own agendas, which they will try to maintain through their relationship with the NGOs by constantly monitoring and evaluating their activities (Porter and Wet 2009:290). For instance, NGO 1 explained that one of their sponsors (a food chain company) was not happy about their policies and approached them with their objections. As the manager puts it:

One food chain refused to support us after they listened to a speech by a young female participant in the conference, who was saying [that] it is good to spread Islam to other non-Muslims. They said that they don't want support an organisation with a religious agenda.

(Female, 30)



Showing their awareness of the impact that the association with a missionary Islamic organisation could have on their name, these sponsors not only objected to the NGOs values, but withdrew their sponsorship entirely. Making such an objection presented a clear message that they were not willing to adopt any agenda that an NGO tried to push. The sponsor displayed some responsibility in maintaining the reputation and image of these businesses. After all, in addition to making a contribution to society through this NGO, they were also using them to advertise their company.

NGO 8 also receives donations from trading companies as part of their social responsibility programme, and the manager of NGO14 mentioned their attempt to attract sponsors and seek support from companies through such programmes as well. This manager also noted that a fashion brand that sells furniture offered to decorate the charity office with luxury furniture, and commented: “I rejected [the offer] because I don’t want people to think that this charity decorated their office with the most expensive brand [of furniture] – it is about our image and what we trying to present.” This consideration of public perception shows that it is important for NGOs to not just accept any assistance that is offered, but to think about how this assistance will be viewed or interpreted, and whether it is compatible with the values and ends they promote and pursue.

NGOs seek sponsorship from businesses and companies for funds and resources, and although social responsibility programmes can be very useful for NGOs, donors often want to see a clear plan of what these NGOs want and how they are spending funds, and they sometimes impose their own agendas. NGOs and sponsors are thus constantly in negotiations, not only with respect to funding, but also to ensure that the agendas and objectives of both parties are fulfilled.

## **7.2 NGOs' Relationships with the Government**

This section explores the relationships between NGOs and the government from the NGOs' perspectives. As has already been noted, Breed (1998) has argued that the relationship between NGOs and the government is usually a cooperative one, suggesting that their independence from the state may not be clear-cut. As noted before, debates have thus arisen concerning whether and how NGOs can balance a cooperative relationship with the government whilst simultaneously maintaining autonomy. In explaining the dynamics in which NGOs interact with governments, Breed (1998:57) suggests that governments should support the roles and functions of NGOs, but that this can only happen where NGOs are able to persuade the government of the relevance of their policies to society at large. Furthermore, governments should ensure that the proposals that NGOs are making are relevant and have merit prior to seeking support from the wider society for the implementation of NGO-suggested policies (Breed 1998:57). Debates have arisen concerning how NGOs can have a cooperative relationship with the government whilst maintaining their autonomy. Moreover, AbouAssi (2014) has argued that Middle Eastern NGOs in particular need the cooperation of the government in order to play an active role in the policy process, and this was confirmed during the interview analysis.

The analysis revealed four levels of relations between NGOs and the government, ranging from no relation at all to an influential relationship that impacts on the policy-making process. In the Saudi setting, it is very difficult to avoid having any relationship with the government, as most public engagements require a permit from the relevant Ministry to occur – for example, a medical NGO has to obtain a permit from the health Ministry. NGO 9 has explicitly linked what they are doing to the country's national development plans, and its representatives were keen to point out that women's empowerment is in fact part of the country's objectives.

### **7.2.1 No Relationship**

Although this study concerns non-governmental organisations, it is almost impossible for such organisations to have no relationship with government, for the reasons just listed. However, one NGO that fully captured the spirit of the non-governmental organisation was NGO 12, whose manager (male, early fifties, human rights NGO) commented: “The government has no authority over us”. This NGO considers itself a proper non-governmental organisation, and has an independent governing body. The manager added that the government has its own human rights organisation, which works closely with most public institutions, and that “the governmental committee of human rights has more authority [than NGO 12] and [a] relationship with all government sectors”. Nonetheless, most of the events they organise are arguably required to have permits from a governmental body.

Through the analysis of interviews it was found that two NGOs stated that they had no relationship with the government. The manager of NGO 6 (female, fifties) said that they did not receive any funding from the government, whilst the manager of NGO 4 (male, early thirties) simply stated that they had “no relationship” with the government without providing any further information on this issue. It was interesting that this manager avoided elaborating on this question. As mentioned above, having some sort of relationship with the government is, strictly speaking, unavoidable, and the manager of this NGO mentioned on another occasion that they always make sure that they keep the authorities posted on what public events they are performing. As he commented, “The city council came and I was surprised at first then I found them saying we are here to support you– just continue what you were doing”. Thus, his claim

should be interpreted as meaning that this NGO does not *collaborate* with or *involve* itself in any projects with the government.

Discussions about relationships with the government produced various reactions among the interviewees (NGO managers). The initial reaction often reflected the possibility of holding relationships with the government, with only three out of sixteen interviewees having no relationship with the government in the form of support or funding.

### **7.2.2 Support from the Government**

It is important to note that the government provides annual funds for charities through the Ministry of Social Affairs. The analysis showed that three NGOs are funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs, and receive an annual fund from them. According to a ministry employee, these funds vary according to the size, needs and projects of each NGO, and range from 40,000 Pounds to 400,000 Pounds. The manager from NGO 2 manager said that the annual fund from the government did not cover the NGOs needs, and that they are constantly seeking financial support from sponsors.

On the other hand, although NGO 1 is not under the Ministry of Social Affairs, and they do not receive any funds from the government, they are continually looking for government support. This manager's comment about seeking government support – “we try to attract them all the time” – refers to their interest and motivation in securing government support for funds, legitimacy and connections. She goes on to explain that although they are seeking government support, they are continuously encountering difficulties regarding governmental bureaucracy on getting permits for events issued. NGO 1 mostly interacts with the government to get permits for events rather than to pursue funding from them, but bureaucracy is a big problem for NGOs in Saudi Arabia. This NGO was forced to take a

risk and go ahead with their conference without a permit because of all the planning, publicity and organisation that had already been put into it. This time-consuming permit process generates frustration among managers who are willing to step outside the box in creating innovative projects and events through their NGOs. Nazeen and Maheen (2010) argue that negotiating with the state can increase access for NGOs, but that they need to avoid controversial issues, and be critical and careful in the naming and framing of their issues (Nazeen and Maheen 2010:72). For instance, the manager of NGO 8 mentioned that their NGO wanted to conduct a conference on “Women’s Liberation in Islam”, but their permit was rejected due to the sensitivity of the title, which challenges the current status quo. Thus, the government, despite *declaring* its support, did not let this event proceed because of its controversial title.

### **7.2.3 Collaboration with the Government**

The previous section concerned NGOs seeking government support or funds. NGOs receive this support without having shared objectives or working together. The following section considers the relationship between NGOs and the government at a step higher up. Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff (2011) explain the importance of public-private partnerships concerning policy, service delivery, infrastructure, capacity building and economic development. The analysis of the interviews showed that several NGOs have collaborated with the government on various matters, and that many NGO managers felt that cooperation with the government could be positive, reporting that they had “a good relation with government”. The manager of NGO 13 (female, forties, Domestic violence NGO), for instance, reported that “the government itself was very helpful”. However, she also expressed similar disappointment to the manager of NGO 9 regarding government bureaucracy. Moreover, the manager of NGO 5 (female, forties) described their

relationship with the government as being “excellent” and explained that they have a lot of cooperation with government as they refer for counselling, and their employees are offered courses by the government.

In the government attempt to form collaboration with women’s NGOs they signed contract with three NGOs to carry out job for them. For instance, NGO 3 has collaborated with the government in conducting surveys about poor districts in the city of Jeddah. For example, the city council of the district of Rowis decided to rebuild portions of their city and asked this NGO to survey and document how many people and services are there. This project was very successful according to the manager of NGO 3, as they surveyed the whole area with field researchers that were all women. NGO 10 also provided a training course for the Ministry of Labour calling for the empowerment of women in workplaces. The manager of NGO 8 (female, early thirties) agreed that a “contract with the government would also help.” For them, a contract with the government would guarantee a permanent client with stable funding. NGO 8 organised the last ‘young business men and women’ event – an annual event for the Ministry of Commerce.

Collaborations with the government were generally positive remarked on in terms of the outcomes produced through the relationships, with NGOs that have had such experiences describing the collaborations as helpful, excellent and good. As stated above, cooperation between NGOs and the government have involved different approaches, including organising events, offering courses, capacity building, counselling, and executing projects for the government. By reaching out to NGOs the government is making good on its relationship with civil society, but also acknowledging the values that these NGOs are offering.

#### **7.2.4 NGOs with an Influential Impact on the Government**

The analysis of the results shows that some NGOs were able to collaborate with the government simply through both sides providing each other with mutual benefits, and that these NGOs were able to influence the policy-making process. In their efforts to solve problems, NGOs have become more and more involved in advocacy and human rights (Yanacopulos 2005:93), and such advocacy has been gaining popularity in relation to women's issues in particular. Although, advocacy has been weak in Saudi Arabia in general, and particularly weak within women's NGOs, yet some of these NGOs were able to have an impact on public policy and influence the government decisions (Hamilton, 2010, Ottaway, 2005). This analysis revealed that two of the fourteen NGOs studied have been involved in women's advocacy issues, and this section will address the advocacy *process* relating to these NGOs' influences on public policy for women.

NGO 9 is the only one of the NGOs studied here to have stated that they communicate directly with the government, which they do through the Ministry of Labour. They write letters requesting changes of certain policies regarding women's empowerment, and this approach "has been successful" according to the manager that I interviewed. She explained that their communication with both the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Commerce has been listened to, and that many of their demands and suggestions have been implemented. Three laws have been passed regarding women's rights in the workforce as a result of their correspondence with these two ministries. The first one allows women to work in Lingerie shops; the second provides a mechanism for hiring women in factories that ensure their rights are protected; and the last one provides legislation securing working

from home as a means for Saudi women to work in Companies.<sup>1</sup> These policies have already been enacted, and there are penalties for those who do not comply with them. In other words, this NGO has been able to mobilise and influence policy-makers in realising some of their political goals. The manager of NGO 9 explains, “We are lobbying on laws on issues that need change – for example, [that] women were allowed to sell women’s lingerie, [and we] developed a mechanism for women to work in factories and distance working for women”.

The manager mentioned that each law took a whole year of negotiating with the Ministries to get passed, and achieving their goals thus requires a lot of time. However, these achievements are very significant, and not only has NGO 9 succeeded in influencing the government to pass these three laws regarding women’s employment rights, but also to back these laws up by pushing the Ministry to impose penalties on companies that fail to comply with them. This manager attributed most of the success in generating these reforms to the team that she works with. She added that the change in society in general provided support for the lobbying on these issues because it promoted the acceptance of change: “the huge acceptance [from] the public for raising such issues has increased, which just [a] few years ago was hard to achieve”. One of the strategies that NGO 9 worked on was mobilising the public and, as this manager argued, it would not have been possible for these law to be passed without a significant amount of support from within Saudi society. This NGO worked in two “parallel” directions: by pushing the government, and by raising public awareness through campaigns in an attempt to mobilise them – an approach that Princen (2011) refers to as “agenda setting”.

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<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, a set of guidelines to ensure that working from home in this way is monitored to ensure that the work is being done.



Agenda setting has been discussed in detail by Joachim (2003), who argues that Saudi NGOs are able to influence the state by the way they present their issues, or what is called the 'Framing Process', which involves stating the problem together with reasons for its importance and then offering solutions to it (Joachim 2003:253). Framing an issue involves intentionally selecting particular events, facts, items of news or terms in order to shape and present it in a way that confers legitimacy on it and shows that it is a relevant concern that needs addressing (Allan *et al.* 2010). Shawki (2010) adds: "Mobilizing structure is used to refer to 'those collective vehicles, formal as well as informal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action'. The term also encompasses mobilizing structures that exist within other organizations and institutions not initially established for mobilization, including for example professional associations" (Shawki, 2010:101).

This is precisely the path that NGO 9 has taken: they began as a branch in the Chamber of Commerce that offered courses and practical skills for businesswomen, but now they are focusing on lobbying advocacy within the area of business. According to Yanacopulos, "lobbying involves engaging with those one wishes to influence, lobbying is a targeted process, requiring the art of persuasion, expert knowledge and negotiating skills" (Yanacopulos 2005:103). NGO 9 focused their attention on women in the workforce, conducting studies and lobbying the government on this issue. By selecting a legitimate issue and providing the government with a practical and achievable solution, they achieved what they set out to. Also the manager stressed on the effectiveness of having a skilled team who work passionately and believe in their cause.

On the other hand, the manager of NGO 8 manager (female, early thirties) is more interested in the cultural and social barriers that women in Saudi Arabia face. A simple yet strategic example was provided by the manager to show how this women's NGO has

influenced the Ministry of Commerce as will be discussed in the next chapter. This involved changing the Ministry's logo representing a young businessman by adding alongside it a cartoon image of women beside men, and changing the title for its logo from 'young businessmen' to 'young businessmen and businesswomen'. It is important to see why the Ministry of Commerce decided to hand over the organisation of a major event to a women's NGO. Remarkably, both the Ministry and NGO 8 were on the same page about women's empowerment, as both sides used resources from the other to achieve their agendas. The Ministry reached out to a women's NGO to organise their event, indirectly offering them support, visibility and credibility, whilst NGO 8 was able to use this support to influence the public by creating for a powerful image of businesswomen alongside businessmen.

Interestingly, the two female managers of the aforementioned NGOs are only in their early thirties, yet have had the vision to lead the process of changing and influencing government policy on women's rights. Although the manager of NGO 9 mentioned that they were able to push their policies forwards because of the team they had, they all possessed a passion for the issue and shared the same vision. She was also aware of the importance of the directors that made up their board, and the role that the king's daughter played as a member of the board realising the significance of policy change. The manager of NGO 8, on the other hand, has been able to convince the Ministry of Commerce to change its advertising logo to include women, and to influence the public. Ultimately, this piece of advertising affects both the government and the general public at the same time.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

NGOs relationships with other organisations take different forms, and establishing such relationships are one of the strategies they adopt to empower women. This chapter has identified the kinds of relationship NGOs form including collaboration, networking, sponsorship and social responsibility. There are mutual agreements within these relationships that involve exchanges of benefits and agendas. Some NGOs are satisfied with receiving support and funds from donors, sponsors and the government without having much interest in pushing issues forwards, whilst others are very keen to exchange resources and offer consultations and other services to the government as well as to other organisations. Some NGOs have the ambition, vision and strategic plans to mobilise and influence government decisions, with one of the NGOs studied having influenced policy on women's rights as members of the workforce. It is remarkable to see that public policy can be influenced and new laws be passed on women's rights through the influence of women's NGOs. This chapter has thus showed how Saudi NGOs adopt a range of activities to pursue their goals, from the very passive to the very influential.

## Chapter Eight: The Media

The media plays an important part in many people's lives, creating a channel through which they can connect and communicate with each other and be informed about what is happening around the world. The media is a tool that is used to deliver information, messages and news, and it functions as an important advertising and communication tool for any NGO. Governments, news agencies and other organisations use the media to influence people's views and opinions, as well as for advocacy. Information is used in the media as tool to engage, motivate, persuade and empower people, and the introduction of social media on the web has added to this power by providing a media format that is not restricted by censorship as the traditional media is (Human Rights Watch 2010).

Social media has recently been introduced within the Saudi setting and, interestingly, has spread far and fast (Benardi 2010). It has created a social shift, becoming widely used among the younger generations within a short period of time. More specifically, women's NGOs in Saudi Arabia also use the media to promote empowerment and educate, inform and enlighten women (Sakr 2008). Moreover, one can argue that social media has also added a new dimension to the identity of Saudi women who, after being highly protected and restricted by their roles within the family structure, have begun expressing their opinions more in public and become more informed individuals through the links that social networks provide. As Hilbert (2011) argues, new technological communications have globally transformed social, political and cultural structures and shifted our ways of interacting and communicating with each other. A study by Seo *et al.* (2009) talked about

the contemporary power of the media and how the new platforms it offers have been utilised by NGOs to switch their focus from a local to a global one, within which different forms of information can be very powerful. Carpenter and Jose (2012) also suggested that web offer a quick and inexpensive tool for NGOs enabling them to have a greater impact and enhance their functions.

This analysis chapter focuses on the media and how it has been utilised by NGOs in Saudi Arabia, describing the tools that NGOs use to attract and interact with audiences, clients and sponsors. I will discuss the role that the media plays in their activism, and in their mobilisation of issues and the public. Examining this tool will enable us to understand how it serves to address particular targets or strategies for NGOs, and this chapter analyses both the traditional and the new media's use by NGOs. Further discussion on particular social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube will also be provided, and will focus on how they have been employed to promote women's empowerment, and analyse the image NGOs are presenting to their audiences and the level of visibility women are displaying with NGOs. Finally, this chapter will examine the downsides or disadvantages that the use of the media has for these NGOs.

### **8.1 The Roles and Functions of the Media for NGOs**

The use of the media is important for all NGOs as it provides their channel for connecting and communicating with others. The interview analysis showed that NGOs used the media for many purposes including, communicating with people and attracting them to their causes, promoting and publicising their NGOs, advocacy and mobilisation. The interview analysis shows that some NGOs have clear and straight-forward motivations and strategies for their use of media outlets, whilst others are not very clear about the reasons behind their

use of them. According to Seo *et al.*, the new media has five functions for NGOs: promoting their images, fund-raising, interacting with public, creating connections with other NGOs, and providing access to NGO information (Seo *et al.* 2009:124). The analysis revealed that media functions in NGOs are split into two aspects: communication tools for attracting people and promoting the NGO; and mobilisation tools for advocating their positions and promoting change.

### **8.1.1 Communication and Promotion**

NGOs have adopted numerous different kinds of media, each used to target particular audiences and to serve specific aims or goals. Publicity was cited as one of the main reasons for using the media; with five NGOs saying that they use local television and newspapers as a channel for posting their news. Traditional forms of media are understood in this study to include television, radio and newspapers, and these were used by the NGOs in the study in the following ways. NGO 1 (a youth empowerment NGO) invited the press media to cover their annual conferences, providing a lot of publicity for them. However, as the manager explained, they cannot control the content of the press media, and this was expressed as a concern. Publicity was also the main target sought by NGO 5 (a conservative women's empowerment organisation), with the manager explaining that they use newspapers to reach out to officials or to let officials and sponsors know about their activities in order to attract people and funds. NGO 2 (charity housing) briefly mentioned that they use newspapers to post their news. For all these NGOs, getting their events covered by the press is attractive as it brings them more publicity and gains the attention of officials.

The media has also been used by NGOs as a tool for enabling them to communicate with clients, sponsors, donors, volunteers and the public. The media provides many tools that can be utilised according to different needs, and many NGOs discuss the importance of reaching out to others using both traditional and social media. One kind of communication tool that was identified as effective for reaching clients was the use of the mobile phone text SMS service. As expected, because NGOs 6 and 7 are traditional religious NGOs with many older clients, they use the reachable SMS. They have found that sending messages to their regular clients via mobile phone is useful and effective for communicating with them and attracting their attention. As the manager of NGO 6 explains:

I always rely on Phone SMS to inform people about human cases that would evoke deep emotional reactions, because the messages have a deeper impact, targeting mostly older age groups, these direct messages have more impact. I send messages asking about how they have been and if I have a case that needs support, or to invite them for an event. (Female, 50s, Aid relief)

This manager thus mentions three purposes for using texting: to keep in touch, to generate funds and to invite guests to their events. This NGO attracts funds and attention by presenting passionately described cases that tell the stories of disadvantaged women, and the manager notes how effective this strategy is, claiming that it yields immediate responses from the NGO's regular older clients. Here the reason for using text messaging is not only to keep in ongoing contact with regular clients, but also to persuade people to act and to be involved in their cause, which builds the NGO's network and provides access and opportunities. This was mentioned by James Weidman (2003) in his discussion of media relations in NGOs, which talked about the NGO strategy of humanising ideas by providing an emotive case or telling a passionate story in order to "engage the mind and imagination

of the reader” (Weidman, 2003:248). Randall and Harms (2012) agree with Weidman (2003) that using stories that “win both the listeners’ hearts and minds are critical communication tools” for NGOs to employ, and are thus considered by NGOs to provide a strategy for persuading audiences (Randall and Harms 2012:21). Similar to NGO 6 are both NGO 7 (an old and traditional organisation) and NGO 11 (a conservative women’s empowerment group), who each mentioned that they use phone texts to communicate with clients when both managers and clients are from the older generation, who prefer traditional direct messages. However, NGO 1 (a youth empowerment NGO) offered a different explanation for their use of SMS:

We advertise but we found that many mothers do not use social media except for mothers between 25 – 35. They have Facebook accounts, so when mothers are older than that, we send text messages with a professional and respectful tone. (Female, 30, youth empowerment)

In support of the above argument that phone texts are more commonly used with older clients, this NGO stressed the fact that they texted older groups of clients instead of using social media sites to communicate with them. Thus, there are still a large group of people from older generations that prefer to be contacted by phone texts because they do not (regularly) use social media platforms. Consequently, NGO 1 selected the most appropriate media tool for each particular target group. In other words, they choose media tools carefully according to the target they are addressing. However, NGOs face challenges in their attempts to attract both mothers and their children, as each has different interests and in return will be attracted by a different media tool. The approach that this NGO has



adopted for selecting the appropriate tool for the target is well-planned and in-line with the audience's way of thinking.

As indicated above, NGO 1 has used social media to attract people. The manager of NGO 1 (Female, 30s) explained their use of both traditional and social media in detail. When targeting children, they use social media like Facebook and YouTube, utilising colourful and trendy ads with English words, whereas for official and public gatherings, they use scientific, academic language. However, the manager explained that they are changing their tactics for attracting their audiences, using more Arabic and less English in order to teach children the importance of maintaining their identities.

One of our strategies during the first three years was to be cool with English titles, have fun, and not to appear very strict. So we used to use English more. But now, after we [have] become well known and we [have] already caught the attention of a large audience, we want to go back to our identity by using Arabic more.

(Female, 30, youth empowerment)

This manager was very clear about her NGO's reasons for using social media, and more specific about the content of it. This NGO pays attention to the smallest details of their page layout on social media sites, with the wording and the language used being tailored to the audience that will be interacting with their messages. Also, when communicating with children, they consider what mothers would think and make sure that they avoid to include any religious messages that will make them appear "strict". Interestingly, this NGO has already changed the content they use through social media sites to attract their audiences. As part of what the manager called their 'strategy', they began slowly changing

their content to one that seeks to maintain the identity of modest Islamic society after gaining their popularity. Seo *et al.* (2009) argued that NGOs carefully consider what type of new media to use according to the function it serves, and whether they are directly targeting the public on specific issues or indirectly approaching the mass media to affect public opinion.

Moreover, both NGO 2 (social surveyors) and NGO 11 (a conservative women's empowerment group) are also using social media, reporting that "we have Facebook and Twitter accounts" when asked about their NGOs' uses of social media, but without any further elaboration. NGO 1 (a youth empowerment group), NGO 3 (an elderly charity), NGO 5 (a conservative women's empowerment group) and NGO 8 (a women's empowerment group) all clearly stated that they use social media sites to attract the younger generations. For example, the manager of NGO 3 explained that the social media enables them to attract and communicate with young volunteers. As noted earlier in chapter six, the manager (Female, 30s) commented, "We could attract ... them through social media later for recruitment and participation". She also acknowledged that attracting an audience through social media makes it easy for them to communicate and recruit from this pool for future events, as they will then be part of their communication list of possible volunteers.

Furthermore, NGO 4 (a Facebook-based group) uses social media exclusively to communicate and interact with its volunteers. The manager of this NGO mentioned that they use Facebook as the basis for their interactions, and Twitter for their daily activities with volunteers. As the manager said, "Facebook is very easy for communication and to be clear about what we are doing in front of the government." Mentioning the government in this instance was odd, as they are conscious about the possibility of the government monitoring their posts on social media. In fact, as Agarwal *et al.* (2012) argue, "social

media sites are attractive places and two way channels to gather information not only about the citizen but also for citizens to gather information about the government” (Agarwal *et al.* 2012:99).

Similarly to NGO 1, NGO 4 exclusively uses English language in its posts, and when asked why the male manager replied: “[we communicate] in English because it is easier, and because there are also other nationalities involved.” In fact, their reason for using English was not only that they have a multinational target audience that they want to involve, but also that they want to exclude more conservative audiences, who do not use English. As the manager (male, 30s) said: “You know, at first, English was really easier for us, but now it is becoming more of a strategy.” Here, the language has become a gateway and an access to a territory where the people who are not comfortable using English are the people with whom engagement is not sought. This NGO has purposefully narrowed their target audience to attract not only the younger generation, but also a more open-minded, educated, English-speaking group.

Both NGOs 1 and 4 used the word ‘strategy’ to describe their employment of the English language for their communication, and also displayed an awareness of the importance of the social media content they are presenting, and the type of audience receiving it. Interestingly, they demonstrated an awareness that using English was an explicit ‘strategy’ that they had adopted. Remarkably, they both agreed to use the term ‘strategy’ to describe the use of English in their media communication because the use of English attracts moderate, trendy, multinational and open-minded target groups. However, the purposes for which NGOs 1 and 4 use English differ, with NGO 1 using it to attract younger audiences and to be perceived as a ‘trendy’ NGO, whilst NGO 4 uses it to attract a moderate audience and exclude a more conservative one. Evidently, the content of media matters by presenting

certain image that will likely influence audience and eventually evoke particular outcomes.

### **8.1.2 Activism and Mobilisation**

NGOs in Saudi Arabia also use the media to advocate engagement with issues and problems facing the society. Abdullah (2003) describes 'Media Advocacy' as one of the most successful NGO engagement strategies. Media advocacy enables NGOs to mobilise the public, thereby affecting the social-political climate. NGOs choose a particular issue, launch a campaign to educate people about it, and suggest solutions, with the media (and particularly the social media) enabling NGOs to discuss issues that were previously considered taboos (Maisel 2013:297). Media activism is closely related to women's empowerment as it creates spaces for activists to express opinions about and draw attention to issues and challenges facing women, as well as to mobilise people in an effort to solve these problems. For example, as will be explained later, the issue of violence against women is the main one that Saudi women's NGOs are concerned with raising awareness on. Yet, these mobilising efforts are very weak and still need the experience and time to develop.

NGOs utilise campaigns to advocate positions regarding various issues and to raise public awareness. For instance, NGO 12 (a human rights organisation) is trying to raise awareness on the importance of human rights and to educate the public on the culture of human rights. As the manager (Male, 40s) points out, "Through different streams, such as campaigns, TV, radio, publications, seminars and lectures, we try to enhance awareness of the culture of human rights, but we are still ... limited to [reaching] certain people." Through studies that they conducted this NGO discovered that there is "an absence of understanding [on]

rights in general and human right in particular”, as the manager put it. This manager also stressed the role that the media can play in spreading the principles of human rights. NGO 12 has also initiated a campaign entitled “I am a human” to ban violent verbal language addressing women and to raise awareness about women’s and children’s rights. They are also expanding their awareness campaigns to include villages and other emoted areas where the culture of human rights is not well constructed or understood.

Raising women’s awareness also is one of the central aims behind NGO 13 and NGO 14’s use of the media. NGO 14 (a breast cancer organisation) uses newspapers, TV, Radio and other social media to advertise and promote its activities and to attract its audience. Apart from their traditional use of the media, they have also been able to introduce a new form of activism through the media. Thus, the media has played a crucial role for this NGO, enabling them to introduce new ways of raising awareness about breast cancer within the Saudi society. This NGO was able to raise public awareness throughout October – the global month for breast cancer awareness. For the past five years they have managed to present new ideas to attract the public’s attention to the issue of seeking investigations for breast cancer during this month. The manager mentioned her concern about Saudi people’s avoidance of the issue of cancer in general, and breast cancer in particular, and how cultural barriers have made the disease a taboo subject. This NGO was able to capture the public’s attention by introducing the issue in a different form, allowing them to break the cultural taboo surrounding discussing the sickness. During the month of October, they present the personal experiences of survivors, including the manager herself, who relates her personal fight against the disease, and encourages women to act and seek prompt early detection and regular check-ups. This involved a new form of activism in which the NGO directly approached the local media to speak up about the issue and to encourage women to get

tested for breast cancer. This NGO has thus not only drawn attention to the issue of breast cancer, but also raised awareness about it and encouraged women to act.

In addition to media interviews appearances, this NGO also introduced other campaigns that took a different form each year. For example, in 2009 they formed the largest pink ribbon made by human beings using women wearing pink. This was recorded in the Guinness World Records book, and was published in local magazines. In October 2010, 3,500 women gathered to form a human pink ribbon broke the previous record, and Princess Haifa and Princess Rima were honoured guests at the event (Jeddah, December 2010). This NGO also organised a sponsored trip for eleven girls to climb Mount Everest, with the leader of the expedition being a princess, which again provided them with huge publicity. They have also led the way in establishing a new social trend in which celebrities and TV presenters wear pink during their YouTube videos that, last October, posted short videos and distributed awareness brochures of celebrities wearing pink in support for their mothers, wives and other female members of their families (See image 8.1). All of the activities arranged by this NGO (the world record, the Everest expedition, and the male support for breast cancer) have been out of the ordinary, representing new tactics that have raised publicity and initiated more creative ways to introduce the issue to Saudi women. The manager (female, 40s) proudly said that because of all these uses of the new media they “were voted the most transparent NGO” in 2011.



**(Image 2) NGO's brochure**

NGO 13 is also concerned with advocacy, in their case concerning domestic violence. Like the issue of breast cancer, the issue of domestic violence was a taboo subject for discussion because of the private nature of Saudi society. According to the manager of this NGO (psychologist, female, 40s) the issue of violence against children went un-discussed and neglected for a long time. However, a case that was published in the local press of a girl named Gosoon, who was tortured and killed by her father and stepmother, captured public opinion through the harsh images that were printed. Both the public and officials were touched by the story, and public calls to fight violence against women and children were made. Groups of doctors, psychologists and activists formed an NGO to deal with this issue in the capital, Al-Riyadh, and another in Jeddah. Workshops were conducted in hospitals, and police, doctors, human rights activists, sociologists and psychologists were involved in discussions that called for a law to ban domestic violence. Interestingly, the power of

the media was the main facilitator for this entire mobilisation, with press releases representing the means for mobilising the public, officials and activists. However, it took a long time for the government to issue legislation to make domestic violence a crime, with the case of Gosoon breaking in 2005, but changes in the law not being introduced until October 2014. Both NGOs 13 and 14 have raised engagement with issues that were considered taboo in the Saudi society until recently. The media provided their tool for breaking these taboos and getting these issues discussed. Maisel (2013) argues that in Saudi Arabia, the internet in particular has become “a popular source for soliciting opinions on social issues and taboos” (Maisel, 2013:297), and it has been an effective tool for expressing views on topics that were not previously discussed in public.

### **8.1.3 Influencing the Public**

Increasing attention has been given to the way in which NGOs can present their ideas to have a greater impact. Their success in influencing the public has been seen through the use of social media and other campaigns for rising awareness, with social media providing the platform for such influences. As mentioned earlier in the Media Chapter, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are becoming increasingly popular among the Saudi population, and so in order to influence public opinion, NGOs have begun posting videos on social media sites consisting of short clips about their NGOs and the issues they engage with. As argued by Carpenter and Jose (2012) the World Wide Web enabled NGOs to promote for their causes through “connecting activists, framing issues and mobilizing constituencies” (Carpenter and Jose 2012:526). Some of these NGOs (NGOs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8) also have websites with information about themselves, whilst NGO 3 (an elderly charity) has explicitly stated that they post pictures of their activities and achievements to document



their activities and display their reliability. NGOs websites provide useful information about these of NGOs identity and activities (Carpenter and Jose 2012).

Not very far away from Facebook and Twitter is YouTube, which has been very popular because of its potential to produce an immediate impact and its quick-viewing functionality. A new trend has developed in the last couple of years in which young Saudi men and women have started posting YouTube videos of their views about Saudi society, presented in the form of comedy. Many of these have been very popular, with thousands of views, and many of these 'YouTubers' have become celebrities, having a huge impact on Saudi society.

Seven of the NGOs studied mentioned that they have posted videos on YouTube about their activities– NGO 8 (a women's empowerment organisation), NGO 2 (a social survey organisation), NGO 14 (a breast cancer awareness organisation) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cfYZGFDIX8> , NGO 10 (a social development organisation) and NGO 4 (a Facebook-based organisation). For instance, NGO 4 posted YouTube videos showing some of their activities, talking mostly in English to restrict their audience. All these NGOs have created short films about their organisations and the work that they are doing in order to attract people to raise awareness and to volunteer. As noted earlier in the guests and events chapter, having media representatives as NGO guests was a strategy that two NGOs reported using, justifying these invitations on the basis that they would spread the word about their NGOs to the public. This aspect of the use of the media will be elaborated on later in the media section of the analysis. As stated above, Joachim (2003) considers the media as an 'important ally' for NGOs to have in order to push their agendas forward in the desired way (Joachim, 2003:259).

NGO campaigns have also gained popularity, and have played a part in influencing public opinion and government policy. The manager of NGO 9 (an advocacy NGO) stated that “lobbying the government goes parallel with awareness campaigns for the public”, stressing the importance of changing people’s attitudes to match government initiatives. NGO 14, as already noted, launched a campaign that encouraged male celebrities and journalists to wear pink in support of the women in their lives. Each commercial had comedians, celebrities or TV presenters encouraging investigations for early detection of breast cancer by posting messages for a woman in their lives. This was considered to be a very bold move, as Saudi society is not used to men showing emotions and giving such forms of support to women. It is a very tactful move for NGOs to use celebrities to produce a direct impact on the public.

As mentioned in the chapter on building alliances, after receiving the job of organising an event for the Ministry of Commerce, NGO 8 (a women’s empowerment organisation) changed the Ministry’s logo for the event from a cartoon of a man to a cartoon of a man and a woman (see image 2). This move was a visionary one, as this NGO aimed to use the media to influence the public by presenting an image of Saudi businesswomen being successful and standing side-by-side with Saudi businessmen.



(Image 3) NGO's 8 event flyer

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/133528733456003/photos/a.133544496787760.29840.133528733456003/150800921728784/?type=1&theater>

NGO 8 organised another expo for the Chamber of Commerce under the name 'young businessmen and businesswomen', with the NGO's manager commenting, "for the first time this year we have changed the logo to include a character of a man and a women, so it was a huge success". She has thus provided an example of how women's organisations that do not represent a threat to the government can form successful relationships with the government and influence Ministry decisions. The manager explained:

It was a symbolic gesture is when we have to organise the conference of young men and women in business we for the first time changed the conference, which used to be held annually, to include a male and female in the same logo instead of only a male. And we are planning to translate this into the conference.

(Female, 30s)

Ottaway (2005:129) argues that women's organisations can provide the government with a degree of expertise on related issues, and can "lobby the government for specific policy reforms". This is precisely what this NGO has done by influencing the Ministry's decision to accept a woman's image being included alongside a man's image in the event's logo. Ottaway (2005) also focused on the influence that women's NGOs can have through liaising and supporting the government by offering consultations to reform certain policies in relation to women's issues. NGO 8 has been able to influence one government institution by pushing their vision of introducing a female image alongside a male one. As the manager (female, 30s) of NGO 9 (a lobbying NGO) puts it: "Basically we are lobbying on legislation and laws. This lobbying is also working parallel to raising awareness through the different campaigns we do". NGO 14, as we have seen, has posted YouTube videos of local male celebrities wearing pink and addressing their female relatives to express their love and to encourage them to get an early test for breast cancer. It is astonishing to witness what NGO 14 has achieved here, as not only have they had to convince men to address women's issues within the popular social media, but also to get them to do so wearing pink.

## 8.2 The Social Media

This section focuses on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, examining their relationship to women's empowerment and NGOs. Studies have shown that the rapid growth of social media has brought with it both possibilities and challenges for NGOs (Procter et al. 2013). However, the number of digital media users in Saudi Arabia has increased rapidly in recent years, with the help of easy accessibility, portable mobile devices and near real-life communication functionality (Edwards et al. 2013; Procter et al. 2013; Guo and Saxton 2014; Benardi 2010). The use of various social media forms has become common and popular, especially among the younger generations. As Chiara Benardi (2010) has observed, the boom in the use of forms of social media in Saudi Arabia since 2004 "has revolutionized the way young Saudis interact". The number of Saudi internet users grew from 200,000 in 2000 to 9.8 million in 2010 (Benardi 2010:3). Wall (2002) also argues that internet use by NGOs has changed their communication channels in several ways, including the speed at which information can be circulated, a reduction of boundaries, an increase in efficiency, and a decrease in cost. In addition, internet communications have enabled NGOs to accelerate social change through the increasing knowledge, encouraging self-expression and providing dialogue opportunities for website users (Wall 2002:28).

More specifically, as Guo and Saxton (2014) stressed, the social media has brought vast opportunities for NGO advocacy. New platforms have been introduced through social media sites for engaging, communicating and mobilising the public, and the low cost and interactive nature of such communication has provided the perfect platform for NGOs to attract attention to issues (Guo and Saxton 2014:60). Hence, as noted earlier, in Saudi Arabia, the internet has increasingly become a channel for expressing opinions on social issues and "taboos", as well as a tool for empowering the 'underprivileged and

marginalised' (Maisel 2013:297). According to the Human Rights Watch (2010), activists in Saudi Arabia have played an important role in advancing human rights through releasing petitions on social media sites.

As has been stressed by the researchers above, the social media has become an important and effective tool for mobilising people on social issues. Many studies have focused on the use of Twitter for influencing and communicating with the public (Edwards et al. 2013; Procter *et al.* 2013; Guo and Saxton 2014). Established in 2006, Twitter is a micro-blogging site that allows users to post up to 140 characters, with the “hashtag” feature providing a way for users to label a tweet with a topic that allows the discussion and expression of views and opinions (Procter *et al.* 2013:198). Guo and Saxton (2014) explain that tweets consist of three communicative functions: information, community and action. Connections are made through followers and followers’ friending. However, they add that what makes Twitter appealing is the dynamic feature of sending brief instant messages – “status updates” and “hashtags” – and receiving immediate feedback. They also argue that organisations have an advocacy strategy and advocacy tactics that provide specific actions for executing a particular strategy (Guo and Saxton 2014:61).

To stress on the crucial role Twitter has played in changing people’s opinions by offering a wider platform for contrasting views to present their opinions, the manager NGO 13 (domestic violence) pointed out that the social media has brought out more moderate religious figures that normal persons can relate to: “also, after exposing to Twitter, there are few who are moderate and nice”. So after years of listening to solo opinion and one interpretation of religion twitter has offered a wider variety of religious opinions and for this instance more moderate view that suits and talks to the more moderate population. She also acknowledged the importance of religion, whilst the manager expressed her

resentment of strict rigid clerics, stating, “there is a disassociation between the ordinary person and conservative religious figures as they are very strict [and] their words do not appeal to the public”. According to Glosemeyer (2004:155), the government’s elites also prefer the “moderate second-generation scholars” who does not challenge the current status of the state. The social media has produced social change, with the Manager of NGO 8 stressing the impact it has had on women’s identities and in accelerating change (Glosmeyer, 2004). She contends that 2010 represented a turning point in society in general, and in increasing awareness and promoting change for women in particular, arguing:

90% of recent change was because of the social media – Facebook and Twitter. It has raised the awareness level for women and girls, [to a point] where they are increasingly expressing themselves boldly by their names. Before it was shameful for a man to say his sister’s name or write it on books, but now, in no time, it has become common for women to speak their minds on social media sites.

(Female, 30s)

Thus, in this manager’s opinion, social media has changed people’s attitudes towards cultural traditions surrounding the protection of female members of the Saudi society. The manager focuses here on the greatest changes that took place through the spread of social media, which happens to be very popular among young Saudi women. She also points out that the social media has made “many distinguished women known to the society”, who otherwise would have remained unknown to the public. This manager thus raises the important feature of the visibility that the social media produces, and how this has led to

the achievements and contributions of many Saudi women being brought into the public sphere. For example, this manager identifies a small yet deep indicator for such change when she remarks on young women using their full names for their Facebook and Twitter accounts, and in some cases providing (profile) photos of themselves on these sites as well. Arguably, women's presence within these virtual spaces has become widely accepted, whereas they are still not commonly seen in the traditional TV and Newspaper media. This might be because the social media represented an unexplored medium that has been too different and complex for many members of the older generation who represent the social control in the society to adopt, whilst the male brothers of women from the same generation have accepted the fact their sisters are expressing their views using their full names. It is not surprising that younger generations are more open to (and unafraid of) trying new things as a result of new technologies.

Twitter is the most popular social media site in Saudi Arabia, According to a report by the Economist (2014), Saudi Twitter users are estimated to be 60% of the population with 45% increase during 2013.

<http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21617064-why-social-media-have-greater-impact-kingdom-elsewhere-virtual?fsrc=scn/tw/te/pe/ed/avirtualrevolution>).

This is not surprising, especially in the absence of real political channels through which people can express and air their opinions. The internet has opened up channels for advocating opinions and engaging with issues for women that were previously marginalised (Faris 2014), and Twitter has provided a popular tool for Saudis to express their voices and engage with other opinions. For instance, the woman's driving campaign that was initiated on Twitter by both Saudi men and women to encourage lifting the ban on women driving is an excellent example of such engagement. Moreover, it was interesting



to see the word ‘campaign’ – a word not regularly used in Saudi Arabia – used directly and boldly in the title of the tweet – ‘Driving 26 Oct. Campaign’. The group of activists that initiated the campaign called for all women who knew how to drive and had a driving licence to drive on this date – 26 October 2013. International news agencies such as Reuters posted news about the women driving campaign, which was undertaken by women activists who posted photographs and video clips of themselves driving (Reuters 2013). Although the campaign was not a success, its organisers were well aware that its main purpose was to raise awareness among the public, and to familiarise them with the idea that they are justified in claiming their rights. As Bennett and Segerberg (2012) note, the digital media provided venues for organising large scale action and mobilising the public. Seo *et al.* have also argued that ‘new media tools’ allow NGOs to mobilise and communicate with people across the world and offer “interactivity and independent distribution of information” (Seo *et al.* 2009:123).

However, reactions to the driving campaign on Twitter and other social media can be divided into supporters and objectors, with hostile attacks being exchanged between both parties. As the discussion heated online, an official statement was issued by the Ministry of Interior saying that the government would not tolerate any disturbance of the social order. In return, the campaign posted a statement assuring them that this was not a protest, and that there would be no gatherings anywhere. Noticeably enough, an unspoken interaction between officials and activists has taken place through press releases. Official statements contain reply comments to particular incidents that were raised on social media sites by both activists and opposition voices. Interestingly, it shows that the government is actually following what is going on in the social media, and updating the public with rather ambiguous statements that take or leave neither conservative nor liberal sides. However, it was interesting to note that weeks before the date set by the campaign, three female

members of the Shura Council – an influential consultative body to the government – raised the issue of women’s driving, presenting a proposal about it to the council that marked the first time that an official call for such right has been initiated (Reuters, 2013). Given the neutral position of the government, the campaign continues with information updates and new dates each month to stress their determination to have the ban on women driving lifted. As Guo and Saxton (2014) have noted, such NGOs use twitter as a tool for reaching out to people and keeping ‘the flame alive’.

Stressing the impact of the media on women’s lives, the survey results shown in table (8.1) illustrate the views of respondents on the role of the media in relation to women’s issues. The most common response (20.2%) was that the media has become a tool for expression, with two groups of twenty respondents believing that the media provides a tool for change and a tool for raising awareness respectively. Another two identical numbers of respondents (13.5%) thought that media provides a tool for communicating and gaining knowledge.

**Table 8.1**

<b>How do you view the media's role in women's issues today?</b>			
		<b>Responses</b>	
		<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>x2(a)</b>	<b>Tool for expression</b>	21	20.2%
	<b>Tool for change</b>	20	19.2%
	<b>Tool for communicating and recruiting efforts</b>	14	13.5%
	<b>Tool for gaining knowledge</b>	14	13.5%
	<b>Tool for raising awareness</b>	20	19.2%
	<b>Tool for investing time</b>	8	7.7%
	<b>Not an important tool</b>	4	3.8%
	<b>Don't Know</b>	2	1.9%
	<b>Other</b>	1	1.0%
<b>Total</b>		104	100.0%

The results reflect NGO 8's position that the social media's largest role is as a tool for change, raising awareness and expressing opinions. NGO 8 stressed the importance of expression, and how the new media has opened new venues for women to be visible, express their views and claim their spaces. This viewpoint was supported by the highest percentage of respondents, who held that the most important role the media plays in women's lives is providing the opportunity for self-expression. Despite the fact that this expression takes place in virtual spaces, the social media has been able to change the dynamics of society, enabling women to move away from their passive role and enjoy the full potential of high-tech possibilities. Almost as many respondents considered the media's primary role to be as a tool for raising awareness and for change – outcomes which also have an empowering element to them. After this, the next 'main roles' of the media

were considered to be its function as a practical tool that can be used to gain knowledge and to communicate with people. This is interesting, because the media's role as a tool for gaining knowledge is perhaps its most straightforward and obvious one, but this was not the function that was picked by the majority of people. The survey revealed that the majority acknowledges the impact the media has had on women in Saudi Arabia, and its ability to facilitate change for this cohort.

### **8.3 Image and Visibility**

Generally, Saudi women's visibility in the public and in media has recently increased; yet, their visibility within professional setting needs more investigation (Sakr, 2010). In fact, NGOs in Saudi Arabia it is usually either all women's NGOs or has a separate parts for women only. Public appearance for women in Saudi Arabia is usually associated with the black robe (abaya), but still the detailed features of the appearance vary from one city to another. It is very common to have women from the city of Jeddah with the traditional black robe (abaya) with the face shown in public and more recently in various media coverage. Historically, women had always been appearing in public with the basic head covering and face showing only when Saudi Arabia was unified under one country when some of the traditions from the central region spread including the face covering. Nowadays, it is mostly a matter of a personal/family decision how women appear in public but there has been a widespread tendency for more public appearances regardless of the detailed features of the dress (Le Renrad 2008).

Women's public appearance within NGOs setting depends on many complex factors, such as, the dominant culture where the activity will take place, NGO's ideology, vision and mission, Credibility factor, the audience attending, and the scope of desired impact. For

instance, the appearance of women on television has produced different attitudes within the social media, and this change was something that interviewees had mixed responses to as well. Some interviewees and two NGOs (5 and 10) commented that television is a traditional media tool. NGO 5 (a conservative women's empowerment NGO) reported using newspapers as a media tool, but when asked about their use of TV, the manager (female, 50s) explained that they do not use it although they are now working with a channel to make a show that offers consultations for girls. However, women will not actually appear on television in this show, but rather will receive consultations by phoning in to talk to religious figures. The manager commented that women from their NGO "have not been on television because of the religious boundary". Interestingly, the problematic gendered dynamic of using male presenters to offer consultations to women on this television programme was not picked up on by NGO 5. Yet, in contrast, the same NGO has a blog on the internet for women to discuss issues they are concerned about. Clearly, then, they are more comfortable using the web to discuss and express their views rather than they are to express them on television. This contradiction was raised by NGO 8 (a women's empowerment NGO), when the manager wondered about the large gap between the traditional television and newspaper media and the new social media in Saudi women's preferences. As the manager (female, 30s) explains, "still appearing on TV is very weak among women – it [is] part of the society's culture – but social media has been very [widely] accepted, maybe because there [are] introductions by email and websites".

The manager (female, 40s) of NGO 10 (a social development NGO) said that appearing on TV "does not add any value", thus contending that television is not a tool that serves any valuable purpose for women. Naomi Sakr (2008) argues that although the visibility of Saudi women in the media has increased since 2004, "there is no automatic correlation between women's visibility in Arab media and their status in other areas in public life"

(2008:386). She adds that the reason for women's absence from traditional media is the assumption that women, whether they were negatively or positively represented in their roles, would meet social constraints that would force them to match the 'model' woman, and play the role of the 'carriers of traditions' (Sakr 2008:387). In the same vein, Al-Rasheed (2013:2) asserted that in the last decade, due to the rise of communication technology and the media in general, Saudi women are more visible in the "public sphere", and able to push their issues forward. She adds that the image of Saudi women in the media represents an attempt from officials to normalise the lives of these women by stressing their success stories and accomplishments (Al-Rasheed 2013:140).

The visibility of Saudi women in the public arena and within the media has recently increased, yet their visibility within professional settings needs further investigation. NGOs in Saudi Arabia are usually either all-women NGOs or have separate sections for women. Women's public lives in Saudi Arabia are usually restricted to and associated with a professional career within an organisational context (Le Renard 2008). Women's presences in public spaces within NGOs depend on many complex factors, such as the dominant culture in that NGO, where its activities will take place, its ideology, vision and mission, its credibility, the audience attending its event, and the scope of the impact it aims to produce. However, even with all their target objectives, members of NGOs, like most people in Saudi Arabia, unconsciously continue to apply 'appropriate' boundaries regarding the visibility of women.

The example that was just mentioned of NGO 5 preferring women not to appear on television is representative of a conservative population whose members believe that women should not be visible in the media for religious reasons. In the same vein, two other NGOs in this research stated that they take such cultural issues into account when they are

working in public. NGO 2 (a social research NGO) conducts research within poor districts of Jeddah and, according to the manager, they make sure that their staff are appropriately dressed for fieldwork as most of the areas surveyed by this NGO are poor. The manager mentioned that all their field researchers are women, and that they provide them with special white hats and gowns so that they stand out when they are in the field. In addition, male security guards accompany the researchers everywhere they go in order to make sure they are safe. Applying particular measures when women are visible in public was viewed as being important by both NGOs. Regardless of their personal preferences, NGOs thus tend to avoid attracting any unwanted hostility through their female members being accused of immodest displays in public. However, paying attention to the image that female researchers have within the public arena was an important issue for the NGO manager to address.

NGO 4 (a Facebook-based NGO) also works in poor areas and often prefers its members to wear something modest when undertaking fieldwork in such areas. When the manager was asked about their visibility, she answered:

We understand the cultural values of the society very well. So before I go on a mission we make sure [we know] where we going and who are we meeting. For example, if I am going to South Jeddah, I know I have to fit in – I can't wear coloured Abaya and do not wear make-up over there because I have to fit in with the environment.

(Female, 30s)

As clearly stated, making sure that their appearance is appropriate for the place they are working is seen as crucial by members of these NGOs for carrying out their work there,

and is part of blending into the surrounding to prevent hostility and gain acceptance. The female manager of this NGO also explained that in their normal everyday interactions they often appear more liberal, and often receive criticism about the way they dress when they are in mixed meetings. She asserted that they usually ignore such people, however, and just let them talk, as engaging with them on such issues prevents them focusing on getting their jobs done. On the other hand, the male manager pointed out that he usually keeps an eye out for any unacceptable behaviour between the volunteering men and women. NGO 4 has rules according to the people they are meeting and the places they are visiting, and it should not be forgotten that all members of the group are English-speaking members of the younger generation, who are often not conservative in outlook.

In contrast, the manager of NGO 3 was determined to maintain her personal preference for clothing while she was promoting their NGO in an upscale shopping centre, and was not willing to change her appearance to fit in. As mentioned in chapter five, the manager of NGO 3 (elderly, charity NGO) was approached by a conservative man because she was wearing a coloured Abaya. About this she commented: “I did not care about what the man said. Who says that we should wear black only in our religion?” This manager did not thus care about how she was perceived, and was not afraid to respond to criticism. It is important to note, however, that this incident happened in Red Sea Mall – one of the most popular upper class malls. She responded to the man from a power point of view, whereas she might have had to adopt a different tone if she was in a different place, as the manager of NGO 4 did (being more liberal in some places whilst being more conservative in others).

When asked about visibility, the manager of NGO 14 (a domestic violence NGO) (female, 40s) added: “There is no written rule, but we always dress modestly even if I don’t regularly wear hijab. We don’t generate unwanted hostility for not appearing in a suitable way”. This



approach was also stressed by the female manager of NGO 4, as we have seen – although in her personal daily life, her appearance would be considered to be liberal, she would carefully consider the clothes she would wear for work. In general, a modest look is always favourable within an NGO setting, whether or not it is the personal preference of the individual. There are some rebels who do not care about what people say but, at the end of the day, women tend to be more modest within professional settings and in public more generally.

#### **8.4 Disadvantages of the Media for NGOs**

The main downside of the traditional media mentioned by the NGOs was in relation to media ethics – particularly the extent to which journalists and reporters are committed to ethical standards. For instance, NGO 12 (a human rights NGO) uses the media through different streams such as campaigns, TV, radio, publications, seminars, and lectures. As the manager (male, late 40s) explains, some reporters lack the professional responsibility expected of the press. As the manager puts it, a “down side is when reporters write news without consideration to issues of privacy and other ethical and moral boundaries. We did a special workshop for reporters about ethics in the media.” This NGO offered a solution for the problem they are facing with reporters by offering a workshop to raise awareness, which could have positive impacts on public opinion through responsible journalism. NGO 13 also talked about this downside of the media, with the manager (female, 40s) being upset with reporters for making up stories about their NGO. She gave an example of a report entitled ‘One million has been stolen’ about this NGO. She explained that this and other reports have been published to attack them and harm their image. Both NGOs have thus cited examples of traditional media reports that are unethical, presenting false facts

and gossips about these NGOs. Similarly, NGO 1 also raised the concern that they have very little control over the content of press coverage.

Moreover, there are also downsides in using social media, as mentioned by NGO 14 (a medical charity), who were hacked and had comments fraudulently posted on their behalf. The manager of this NGO expressed her concern that patients and survivors who are following them may be negatively influenced by bad or inconsiderate comments. On the other hand, the manager of NGO7 acknowledges that media will always have two sides: the good and bad but she also stressed on the power of media and the great influence it plays on people's minds which again could be used both ways.

## **8.5 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the functions media plays in NGOs which include, communication, promotion, activism and mobilisation and influencing the public. The analysis shows that media tools were selected by NGOs based on their effectiveness in relation to their target audiences and practices. While traditional media channels have been widely used by NGOs, and have been effective in achieving their targets publicity-wise, the social media has had a deeper effect on people. The traditional media was utilised mostly when the target audience comprised older generations or officials, whilst different varieties of social media were used by NGOs to address, attract and interact with younger generations. The empowerment of women was also a reason cited for using forms of social media, as they represent a milestone for women in enabling them to express their opinions and have them listened to. Social media networks have played a major role in mobilising women, who are a marginalised group in Saudi Arabia. Without the social media, initiatives such as the women's driving campaign could not have become widespread and entered into the public

consciousness. However, there are still social constraints facing women in Saudi Arabia, and many women have sought further changes, calling for strategies to address every obstacle. It has been remarkable to see the number of achievements that women have made within such socially restricted and narrow pathways, and how the social media in particular has been used with such success by Saudi women.

## **Chapter Nine: Religion**

Religion plays a major role in the values of NGOs in the Islamic world, as well as in perceptions of their legitimacy and credibility. Moreover, religion influences and guides a large part of people's lives in the Islamic world, making this a rather sensitive subject to discuss. A number of studies suggest that Islam creates an ethical and moral framework for many Muslims that is deeply embedded in their daily rituals, choices of dress, interactions, speeches and actions (Sholkamy 2011; Seguino 2011; Kucinskas 2010). Specifically, Islam shapes and colours almost every aspect of people's lives in Saudi Arabia, being the official religion and run by a "state-cleric alliance" where religious institutions exercise powers in order to maintain their conservative interpretation of Islam (Kucinskas 2010:762). Hence, an examination of Saudi NGOs and their charity work cannot be undertaken without reference to Islam.

The relationship between religion and women has its own dynamic in this thesis. That is, the topic of religion is intertwined with other related topics that are being studied here, including NGOs, charity and women. As this chapter argues, Saudi NGOs use religion to provide them with legitimacy and to gain credibility. Sholkamy (2011) puts this outlook simply in the following statement: "if people are driven by faith, then let us use faith to drive them towards social and political change" (Sholkamy 2011:48). As she points out, policy makers and international development experts are now increasingly using religion as a tool for change, especially in the aftermath of 9/11. Many researchers have pointed to the changes that occurred post 9/11 with regards to an increased focus on human rights

(including women's rights) in the Islamic world (Tadros 2011; Mir-Hosseini 2011; Mostafa 2011; Sholkamy 2011).

The following analysis considers the ways in which different NGOs view religion as a tool for empowerment and the impacts that religion has on people's lives, It also discusses how NGOs use religious values, texts and guests to gain credibility, whilst simultaneously avoiding the use of religious references with particular emphasis being placed on the managers' views on this. The interview findings are further discussed in order to illustrate how religion is used as a strategy for pushing women's empowerment forward.

The first theme discussed in this chapter is the importance of religion, and this is followed by an examination of its function as an inspirational tool that affects people sentimentally. Moreover, the question of how adopting an Islamic religious discourse can increase the credibility of NGOs in the eyes of their sponsors and the public is also considered. This is then followed by a section on religious guests and their role in helping NGOs to gain acceptance and to engage with people. A further theme focuses on the tendency that some NGOs have to stress professionalism over the use of religion, and the chapter concludes by presenting some of the misconceptions about religion that NGO managers perceive to exist.

## **9.1 Religion as an Empowerment Strategy**

Religion is used broadly in daily interactions in Saudi Arabia, and affects individuals at both the personal and professional levels. This section assesses the ways in which religion has been used a tool to persuade people and have an impact on them within NGO settings. In Saudi NGOs, religion is a major element in the planning process, in goal-setting, and in the implementation of projects and policies. Moreover, it has a huge emotional impact on

people and their attitudes. This is true even for secular NGOs, which often utilise religion in some way or another to gain legitimacy and credibility (Badran 2011). The analysis of this thesis has revealed five main ways in which religion is used as a strategy by NGOs: 1) for recruitment (NGO 3), 2) as a form of therapy (NGO 14), 3) for increasing credibility and legitimacy (NGO 13), 4) for promoting religious values (NGOs 5, 6, 7 and 11), and 5) for empowering women (NGOs 8, 9 and 10).

### **9.1.1 Religion as a Source of Inspiration**

Religion provides a powerful force that NGOs can use in order to influence people. The analysis of the results of this study shows that half of the participating NGOs, including NGOs 3, 4, 5, 7 and 9, reported that religion has had an impact on them and some of their practice, stating that it has sentimental value, affects people and provides inspiration for performing good deeds. For example, the manager of NGO 5 (female, 50s, conservative women's empowerment NGO) said that "religion has a sentimental effect on people", and the manager of NGO 7 (female, 50s, Human Aid NGO) stated that "religion is a belief, and it inspires us to help others." Similarly, the manager of NGO 3 (female, 30s, elderly care NGO) said, "of course religion encourages you to be compassionate towards the elderly and needy". Moreover, the manager of NGO 4 (Facebook-based) added that although they do not use religion directly in the form of texts and guests, Islam inspires them to do good deeds.

All the above NGOs agreed that religion has an inspirational impact on both people in general and on their NGOs. However, some NGOs (NGOs 5, 9, 10, 13 and 14) were of the opinion that religion has an affect on everything they do. For instance, the manager of NGO 10 (a social development NGO), called religion a 'framework' for their practice, while the

manager of NGO 9 (a lobbying NGO) said: “We refer everything to Islam”. Hence, these two NGOs consider religion to provide a set of guidelines for both personal and professional lives. The manager of NGO 14 (a breast cancer awareness NGO) also argued that religion plays a major role, commenting: “Sure, religion is basically everywhere, even in the West they rely on faith in the healing process.” Moreover, the manager of NGO 13 (an NGO that combats domestic violence) commented that, “religious discourse is very important – it is everywhere, no one can deny this”. Both these NGOs thus used the word ‘everywhere’ to refer to the extensive role that religion has to play in (their) lives and their NGOs. Moreover, NGO 5 (a conservative NGO) added: “we need religion and it is an essential part of our values”. It would appear that NGOs recognise the strong influence that religion has on every aspect of people’s lives. All five of these NGOs used adjectives such as, ‘everywhere’, ‘everything’, ‘framework’ and ‘essential part’ in describing the role of religion. Such generalising terms indicate the wide impact that religion has, infiltrating everything in their daily lives.

The survey results confirmed the findings of the interview analysis on religion’s widespread use in NGOs. As table 9.1 below shows, the answers to the survey question “To what extent do NGOs use religious expressions?” revealed that 63.2% reported that they do so most of the time and 20.8 % said they always do. This shows that from the point of view of the audience, NGOs use a lot of religious references.

In total, about eighty percent of the survey respondents believed that religious expressions were used either most of the time or all the time in the messages that NGOs disseminate. This high percentage shows that religious discourse is commonly appealed to and utilised in NGOs’ messages.

**Table9.1**

<b>To what extent do NGOs use Religious expressions?</b>			
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
	<b>Always</b>	22	20.8
	<b>Most of the time</b>	67	63.2
	<b>Often</b>	5	4.7
	<b>Sometimes</b>	11	10.4
	<b>Don't know</b>	1	.9
	<b>Total</b>	106	100.0

Interestingly, as mentioned earlier, Facebook-based NGO 4 insists that although religion impacts on them at a personal level, inspiring them in their work, they do not use it for their NGO discourse. Both the male and female managers of NGO 4 made very similar comments about religion in their interviews. The female manager said: “we go with the rule that says there are three things you do not talk about – religion, sex and politics – but, after all, it is a value, because all we do is to please God”. On a separate occasion, the male manager commented: “we don’t talk about religion but, after all, we are working from a humanity perspective and for me personally, yes, being Muslim has inspired me to do good deed”. Both the male and the female manager asserted that they do not make any religious references in their NGOs’ activities or within their posts, while agreeing on the inspirational and motivational effects religion has had on them. This fits with Lewis et al.’s



(2013) findings that there is a positive relationship between religious commitment and engaging in charitable activities and volunteering.

Religion was thus referred to by NGO managers as being, variously, a framework, a belief, a set of values and sentiments, and an inspiration for doing good deeds. Overall, religion appeared to have a major impact on these NGOs, including the secular ones, which claimed that although they don't talk about religion, they have still been inspired by the values of Islamic teachings on a personal level. As this section has showed, religion appears to be an inspiration for many individuals, and NGOs acknowledge its value and stress its importance. This 'sentimental effect' of religion provides the base on which NGOs seek credibility and claim legitimacy.

### **9.1.2 Credibility and legitimacy**

The analysis shows that one of the ways to increase NGOs' credibility is to use religious texts. As stated above, religion has a major effect on people's emotions, values and attitudes, and this study investigates how NGOs in Saudi Arabia use it as a tool. Thus, one question that needs to be addressed is whether NGOs use religious terms and ideals pragmatically or purely instrumentally in order to gain legitimacy. Credibility is something every NGO seeks to achieve as it brings resources, attracts people and provides trust. As was demonstrated through the interview analysis, there are two ways for NGOs to achieve credibility: to use religious references by citing Islamic texts to inspire and attract or engage with people; and by inviting religious guests to their events. As the analysis revealed, both ways are widely used by NGOs as simple and accessible ways for increasing their perceived credibility, reliability and legitimacy.

### **9.1.2.1 NGOs' uses of Religious Texts**

When asked if they used religious values or references to increase their credibility, the NGOs studied produced a variety of responses. NGOs 1, 2, 3 and 9 said that it does increase their credibility, while others were not so certain. For example, NGO 1 (youth empowerment) said that they sometimes use religious references, but that it depends on the type of audience that is attending an event. Thus, while acknowledging that they do use religion to increase the credibility of their NGO, they first consider the target audience before using it. Moreover, NGO 3 (charity housing) mentioned that they use religion to attract people. She explained that religious references are appealing to people, and that it is a useful way to attract them. However, NGOs 2 and 3 stressed that religion is never enough to establish credibility, because NGOs have to prove themselves through their work and achievements. NGOs 5 and 7 (both religious) stressed that they are proud of being religious NGOs, and that they want to prove that they can be religious and professional at the same time. There is a noticeable contrast between these two views – one seeing religion as setting positive values, whilst never replacing the proof of work and achievements; the other stressing the religious aspect of what they do through simultaneously adopting religious and professional characters.

All the above respondents agreed that religion adds to the credibility of their NGOs. However, when providing more detailed explanations of their positions, they differed regarding how their NGO's use religion to serve their objectives. The analysis of the interviews produced different responses about the importance of religion as a source of values, a motivator or a provider of credibility. From the interviews, there were found to be several ways in which NGOs associate religion with their activities. The

use of Islamic discourse and religious guests provide two ways for incorporating religion into NGO activities. The use of religious texts in the form of Quranic verses or the Prophet's hadiths in speeches was seen very favourably by a wide variety of NGOs, and most NGOs said that they use religious discourse in their NGOs.

Ten out of fourteen NGOs used Islamic texts in their practices in some way. For instance, NGOs 1, 3, 11 and 13 used them in their activities and publications, whilst NGO 3 stated that they use them to attract people. In contrast, NGO 14 (a medical charity) reported using religious discourse to help people 'get better', rather than as a tool to attract people to their NGO: "we use religious texts in the healing process not to attract people" (manager, female, 40s). For this particular NGO, religion is a therapeutic resource for helping patients in dealing with cancer and fighting it, becoming a source of peace and motivation in the healing process for cancer patients. NGO 9 (a lobbying NGO) was named after the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him (Khadija Bint Khwalid), and has its own symbolic gesture of being religious (Hamilton 2010). The manager explained that their centre carries the name of the Prophet's wife, who was an example of a successful businesswoman during her time, and whom they view as an inspiration and an example to follow.

The survey asked more specific questions concerning the charitable religious goals of the NGOs. Table 9.2 below shows that 29% of respondents believed that such goals added to the credibility of NGOs, 29% said they thought that such goals increased the social acceptance of NGOs, and 14.5 % said it is favourable in general for NGOs. Thus, from the point of view of an initial overview, religion appears to play a major role in NGOs from the public's perspective. These findings thus support the managers' points of view about the importance of using religion in their NGOs.

**Table 9.2**

<b>Announcing for religious charitable goals:</b>			
		<b>Responses</b>	
		<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>x1(a)</b>	<b>Adds to the NGO's credibility</b>	40	29.0%
	<b>Adds to society's acceptance of NGOs</b>	40	29.0%
	<b>Attracts more people to NGOs</b>	30	21.7%
	<b>Is favourable in general</b>	20	14.5%
	<b>Does not make a difference to NGOs</b>	5	3.6%
	<b>Don't know if this makes any difference or not</b>	3	2.2%
<b>Total</b>		138	100.0%

For NGO managers, establishing the credibility of their NGO was one of the reasons for using religious discourse agreeing with survey results which shows that the highest percentage goes to adding creditability and gaining people acceptance. For example, the manager of NGO 13 (domestic violence), which uses religious texts in their campaigns and lectures, stated:

In lectures I often speak about how kind our Prophet was. It is our faith and the religious discourse is very important, especially in a domestic violence NGO. If we marginalised religion, we would clash with each other, even if we are not religious. After all, we are a tribal religious society.

(Female, 40s)

According to the manager, religion thus provides the mutual grounds for bringing people together. This consideration of the nature of Saudi society is very insightful, and points to how religion can put people on the same page without bringing up arguments through the basic principles of Islam. Also, appealing to the example of the kindness of the Prophet Mohammed always has a profound sentimental effect on Muslims.

On the other hand, the manager of NGO 12 reported that their status as a human rights NGO meant that it was important for them to always explain their actions to their audience, and how their values fit alongside Islamic values: “As a human rights NGO, our values do not conflict with Islamic Sharia Laws, but in contrast it actually enhances [the] values of human rights.” He also added that one of their board members (female) has presented a paper that argues that most of the values underpinning human rights are the same as the values that Islam promotes. Moustafa (2011) has also linked human rights to religion, arguing that NGOs represent the intersecting point for human rights and religion. He added that, post 9/11, many international organisations put huge efforts into promoting human rights within the framework of Islam and encouraging a culture of non-violence and tolerance in the face of ‘radical Islam’ (Moustafa 2011:22). Thus, as NGO 12 points out, the culture of human rights is enhanced and welcomed when it is highlighted in reference to Islamic values.

Incorporating religious discourse into NGO activities is a common practice in Saudi Arabia, as shown earlier. However, other NGOs – 5, 6, 7 and 11 – all reported promoting religious awareness through lectures and activities, saying this was one of their main objectives. NGO 6 and NGO 7, for example, embrace the Quran, giving lectures and workshops on aspects of the Quran and Sunnah for clients. In fact, NGO 7 specialises in explaining scientific evidence from the Quran and Sunnah. The manager of NGO 6, in the

meantime, explained that they were inspired by the story-telling technique in the Quran, and have begun using the same method to promote their achievements and relate their success stories about the young women were training in their NGO.

This section has thus dealt with the way that religious references (reciting religious texts, raising awareness on religious matters or setting examples from Islamic culture) have provided NGOs with the means to enhance their credibility. The next section will look at how NGOs use religious guests to do so as well.

### **9.1.2.2 Inviting Religious Guests**

In addition to using religious references and texts, NGOs also invite religious speakers to promote their NGOs and to confer credibility and legitimacy on them. This section describes how religious guests are utilised in women's NGOs. Inviting religious guests is very common practice, and for most events, one of the speakers will be a religious representative. This is almost impossible to avoid, and is still seen favourably by the population at large. The use of religious guests by NGOs was explained in chapter five; however, inviting religious speakers can also be regarded as a strategy for women's empowerment. As Abu-Rabia-Queder states, NGOs tend to invite male figures (Sheiks or Judges) as speakers for two reasons: first, change occurs for the whole society, not only for women, so speakers should be representative of this; and second, they provide religious justifications for issues regarding women's changing roles, especially in patriarchal tribal societies (Abou-Rabia-Queder, 2007:76). She also refers to this strategy as 're-Islamising patriarchy', and NGOs tend to include male religious figures to offer religious justifications that will give them legitimacy and guarantee their acceptance within the community. From the analysis of NGO uses of religion, it became clear that most of these NGOs use religion in some way or another, whether they are conservatives or liberals.

The practice of inviting religious guests was mentioned by nine out of the fourteen NGOs as something that they do as a way to explain different aspects of Islam regarding women. For instance, as mentioned earlier, the manager of NGO 1 (youth empowerment, female, 30s) said they utilise religion “according to [the] audience.” If the audience is young, they use vibrant colours and fun messages, but if the audience is older and more conservative, they tend to use religious discourse. NGO 1 is very much aware of the power of different discourses and their effects in attracting people, and therefore they select the appropriate discourse for each and every event. Similar comments were made by the manager of NGO 10, whose invitations of religious guests are also audience-dependent: “if the audience are conservative we would have a religious speaker”. Both NGOs thus display a strategic approach to using religious discourse. The selective mechanisms they use to influence the audience demonstrates an awareness and intention to produce the most impact possible through the choice of their guests.

Religious guests were also used by NGO 12 (human rights). The manager noted that they are always keen to use religious references in promoting their issues and cases, seeking the credibility, legitimacy and decency of religion to address and clarify cases for people: “In everything, we have to have the religious opinion on it, or [its] explanation about it”. In addition, both NGO 5 and NGO 11 (both conservative women’s empowerment NGOs) are very keen to have religious guests at their events. As the manager of NGO 5 (female, 50s) said, “we choose guests [and] they have to be somewhat religious”. The manager of NGO 11 indicated that religious guests support them all the time as they provide religious justifications for the topic under discussion. In fact, she indicated that she made an agreement with a respectful cleric to join her NGO and to be responsible for the men’s section. As noted earlier, many feminist and human rights activists form alliances with “progressive clerics” in order to mobilise religious idioms and symbols. However, this

alliance will provide a meeting point between pro-empowerment and pro-religious viewpoints, and is a starting point for negotiating and initiating social change using the notion of religion (Tadros 2011:1).

NGO 9 invited a respected religious scholar to talk about religious regulations regarding women in their latest forum, entitled “Women’s participation in national development”. Although the forum concerned women in the workforce and business, they intentionally invited a religious figure to talk about Islam’s perspective on women in business. Again, all these NGOs have sought male religious figures for their events. Religious speakers provide not only justifications for their causes, but are also seen as being a legitimate authority in the topic they are presenting on. A manager from NGO 8 (women’s empowerment) also explained that their intention behind inviting religious figures is not only to seek legitimacy and credibility, but also to conduct debates about issues regarding women’s status in Islam as will be elaborated more later.

NGO 13 (domestic violence) invites religious speakers to their events to seek their advice, and to provide explanations on the issues being discussed. In addition, both NGOs 6 and 7 offer regular lectures on religion presented by female Islamic studies academics and female preachers. The remaining four NGOs did not invite any religious guests, preferring to keep their events ‘professional’. Two out of these four – NGO 2 and NGO 4 – have directly indicated that they do not use religion or religious representatives in their NGOs, and this will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

## **9.2 Religion as a tool for women’s empowerment**

As mentioned earlier, religion has been, and still is, a powerful tool for influencing, mobilising and persuading people to become involved in NGOs. In Muslims countries, religious values have played a major role in NGOs, providing both motivation and guidance



for activities, and a source of inspiration for creating a better world. Whites (2010) refers to the complex nature of the relationship between Islam and women's empowerment, arguing that most of the literature about women's empowerment is connected to modernity and its western features, and that the discussion of women's empowerment within Islam has been undermined because of preconceptions about women in Islam. In addition, religion has been used as a tool for engaging with and discussing women's issues, such as women's rights and empowerment, and Islamic feminism has been used to influence gender policy and practice in Muslim countries (Tadros 2011).

According to Devriese (2008), the tendency to use religious references to empower women started to gain popularity during the 1990s under Islamic Feminism, which adopts an Islamic framework from a feminist standpoint. Numerous women from around the Muslim world have created initiatives to mobilise and reform legislation regarding women and family matters using interpretations of Islamic texts. She argues that the success of these initiatives has not only produced specific religious ideologies, but also produced strategic analyses and understandings of socio-political situations. Many Islamic Feminists have been able to introduce legislative reforms that have provided women with human rights from within the framework of Islam and within the context of their culture (Devriese 2008:82). However, whilst Islam has been used as a justification for women's rights by some, it has been used to oppose women's rights by others, and this result from the complexity and diversity of different beliefs, practices and interpretations of religious texts in the Muslim world (Kucinkas 2010). Consequently, according to Mir-Hosseini (2011), an increasing number of women have begun questioning "the link between Islamic ideals and patriarchy", as they do not see any contradiction between their faith and their aspiration (Mir-Hosseini 2011:71). However, due to the uniqueness of the Arab Gulf states, any

policy changes regarding women have to be sensitive to the cultural values of this region, and must come through “a lens of Islamic feminism” (Matcalfe 2011:142).

The interview analysis suggests that religion has been used as a source for women’s empowerment in Saudi Arabia in two ways: through the re-examination and reinterpretation of religious texts in a way that favours women’s empowerment, and through the appeal to religious discourse when discussing women’s issues. Both strategies were mentioned by interviewees and, in contrast to the first part of the chapter, where we looked at religion’s general impact on people and NGOs, this section will focus on using religion as a tool for women’s empowerment.

### **9.2.1 The Reinterpretation of Religious Texts**

Religious texts are utilised to gain cultural legitimacy for proposed social changes to benefit women. This strategy enables activists to integrate the modern concepts of feminism, human rights and gender equality within the local Saudi context by invoking passages from highly legitimate texts that cannot be contested. Sholkamy (2011) notes that women have been in the centre of debates by reformists and conservatives, who use their own interpretations of the Qur’an to aim to liberate Muslim women or to maintain their piety, respectively. These contradictory views on the role of women have increased the gap between feminists, who have human rights on their side, and Islamists, who defend patriarchal rules and a commitment to sharia law (Mir-Hosseini 2011:71). The different sides to the debates will continue to invoke different interpretations of Islamic texts to defend their own views, but the power of such interpretations will depend greatly on the social and political support received by their claims to authenticity (Mir-Hosseini 2011:77). According to Metcalfe “men’s interpretations [of the Qur’an] have tended to be

underpinned by masculinity and patriarchal logic and have tainted the true message of the Qur'an" (2011:135). Islamic feminists, on the other hand, view their interpretations of the Qur'an as providing a source of justification for women having equal rights to men, and "these interpretations have served to facilitate a feminist consciousness" (Metcalf 2011:135). However, Ziba Mir-Hosseini argues that these interpretations of Islamic texts will always rely on different social and political forces, and each side will defend its own authenticity (2011:77).

In her article about civil society in Saudi Arabia, Montagu (2010) contends that women within NGOs are calling for a re-examination of some aspects of the Qur'an, hadith and other early texts regarding women, in order to "highlight essentialist Islam in contrast to 'custom'" and to present more rightful interpretations for women in Islam. Paterson (2008) also offers an example of the use of interpretations in a similar context to the Saudi one – in a conservative area in Baluchistan, Pakistan – where women were encouraged to interpret and translate verses of the Quran with a respected scholar in Millennium Development Goals (MDG) sessions at NGOs. Through these initiatives, they were able to gain confidence and develop the ability to discuss religious interpretations within their communities.

Although the analysis of interviews has highlighted a tendency to view the use of religion in general as positive, NGOs did not explain how religion can provide an effective tool for empowerment, with the exception of NGO 8 (women's empowerment), who displayed an understanding of how to reinterpret religious texts to this end. This NGO has engaged in debates with religious figures to correct religious discourse in order to use it in favour of women's empowerment. Evidently, by inviting religious figures, NGO 8 does not just intend to secure legitimacy and credibility for itself, but rather to affect changes in the

mind-sets of the new generation by replacing or correcting some of the misinterpretations of Islamic texts regarding women. It does so by hosting debates between respected religious figures on controversial issues regarding interpretations of Islamic texts. In fact, the manager has indicated that it is important to reach an understanding of old sayings and interpretations of verses that undermine women and get to the bottom of them. She strongly believes that Islam itself fully supports women's rights, but that the interpretations of it that people have been following for a long time are unrepresentative of its true values. On this point, she added: "We don't believe, by any means, that Islam undermines women, but instead people's understanding and interpretations of it have dominated any discussion about women". This idea was also stressed by Ali *et al.* (2008) when they argued that many women perceive religion as a source of strength despite the negative association of religion with "patriarchy, [the] oppression of women rights and intolerance" (Ali *et al.* 2008:38). Moreover, NGO 8 seeks to legitimise each debate and have it approved by the higher commission of religious clerics:

We are also working on correcting old writings and interpretations about women. We study them and revise them in collaboration with religious scholars, and we get the corrections approved from the higher religious committee, and it is going very well. For example, the old saying that a woman is a part of man's property from father to husband and back to father or brother – we have debated this saying and we are working on right now.

(Female, 30s)

NGO 8 has the courage and vision to debate some of the most controversial Islamic texts. At the same time, they believe in the justice of Islam, and place the blame here on old scholars' interpretations of some sayings. This strategy of reinterpretation has the potential to be used powerfully, but the above NGO was the only one that was encountered using it. Pointing out the power of interpretation, Deneulin and Rakodi (2011) suggest that the reinterpretation of texts can provide the basis for empowerment because it calls for alternative interpretations that encourage everyday practices to be brought in line with religious values, with an emphasis on human dignity for all. They also argue that the reinterpretation of texts can lead to enlightenment through offering a different understanding of social reality which, in return, can develop knowledge, behaviour and practices (Deneulin and Rakodi 2011:51). Whilst the reinterpretation of religious texts has been discussed by many researchers, it was not commonly mentioned during the interviews I conducted. The above example of NGO 8 is remarkable, as it was the only example that used the reinterpretation approach properly.

### **9.2.2 Religious Framing of Women's Issues**

As previously argued, apart from the impact that Islam and its interpretation have on issues affecting women, there is also another dimension of intertwined cultural and religious thoughts and practices. Linking feminist perspectives with existing cultural religious discourse appears to be effective. This practice of employing religious discussions for issues that relate to women has been explored in detail by Mariz Tadros (2011), who argues that religion has been utilised to address gender issues by feminists, human rights activists, and international donors. She identifies two uses of it: first to advance a "progressive religious agenda"; and second to use within a culturally sensitive approach for bringing

about social change (Tadros 2011:1). In order to remove oppressive interpretations of Islam, “Muslim women need to come forward and redefine those interpretations that have disempowered them. The key to gender equality initiatives may remain within the paradigms of Islam” (Jamal 2014:4). As mentioned earlier, the majority of Muslim women are strongly dedicated to Islam, and view the Qur’an as regarding women and men as “different but equal”. The question is whether there is a linkage to women’s empowerment and religion, and whether people feel that religion plays an important role when issues regarding women are being discussed. Not surprisingly, the results of this research confirm the view that religion is perceived an important factor in discussions about women.

As Beverly Metcalfe (2011) argues, because Gulf countries (including Saudi Arabia) are governed by Sharia law, Islamic interpretations greatly influence the role that women have in these countries. However, confusions between culture and religion (in this case Islam) add to the complexity of the issue, with the culture being greatly influenced through male domination and other historical events (Metcalfe 2011:133). Moreover, many of the patriarchal customs are “embedded in the community”, and in many times with no real reference to Islam, became even part of the Islamic jurisprudence (Karam and Afiouni 2014:512). Hence, the government also uses religion to restrict and permit women’s mobility and freedom through ‘fatwas’. Al-Rasheed (2013) describes fatwas as religious opinions on issues but argues that, in the Saudi context, the state and the religious establishment use fatwas to define what is prohibited and what is not regarding women’s movements, appearances and positions. She carries on to argue that conservative religious opinions were constructed to create a “strict moral order”, and that fatwas or religious opinions have become regulators of women’s behaviours and lives (Al-Rasheed 2013:109). By seeking fatwas for issues regarding women, the state constantly seeks for religious opinions to ensure the legitimacy of any reforms. As Montuge (2010:82) also suggests, the

Saudi government has to deal with the ‘dilemma’ of how to modernise the country without undermining its Islamic identity, and this is especially pertinent for issues regarding women.

Abu-Rabia-Queder (2007) argues that Islamic religious texts provide NGOs with a legitimate gateway for discussing and challenging the silent culture on many issues that are considered taboos, and which are thus not publicly discussed. Incorporating gender issues into religious discourses is never an easy task, but it does provide a shared ground that activists can seek to claim their rights within. Using religious discourse in the area of women’s empowerment is a tactic that three of the NGOs studied here adopt – NGOs 8, 9 and 10. Both NGOs 9 and 10 discuss issues regarding women from a religious perspective in their forums. For example, NGO 9 (a lobbying NGO) focuses on women and work, discussing sharia law regarding work laws in relation to women in the forum. However, NGO 8 (women’s empowerment) has taken this approach to a whole new level by choosing the most controversial issue regarding women in Islam and hosting a debate on the topic. NGOs 1, 9 and 11 also invite respectable religious scholars to discuss specific issues regarding women on their forum and in their conferences. On the other hand, conservative NGOs 5, 6 and 7 have regular religious lectures. Finally, NGO 10 wants to educate women about sharia law and about different conventions so that they are prepared to attend and take part in the debate at international conferences.

The survey results also showed that there is popular support for using religion when discussing issues regarding women. As noted in table 9.3 (below), the results of the survey show that 65.1% of respondents said it was very important to use religion when discussing issues regarding women, and 15.1% agreed that it was important. Only 5.7% felt that religion was not an important thing for NGOs to use.

**Table 9.3**

<b>Do you think it is important to use religion when talking about issues regarding women?</b>			
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
	<b>Very important</b>	69	65.1
	<b>Important</b>	16	15.1
	<b>Neutral</b>	1	0.9
	<b>Not important</b>	6	5.7
	<b>According to the issue</b>	13	12.3
	<b>Don't know</b>	1	0.9
	<b>Total</b>	106	100.0

If we combine the two percentages (very important) 65.1% and (important) 15.1%, the total number of respondents who believe religion is important in this context comes to eighty per cent of the total respondents, which means that a vast majority feel that using religion is important when discussing issues regarding women. This represents a very high percentage, and shows that respondents think that religion plays a central role in discussions of issues regarding women.

Thus, the bottom line here is that religion will always provide a legitimate means for approaching people and introducing change in this part of the world. Selecting which arguments they are trying to push forward, and which claims are appropriate to go with them are tactics that are used by the NGOs under study. As has been argued in this section, the use of religion is a widespread practice, with NGOs utilising it for recruitment, therapy,



gaining credibility, promoting Islamic values and empowering women. Each NGO has its own way of incorporating religion into its activities or messages.

### **9.3 Professionalism and Religion**

Although there is collective agreement on the importance of religion, some NGOs have argued that it should not be the only source of credibility sought by NGOs. While most NGOs agreed that religion provides inspiration, motivation for good deeds, and adds to their credibility, some NGOs stressed the importance of showing professionalism inside NGOs, and committing to work ethics and hard work as well. It was noted earlier that NGO 4 (Facebook-based) avoids talking about religion inside their NGO, instead focusing on the work they are doing, and NGO 2 states that they do not talk about religion because they do not want to take advantage of it to promote their NGO. Both NGOs 2 and 3 are keen to prove themselves trustworthy through their accomplishments and achievements. The manager (female, 50s) of NGO 2 (survey-based) was very clear in her assertion that they do not use religion to attract people, and avoid using the emotional effect of religion at all, preferring a more practical understanding of religion to provide encouragement for working hard, achieving more and making the world a better place. As the manager commented, “we take the concept of Islam as building the world very practical”. Hence, NGO 2 uses the concept of ‘building the world in Islam’ as an inspiration for hard work. Yet, the manager also made it clear that she does not believe it to be necessary for NGOs to use religion in their activities, and thinks that NGOs that use religion to gain more popularity are ‘taking advantage’ of it.

Similarly, NGO 3 (charity housing) acknowledges that religion has an effect on people and that it is sometimes used to attract people, but says that this is never sufficient for

establishing credibility. The manager argued that NGOs need to prove their credibility through hard work and achievements, saying: “we had people asking us show documents or proof of what we were doing – people are different, they want to know [for] sure where their money goes.” Here both NGOs have reported the belief that they need to prove that they are trustworthy and reliable through their work, not just through religious affiliations. This has been even more so since 9/11, as many charities have to explain where their donations go, and people are increasingly questioning the credibility of religious organisations or religiously affiliated organisations as they are becoming more aware that some people use religion to persuade others to help (Montagu 2010). Saudi society, in particular, is standing on the doorstep of globalisation, and this has created a huge divide between the views of conservatives, on one hand, and moderates and liberals on the other (Al-Rasheed 2013). Here, Islam has been, and still is, the main component of the debate, because it represents a legitimate language that is also very flexible in how it can be interpreted to suit different parties.

NGO 14 (domestic violence) also leans towards practical solutions to problems, with the manager insisting that it is not always enough to sit helplessly and ask for God’s help. As this manager (psychologist, female, 40s) commented, “women need to stand up for themselves and we [are] here to help them – I cannot just tell her, ‘hang on, God will save, be patient’”. The fact that religion is and will be a good inspiration for people cannot be overlooked. However, the managers of NGO 14 stressed the urgency for women to take action instead of just staying silent and praying for solutions in situations such as domestic violence. Regardless of how strong they feel about religion, these NGOs have drawn the line on when the use of religion overshadows their main objective as professional bodies. Being clear about limiting their attachment to religion and focusing on the jobs they are

aiming to achieve is a bold statement. The sense of rationality and seriousness that they display in a context that is so strongly influenced religion is noteworthy.

#### **9.4 Misconceptions about religion**

This part of the chapter deals with misconceptions about religion, and shows how some of the comments from the interviews indicated negative views about the public understanding of religion. Ali *et al.* (2008) stress the importance of religion in many women's lives, but argue that negative factors are also associated with religion, as does most of the literature in this area. It should be noted, however, that there is a lack of empirical studies on and theoretical understanding about the issue of religion in Saudi people's lives. Ali *et al.*'s (2008) study focuses on the strength of religion in women's lives, arguing that religion must be considered in the study of Saudi women's lives in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of them. The interview analysis revealed that several NGOs (including 8, 9, 10, 13 and 14) agreed that many aspects of religion are misunderstood and misinterpreted by people, and that they require correcting. Some NGOs mentioned their attempts to correct some misperceptions. For instance, NGO 12 (human rights) insisted that Saudis have a tendency to mix up religion and tradition. The manager stated that in tribal societies, tribal laws including male dominance are highly valued and, in some cases, have a stronger influence and authority than religion (Karan and Afiouni 2014). As the manager (male, PhD, 40s) explained, "we have to be aware that we should differentiate between what is agreed on and what is not agreed on, what is religion and what is tradition." This mix between tradition and religion is one of the major problems that this NGO, as a human rights organisation, faces in its attempts to raise awareness about human rights. Another problem with religion is that conservative, strict interpretations of it create a gap between conservative religious figures and the public. For instance, as mentioned in the

media chapter, NGO 13 (domestic violence) holds that religion has some good influences, but its manager also expressed her frustrations with strict and rigid clerics:

I wish we could go back to the olden days, where mosques were cultural interaction places [and] religious figures were closer to regular people in Europe, where the mosque is still a cultural place.

(Female, 40s)

Thus, a concern about the growing gap between the ordinary person and conservative religious figures is raised here. Nevertheless, this manager also stresses how new moderate religious figures are much closer to the ordinary person as they use religious discourse in more relevant, moderate and appealing ways that engage better with the public. Consequently, the core message of this quote is that religion is important, but is better presented in more moderate language.

Another concern raised by the manager of NGO 13 (domestic violence) was that she is frequently judged by the way she looks and how she presents herself: “People always say, how come you speak about Islamic values while your dress code is modern? When I published pictures of myself, I received comments about wearing [a] free look hijab.” The judgmental nature of Saudi society made the issue of visibility very sensitive, as people tend to care about what others may say more than what they truly believe and want to do. This issue was addressed earlier in the media chapter in the discussion of women’s visibility. However, in the quote above, the manager is associating her references to religious values during her speeches with the image she presents through her looks and dress at a given time. While she does not believe in the association of what she is wearing

and the talk about Islamic values, she nonetheless still finds it hard to cope with people's comments about her appearance.

To explain the importance of visibility and dress code in the Muslim world, Deneulin and Rakodi (2011:47) argue that in countries where religious identity is highly encouraged people are often under pressure to demonstrate their religiosity by attending religious ceremonies and adopting particular dress codes. Whites (2010) also stresses that gender can be used as an indicator for modernity through examining the visibility, education, dress and political participation of women in comparison to men. If these are the appropriate indicators, then Islam appears to be opposed to modernity. At the same time, Muslim women are expected to uphold a certain level of morality, and managing this fine balance between modernity and morality has put women in the 'cross fire' between religious conservatism and pro-modernity feminism (White 2010:338).

NGO 8 talked about the need to point out and correct some misconceptions about women in Islam. The manager that was interviewed strongly believes that women's lack of equality is not grounded in Islam as a religion, but in old conceptions of women's roles drawn from dated and biased interpretations of the Hadith and Quran which restrict the role of women to their households. In her opinion, the solution is thus to search for sayings that degrade women and discuss these with religious scholars. She provided an example regarding the custody of children and how, after discussions with lawyers, judges and religious figures, this was seen not to be a religious issue, but a legislative one, and one based in the problem of male dominance. This takes us back to the problem of confusing traditions with religions, and the fact that people who lack educations may not possess the basic knowledge to differentiate inherited tradition from religious obligation. According to the

manager, this problem has tragic consequences, as it is very common for such traditions to be employed in Saudi courts without any legislative or religious grounds.

## **9.5 Conclusion**

The analysis of religion in this chapter confirmed that it is a major player in Saudi NGO practices. In Saudi Arabia it is impossible not to refer to religion in one way or another, with all the NGOs indicating that religion is important to them, whether it is used directly through texts and figures, or whether they are simply influenced by religious values. The survey results reinforced these findings. However, the analysis also revealed that religion is utilised in a variety ways by Saudi NGOs, including for credibility and legitimacy, recruitment, therapy, inspiration, promoting religious values, and empowering women.

Concerns over misconceptions about religion were also raised by some NGOs, as was the misinterpretation of Islamic texts in relation to women's roles. The widely held belief among people in these NGOs is that Islam itself is not to blame for the restrictions placed on women in Saudi society, but rather people's interpretation of Islamic texts. This analysis has established that religious discourse has not just been employed by NGOs to gain credibility or to attract people, but also to empower women from within.

## **Chapter Ten: Women's Empowerment**

This chapter focuses on the strategies and tactics used by the different NGOs under study to promote women's empowerment or to enhance women's roles in the Saudi society. Rosalind Eyben (2010) states that NGOs use a range of strategies to negotiate changes surrounding gender mainstreaming. There is a wide range of feminist approaches – from conservative to liberal – and one of the aims of this research is to examine some of the feminist approaches that are adopted by NGOs, giving special attention to their tactical natures. Western feminism is treated with suspicion in Saudi Arabia, so NGOs are conscious about the language and approaches they use (Macdisi, 2014). The strategies used by Saudi NGOs to promote women's empowerment vary from one NGO to another, but include the use of empowerment terminology, the use of religious discourse, a focus on particular issues about women's rights, status or opportunities, and attempts to influence public perceptions.

This chapter discusses the perceptions towards women's empowerment as both a concept and an aim, from both the interviewees' and the public's points of view. Discourses on women's empowerment have led to the questioning of the nature of the relationship between men and women within NGOs, as well as the dynamics of such relationships, including how they interact with one another. This chapter also examines the participants' views about changes in Saudi society, and the problems that the NGO world faces as a result.

## **10.1 Women's Empowerment Strategies**

This first section is divided into four parts, each discussing a different ways that Saudi NGOs use to approach women's issues: 1) The use of Empowerment discourse; 2) The framing of issues. 3) Capacity building. 4) Role of men in NGOs. These strategies are all ones that interviewees point to, as the analysis shows.

### **10.1.1 Empowerment Discourse**

Let us start by looking at empowerment discourse, which includes the use of terms and concepts by NGOs to describe empowerment. Studies have shown that women's NGOs have adopted several tactics to pursue their goals, including the use of feminist terminology. According to Devriese (2008), the use of appropriate local frames by NGOs is the most important factor for them to get right in order to gain legitimacy. This will allow them to encourage changes without undermining the dominant culture in a society or organisation. These local frames include the language, terms and symbols used by women's NGO that allow them to not only become legitimate actors, but also to minimise their previously marginalised statures, and become part of an on-going process of dialogue with their society (Metcalf, 2011). However, answers to questions about the use of empowerment terms produced a variety of different comments in the interviews, and the analysis of the interviews did not produce a clear positive attitude towards the term 'empowerment'. All the interviewees elaborated on the value of the term, and how they utilised it in their NGO through capacity building or expressing its meaning in different ways, but not all were happy actually using the term. As the analysis shows, NGOs 1, 2, 4, 8 and 9 all stated that they do not use the term 'empowerment', even though their actions



are guided by the concept and goal of women's empowerment. More specifically, NGO 1 (youth empowerment) stated that they have a team considering empowerment behind the scenes, but do not make this explicit when they approach the public. As the manager stated: "For us, as a teamwork, we know exactly our goals and we are clear about our role in empowering the youth – this is in our values – but in advertising, we don't say these things". This NGO has clearly thus employed the term 'empowerment' strategically, as they carefully choose when and where it is appropriate to use it. In fact, NGO 1 stated directly that the term 'empowerment' was not something that they were comfortable using in their ads or at public events. Being careful about what they present to people is crucial for their image, so even if they hold values such as being pro-empowerment, they may choose not to portray themselves as being pro-empowerment or pro-western. Similarly, NGO 9 (an advocacy NGO) prefers not to use the term empowerment, and claims that they use terms such as 'social justice' instead because of the possible hostility that the term 'empowerment' may generate. The manager of NGO 9 put it thus:

We don't use empowerment or equality [as] we believe that men and women are not equal, as women go through different biological stages in life than men, such as bearing children. Women need social justice, especially in work such as maternity leave, [and] family friendly working environments.

(Female, 30s, lobbying NGO)

The use of the term "social justice" is thus viewed as being more accurate and less problematic by NGO 9, which specialises in women's advocacy in work. Consequently, they use the term 'social justice' in their discourse with the government when seeking to

influence policies, eliminating words such as empowerment and equality, and selecting more appropriate, effective and tactful concepts that demands fair treatment for women in the workforce. In doing so, their agendas are more likely to be embraced than if they focused on equality, and they are more likely to achieve societal changes that enhance the status and rights of women. As Abou-Rabia-Queder (2007) argues, women in tribal societies do not use the terms “feminism” or “gender equality” in their activism – instead they transfer these concepts into the idiom of their cultural context (Abou-Rabia-Queder 2007:82). Eyben (2010) also observes that feminists deliberately avoid clarity about women’s equity as a safeguard for operating in dynamic societies with complex value systems. Nazeen and Maheen (2010) provides an example of NGOs that choose a “legalistic approach” in order to create an area for negotiation and to “avoid any accusations of being anti-Islamic” (Nazeen and Maheen 2010:72). This dynamic is especially pertinent in Saudi Arabia, because choosing the right word for a particular audience in a specific context and time is vital for attracting widespread support and avoiding unwanted hostility (Metcalf, 2011), as the example above suggests.

Different NGOs had different reasons for avoiding the use of the term ‘empowerment’. One concern that was pointed to was the fact that the term is associated with pro-empowerment *Western* thinking. However, the survey results showed different attitudes, with more positivity towards the term ‘empowerment’. As table 10.1 illustrates, when the survey respondents were asked about what they thought about the term (or concept) of women’s empowerment, the highest percentage, 28.7%, thought the term empowerment was practical and useful; 21.3% thought the term was unclear and vague; and 20.2% viewed the main aspect of the term in relation to its being new to Saudi society. 14.9% agreed that it is regularly used, and only 9.6% saw it as a ‘Western import’.

**Table 10.1**

<b>What do you think of the term ‘women’s empowerment’?</b>				
		<b>Responses</b>		
		<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>	
<b>x3(a)</b>	<b>It is a Western import</b>	9	9.6%	
	<b>It is regularly used</b>	14	14.9%	
	<b>It is practical and useful</b>	27	28.7%	
	<b>It is not a favorable term</b>	2	2.1%	
	<b>It is unclear and vague</b>	20	21.3%	
	<b>It is new to this society</b>	19	20.2%	
	<b>I don’t know</b>	3	3.2%	
<b>Total</b>		94	100.0%	

As argued above, NGOs 5, 6, 8, 11 and 14 avoided mentioning any of the particular words or terms they use, preferring to explain what they do instead. Explaining empowerment through their activity implies their interest in practically valuing empowerment, and applying the concept of it within their practice and actions instead of through the use of empowerment terms. For instance, NGO 8’s manager stated directly that the word empowerment is “an alien word that was introduced to the society”. She explained that they prefer to talk in terms of training, educating and raising awareness, with the manager commenting: “we want to empower women to have her role in the society”. It is interesting

to note that this manager used the word “alien”, which displays her consciousness of the need to be careful with the use of terms when dealing with the public.

Likewise, a manager from NGO 14 (breast cancer) asserted that the word “empowerment” is not clearly understandable, but they view empowerment to have value in their goal of raising awareness about breast cancer. She said that she prefers not to use the word ‘empowerment’ because it is new to Saudi society and might have a negative effect on people. The manager of NGO 5 expressed a similar sentiment when asked about whether they use the term ‘empowerment’, saying: “Yes, you can see it in our values. The word could be interpreted in different ways and everyone could use it in a different context.” She thus argued that ‘empowerment’ can be understood in relation to people’s orientations, and that it can be viewed from different perspectives.

Interestingly, the academic manager of NGO 11 critically explained the term empowerment, and also argued that it means different things to different people. However, she used the term as a title for her NGO, while insisting that although the term has a Western meaning that is not Islamic, that is not how they are using it. When asked why her NGO was called an ‘empowerment centre’, the manager commented: “I mean, here, we are [talking about] enabling, but not [using] empowerment as a Western concept. The term in the West, or as used by others, has different intentions that might contradict with Islam.” Interestingly, the manager asserted that naming this centre as an empowerment centre was appropriate because it is actually an empowerment centre, but also tactical – to attract an audience that is interested in empowerment. However, there seems to be some contradictory elements in this view, as she sees the word to be inseparably associated with a Western concept that has the objectionable intention to inappropriately influence Muslim women, whilst at the same time using it as a ‘flashing title’ to attract women interested in

empowerment. In fact she feels strongly about educating women on the hidden agenda behind the concept of gender and the goals of CEDAW which from her point of view have many violations of Islamic principles (Al-Saad, 2013).

All the afore-mentioned NGOs produced vague answers on the issue of the use of (the term) ‘empowerment’, which make it hard to determine whether or not they do use the term. They perceived the word as being subject to a variety of different interpretations, and as being alien and western, and thus still treated by Saudi people with suspicion. Abu-Rabia-Queder (2007) argues that in tribal societies, feminist NGOs have had to explore various strategies for finding a balance between modernity and traditional collective values without risking women’s statuses. Coleman (2010) also observes that there is a strong negative association with the word ‘feminism’ in the Middle East. She argues that in the Middle East, there has been a rise in Islamic Feminism, in which the promotion of women’s rights is undertaken from within the Islamic framework. Devriese (2008) also argues that feminist research is often met with suspicion in countries with Muslim majority populations, and that in the Arabian Gulf, in particular, there is a wide resistance to feminist practices because of their association with western colonialism.

However, from a more practical point of view, NGO 13 (domestic violence) sees empowerment as enabling women to live a decent life. Instead of commenting on the word ‘empowerment’, the manager linked it with practical actions that can lead towards achieving empowerment. Because this NGO deals with domestic violence, they view the issue of empowerment as not only an extra luxury in women’s lives, but as a necessary tool and solution for life-threatening situations in which surviving is what matters. The manager (psychologist, female, 40s) put it as follows: “I see empowerment [as having an important role] in letting women live a decent life, in a good house, providing education for her

children rather than suffering from abusive addictive husbands.” As this NGO often deals with life-threatening situations, the women they are dealing with often have no time for slogans. The manager encourages women with abusive husbands to act, and to leave the abusive relationship, which can be extremely hard in Saudi Arabia. While she acknowledges the hardships women face in these situations, she also stresses that such women would not be empowered unless they had the courage to fight for a better life. As a domestic violence NGO, they offer shelter for mothers and children and help with legal papers and other matters, such as proper housing, schools for the children and jobs for these women. From her perspective, this is what empowerment is all about.

The analysis thus showed that the use of the term ‘empowerment’ is not popular among Saudi NGOs, particularly as a term to use in their public discourses. This is unsurprising, as the word is relatively new and has Western associations accompanying it. However, interestingly, there is also a general acceptance of the values associated with empowerment, and how these values can be translated into real practical empowerment.

### **10.1.2 Framing Women’s Issues**

Similarly to the previous section, where the use of the term ‘empowerment’ was analysed, this section looks at how NGOs have portrayed women’s issues in order to empower women. Framing issues is a way of presenting them in a certain way to demonstrate a specific image in order to influence a particular audience. Frames have been described by Allan *et al.* (2010) as being “culturally specific” and “socially produced”, where selectivity is key in presenting or eliminating particular claims about issues and problems and, in return, for shaping the legitimate and acceptable frames in a given situation (Allan *et al.* 2010:30). Frames are one of the tactics that NGOs use to emphasise particular issues and

advocate them as *legitimate* ones. As argued throughout this thesis, the sensitive nature of issues concerning women's rights and statuses in Saudi Arabia means that such matters have to be addressed in appropriate, legitimate and acceptable manners. For example, the use of religious discourse, as the previous chapter argued, is always effective in discussions about issues concerning women. Devriese (2008:78) offers an example of the increasingly popular Middle Eastern feminist strategy of abandoning secular human rights language in favour of existing Islamic frames. Thus, instead of using explicit feminist words such as "liberalism and gender equality" – which are perceived as "Western and dangerous" – they use tools that mix cultural and modern aspects by using scientific facts to explain psychological aspects, or Quranic verses that refer to women's rights and freedom of choice (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2007; Devriese, 2008).

The interview analysis produced some interesting frames in which issues of women's status and rights have been moulded. One frame involves the use of general statements such as "women's participation in national development", which is presented in most of the mission statements of these NGOs. Another frame involves discussing these issues about women within an area of discussion that is already seen as legitimate, such as in relation to employment and education. And finally, although less frequently used, is the tactic of naming and shaming strategies, which rely on labelling individuals who discriminate against women.

As Eyban (2010) explains, one of the tactics used most frequently by the actors that address women's issues in Saudi Arabia is to make vague statements, such as ones about 'women's participation in the society'. This, as Eyban (2010) contends, can incorporate a range of different outlooks, from those supporting women's traditional roles to those encouraging women's political participation. Negotiating change often requires the use of several tactics

for avoiding any possible conflicts with other NGOs, such as the deliberate use of vague language in reference to a common goal. Such 'strategic ambiguity' provides an area for others to make their own judgments about what this general statement really means (Eyben 2010).

In Saudi Arabia, employment and education have come to be seen as a gateway for discussing women's issues for forty years now, and this topic has become a classical point of discussion. As Metcalfe (2011) argues, due to the religious and cultural context in Saudi Arabia, opportunities there have been shaped in relation to terms of education and work, and ultimately are referred to in this context as 'empowerment'. Metcalfe (2011) has been able to chart the uniqueness of women's empowerment there, which has been largely influenced and negotiated through the cultural and religious context in Saudi Arabia. This is what NGO 9 (advocacy NGO) focuses on – demanding social justice regarding work and job-related issues for women, and attempting to influence policies and legislation in this way. As argued earlier, although NGO 9 advocates women's empowerment, they are careful not to use any labels involving empowerment or equality, and to select a particular issue (work and employment) that it is culturally accepted to support (Paterson, 2008:76; Metcalfe, 2011). In contrast to much other empowerment literature, Paterson (2008) argues that women's empowerment should embrace the local traditions of women's lives. NGO 9 is thus an example of an NGO that selects an appropriate frame – employment – as the main issue to initiate their advocacy on other women's issues.

Another way of using frames is to focus on particular problems and advocate solutions to them. NGOs tend to focus on an area or an issue that requires change and attention. However, Joachim (2003) provides a more detailed explanation of how the strategic framing process of NGO agendas can be accomplished, citing three stages: i) the definition



of the problem; ii) the solution or policies offered to solve the problem; and iii) the motivations and justifications for political actions (Joachim, 2003:252). For example, the main issue that NGO 13 focuses on is domestic violence. Interestingly, the issue of domestic violence did not enter mainstream public discourse until 2004, when a case of girl being tortured by her father and step-mother was leaked to the newspapers (Hamdan, 2005). As a result (as discussed in the media chapter), this NGO was established to address domestic violence (such as NGO 13). Thus, what was previously considered a taboo 'spilled out' into the public arena. However, cases of domestic violence are still very hard to deal with legally due to the private nature of Saudi society. As the manager and founder of NGO 13 (female, 40s, Psychologist) put it: "There is not [a current set-up] organising courts for such matters as domestic violence, and then they say 'just go home'. However, we made good steps in raising awareness and helping victims, and are waiting for new violence legislation law".

As noted earlier in the media chapter, although public opinion has pushed this previously taboo issue of domestic violence to the front and centre of discussions, legislation for tackling domestic violence is still lacking. Women's NGOs mobilise by developing strategic agendas that are very insightful, shedding light on the internal dynamics of a hidden process that is not always explicit to the average person. In terms of conducting research, these points are very important for understanding women's NGOs, especially those with advocacy policies and changing agendas (Jouchim, 2003:252).

The survey results provided in table 10.2 show that, when asked about what they thought of people's opinion in general about women's NGOs, a total of 40.6% of respondents reported that they receive either a huge acceptance or else have many people in support of them. This implies a positive attitude towards NGOs, as nearly 40 percent think that people

accept and support women's NGOs. The question was initially asked in order to identify any possible hostility towards women's NGOs, but no such hostility was found, with most showing a favourable opinion of them. However, interestingly, the highest percentage (27.8%) believed that opinions about women's NGOs depend on the orientations of these NGOs. This explains why managers are careful not to explicitly mention certain terms and goals.

**Table 10.2**

<b>What do you think of people's opinion in general about women's NGOs</b>				
		<b>Responses</b>		
		<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>	
<b>x6(a)</b>	<b>They receive a huge acceptance</b>	27	20.3%	
	<b>There are many in support of them</b>	27	20.3%	
	<b>It depends on their orientations</b>	37	27.8%	
	<b>Some are against them</b>	18	13.5%	
	<b>Some blame them for provoking women</b>	7	5.3%	
	<b>I have not noticed any strong opinion</b>	14	10.5%	
	<b>Other</b>	3	2.3%	
<b>Total</b>		133	100.0%	

This section has discussed the widespread culture among NGOs of using appropriate frames to present women's issues. However, there are also some women in NGOs who prefer to stand up and speak their minds, albeit few. According to Abou-Rabia-Queder

(2007), there are ‘rebel’ female activist groups who are taking the hard path, outside the traditional negotiation process that most women’s organisations follow. Nazeen and Maheen (2010) also refer to the method of ‘naming and shaming’ on a specific issue as a way to mobilise members and alliances. However, they argue that naming and shaming depends on the organisational ideology, the nature of allies, and the impact that particular terms will have on their audiences. This strategy is crucial for gaining support and legitimacy, so special consideration of the language that is used is undertaken by members and allies. NGO 8 also adopted the strategy of naming and shaming, where any person who discriminates against women will be labelled and pointed at.

It has to take its natural path – like in the West, how they overcame discrimination against black people. They start by campaigning that anyone [that] treat them [not as an] unequal is portrayed as backward minded, so they would label anybody that discriminates against them. ... [W]e took this initiative and we are spreading the word that anybody doesn’t want women to participate in the society – he is a backward, uncivilised person. (Female, 30s)

These groups have support from their families, but are not usually accepted by society at large (Abou-Rabia-Queder 2007:80). As stated above, the manager of NGO 8 would be considered to be a rebel, and is not afraid to speak her mind in blaming women for not standing up for themselves. Another rebel would be the manager of NGO 3, who proudly wore traditional coloured clothes to advertise their NGO, and when encountered with religious conservatives, responded “I am not doing anything wrong”, showing no fear of making this claim in public. She was not afraid to present herself in the way that she wanted

rather than blending in to make her life easier. Making such a statement is challenging for many, who would consider her as a rebel and this is just what she intended.

### **10.1.3 Building capacity**

The previous section discussed the term ‘empowerment’ and showed why some NGOs prefer not to use the term, instead focusing on their actions and achievements relating to women’s rights and interests. As mentioned earlier, education for women has come to be seen as a legitimate right for women, and it thus provides an appropriate frame through which changes for women in the Saudi society can be pursued. The framing process will be more likely to meet with success if NGOs can link and relate their messages and campaigns to existing frames rather than creating new ones, as mentioned in the example of higher education in the Arabian Gulf (Devriese 2008).

Training and education are one of the most popular strategies for empowering women in the Saudi context. All the NGOs under study offer occasional training or educational workshops for women, even though some are not specialised in training. As explained earlier, NGOs 5, 6 and 8 avoided using empowerment terms in their official public discourse, instead employing the concept to describe their approach to training and educating women. The analysis showed that ten out of fourteen NGOs offer courses, lectures and workshops, with each course or workshop having a different purpose. For instance, NGOs 6 and 7 focus on raising religious awareness through lectures given alongside other capacity-building courses, whilst NGOs 12, 13 and 14 focus on raising awareness on health, violence and human rights, and use lectures that educate people on preventing particular practices while emphasising and encouraging others. NGOs 5, 11, 13 and 14 offer counselling sessions and well-being courses that focus on the psychological

well-being of women, and NGOs 5, 8, 10 and 11 offer courses for building skills, mostly in business and leadership.

In their efforts to empower women, NGO 6 offer weekly lectures and training through a variety of activities and courses. However, they also focus on training women who are already receiving financial assistance from this NGO, by offering professional classes in sewing, cooking, beauty, English and accounting. All these courses offer diplomas or certificates that qualify the women who take them to work in that area. Thus, this NGO is training women from poor families to be financially independent. As its manager said: “the concept of training changed here in the past five years, after people saw the positive result of such training courses” So their approach is not only concerned with offering training, but also with enabling women to be independent and productive. Similarly, but more directly, as well as providing training courses, NGO 5 also encourages women to run different projects. This NGO is trying to build different skills through the project experience they offer – in leadership, decision-making, planning and managing:

We see empowerment as in teaching women how to set and plan goals by working on projects. Every woman comes up with a project idea and presents a proposal of budget and outcomes. After it has been agreed on by funders, they would let this woman [be] in charge to manage and execute the project. (Female, 50s)

So the manager of NGO 5 sees empowerment as best achieved through lessons that actually empower women by giving them authority to manage and make decisions. Thus, the idea is that by going through the whole process of setting, planning, presenting, negotiating, decision-making, managing and executing a project, these women are made ready for larger-scale management. In her explanation of how capacity-building works in facilitating

women's empowerment, Paterson (2008) suggests that women's empowerment in NGOs starts with personal development – through developing a sense of self by expressing feelings, then learning how to manage these emotions, and then focusing on critical thinking.

Both NGOs 5 and 6 are keen to not only raise awareness, but also to provide training that builds these women's skills and thus empowers them by enabling them to become financially independent. NGO 12, on the other hand, offers workshops and seminars not only for women, but for people in general, aiming to raise awareness about human rights. At every international event or day they put on, they organise a special day for children and women to promote the culture of human rights, with a special focus on the rights of women and children. NGO 12, as human rights NGO, has added this special focus on women and children in an attempt to educate the public about their rights more effectively. It is important to note, here, that the frame includes the word 'children' next to women in order to take the focus away from gender, thus making it less controversial and enabling the NGO to approach women within a family-friendly setting. This NGO is doing important work by educating the public through targeting remote areas where there is less knowledge about women's rights. The cases of human rights violations against women that they receive enable them to target the populations where education about human rights is most needed.

In terms of training, NGO 9 has provided rather unusual example for their training experience as they offer training for 80 women to prepare them to work in a factory. The interesting thing is working in factories is not a widespread practice and it is fairly new to the society, the manager explained that they have been approached by a shrimp factory in a nearby village. The factory wanted them to recruit and train girls from the same village

because the factory is keen in hiring women because it was one of the requirements of the Japanese company they planning to export their shrimp to. Interestingly, the Japanese company is very specific about the product being cleaned by ladies. The Saudi factory found themselves in the situation of employing women in their factory. However, NGO 9 worked with the factory to ensure the work environment is safe for these women and they also worked with the locals to convince them to allow their female relatives to work in the factory after assurance of their safety. For NGO 9 this is a success story they have achieved in not only building capacity and offering jobs but also in changing the perceptions of women working in factories.

Confirming the results of the interview analysis, the survey analysis showed that the main role that Saudi NGOs play in women's lives is to build their capacities and raise their awareness. As shown in table 10.3, the respondents' viewed the greatest impact that NGOs have on women's lives to be on raising awareness and knowledge (25.5%), whilst a large number of respondents (17.9%) viewed NGOs as a place for building skills and capacities, whilst 17.5% said that their greatest impact was in enabling women to gain more confidence and self-esteem. Consequently, the three main areas in which NGOs were seen to influence women were awareness and knowledge, capacity-building and building confidence.

**Table 10.3**

<b>What is your opinion of the impact of NGOs in women's lives?</b>				
		<b>Responses</b>		
		<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>	
x5(a)	<b>Raise awareness and knowledge</b>	70	25.5%	
	<b>Contribute to developing and changing society</b>	24	8.8%	
	<b>Building skills and capacity</b>	49	17.9%	
	<b>Financial assistance</b>	29	10.6%	
	<b>Gaining more confidence and self-esteem</b>	48	17.5%	
	<b>Help them to meet other women</b>	20	7.3%	
	<b>Don't know</b>	2	.7%	
	<b>Other</b>	1	.4%	
	<b>Make good use of their spare time</b>	21	7.7%	
	<b>Pressuring tool to enhance women's status</b>	10	3.6%	
<b>Total</b>		274	100.0%	

From the table above, it can be seen that the three categories most frequently cited by respondents are directly related to building women's capacity. From the respondents' points of view, NGOs have thus contributed to raising women's awareness and building women's capacities, and these concords with the managers' opinions about their interpretation of the word 'empowerment'. Both the survey respondents and the managers think that these skills lead to empowerment, and this is the core of what NGOs are doing *and* what people see these NGOs as doing.



#### **10.1.4 Role of Men in NGOs**

This section looks at the role men play in women's NGOs as it has its own dynamic in the Saudi context. The Saudi society remains mostly segregated, and relationships between men and women operate within religious and cultural restrictions. Unlike most countries in the world, segregation between men and women remains a main feature of this country, although in recent years there has been a weakening of the absolutism of this tradition, with it becoming more acceptable and common to see men and women in the same room, even though on different sides of a room (Le Renard 2008, Human Rights Watch 2010 and Coleman 2010). Thus, men and women in the Saudi society often do not interact directly, and this lack of direct interaction has played a role inside the NGO world, as the interview analysis shows. Most of the NGOs under study do work with men in one way or another, however. More specifically, thirteen out of sixteen NGOs have male members on their boards of directors or in leading positions.

The analysis has shown that there are various ways in which NGOs conduct meetings between men and women. Interestingly, many of the NGOs studied are either women's NGOs or else have women's sections, yet men are still involved in them. For instance, the male manager of NGO 12 (human rights) said:

We work alongside women, and since the establishment [of the NGO] we have had women in the planning and in executive positions, and we are open for any nomination for any position for either men or women. We have separate women sections for their convenience.

(Male, 40s)

As shown above, NGO 12 encourages women's involvement and participation in the NGO, and they have separate sections for women, which is very common in Saudi Arabia as it is thought to enable women to be more comfortable in their working environments. However, the interview with the male manager was conducted in a mutual room, which connects both the men's and the women's section. The researcher entered from the women's section, where women were wearing normal working day clothes, into a meeting room where the male manager entered from the other side of the room.

The majority of NGOs had boards of directors comprising both male and female members. This joint management suggests there is joint decision-making regarding the main determinations taking place within these NGOs. The reasons behind having men in leading positions were explained by NGOs managers, with the male presence mainly being attributed to the experience and support they could bring to the table. Three NGOs – NGO 5, 6 and 11 – expressed the view that men started before them in such roles and thus they needed their experiences. They regarded men's involvement in their NGOs as crucial for adding to the quality of their work, as they benefitted from their expertise. Support is another reason for men's involvement in women's NGOs. NGO 9 reported that men's support of women in the city of Jeddah had been exceptional, with the manager commenting:

The experience of nominating and electing members of the Chamber of Commerce has been successful because of men's support for women's nominations – they have actually elected the first female member, whereas the same [attempt] has failed in other major cities. (female, 30s)

The manager regarded the successful election of a female member in Jeddah's Chamber of Commerce to be based on the support of male members, without whose support the manager thought it would not have happened. Nazer (2009:160) also noted that "male members were keen to support female candidates" and contributed to the success of women in Jeddah's Chamber of Commerce. Interestingly, Nazer (2009) have also argued that this support was tactically played by men who believe in the role women can play in the economy in the future pointing out that there are much more men who still oppose the advancement of women in the country's reforms. However, the manager also raised another matter – that the same outcome has not been achieved in all other areas of Saudi Arabia. She claimed that men were supportive in the city Jeddah because it has a homogeneous culture of men and women, but this is not seen throughout Saudi Arabia, where the relationship between men and women is often more formal, restricted and distant. This cultural difference between Jeddah and rest of the country was also mentioned by NGOs 3 and 7, with both arguing that Jeddah is different because of its geographical and cultural characteristics. In relation to framing issues, George (2007) explains that NGOs are culturally framed to produce meanings and present issues in a way that suits the cultural identity of their participants. This includes gender-based analysis of women's NGOs that convey specific regional and national norms. However, according to George (2007), these cultural frames are not fixed, and vary significantly according to the time when they are implemented and the NGOs' vision and structure. Moreover, the effect of these frames also varies, and may produce "uneven" results due to the nature and ideology of each community and their gender dynamics (George 2007:686). In fact, as Le Renard (2008) also argues, the application of a gender frame will work in Jeddah, but in other regions, the frame should be more sensitive towards the use of gender.

In relation to sex segregation, as we have seen, men were involved in most of the NGOs studied in some way or another, and NGO 4 explained that they worked as a team in male-female mixed sittings:

As a work team, we work together – men and women. On a personal level, many of our friends have their spouses [as] us too. In [a] mixed situation, there are few times where some volunteers came just to see other girls, and they were discharged very politely because we are here to work. (Female, 30s)

Many educated young Western-educated men and women work for NGO 4, meeting up in public and carry out voluntary activities. Interestingly, this NGO has indicated that they meet privately at one of their member's houses most of the time, and gather in mixed groups in their regular meetings. However, at public events, they tend to keep the different sexes on separate sides of the event. By contrast, whilst NGO 5 (conservative women's empowerment) is more religious, they describe their relationship with men as being 'cooperative and beneficial'. For NGO 4 – a Facebook-based NGO – working with men has a totally different dynamic. They communicate through televised meetings, where women can see men but men cannot see women. These televised meeting are commonly used in women's universities (Le Renard 2008). The Manager of NGO 5 explains the relationship with men in their NGO:

All men with us believe in women's empowerment, and through our meetings with them – through televised meetings – they give us training sessions, because men started before us and we learned from their experience a lot, and we are planning to be women only, and we are getting there. Monthly, decisions are made through a combined male and female board of directors. (Female, 50s)

As can be seen from the above, the Facebook-based NGO and the conservative NGO 5 represent two extremes of the Saudi society. However, they both agree on the value of working with men, no matter how religious they are. However, the dynamics in which they operate are remarkably different, ranging from non-direct interaction to teamwork that involves working directly together. Although NGO 5 is a more conservative organisation, they have not showed any hostility toward men, instead applying the appropriate measures (from their points of view) to make the relationship with men as conservative as possible, whilst cooperating with them to better achieve their goals. Like NGO 5, the manager of NGO 11 (which provides separate sections for men and women) stated: “We usually have specialists on an issue – either men or women – but we provide two separate places to sit for men and for women, interacting through television and audio” (female, 60s).

The interview analysis showed no evidence of hostility from the female leaders of the NGOs towards the men, and the survey confirmed this positive attitude, which was somewhat surprising. Table 10.3 shows that the highest percentage (39.1%) of respondents viewed the practice of using men as consultants and participants in women's NGOs as important because of the need to make use of their expertise, whilst 30.1% thought that men's involvement in women's NGOs would be useful. More than half of the respondents thus displayed a positive attitude towards men's participation in women's NGOs.

**Table 10.4**

<b>Do you consider the consultation and participation of men in women's NGOs to:</b>			
		<b>Responses</b>	
		<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>x4(a)</b>	<b>Be a useful factor</b>	40	30.1%
	<b>Be important for their expertise</b>	52	39.1%
	<b>Add to their credibility</b>	15	11.3%
	<b>Be acceptable</b>	11	8.3%
	<b>Be unfavorable</b>	4	3.0%
	<b>Not be in their specialization</b>	6	4.5%
	<b>Not make a difference</b>	5	3.8%
<b>Total</b>		133	100.0%

As the table above shows, respondents think that working with men is important and useful for NGOs, thus agreeing with the managers' positive views about the roles of men in their NGOs. Interestingly, this positive attitude towards men's involvement in NGOs was seen in most NGOs, despite the different shapes that this relationship takes in relation to each NGO's culture, beliefs or dynamics.

## **10.2 Changes in Society**

Change in the Saudi society has been (and continues to be) unavoidable, and could reasonably be described as one of the most rapidly changing societies in the world. According to Yanacopulos (2005), globalisation, technological advancement and political opportunities are making 'change' a central feature of the contemporary world. On one

hand, religion and tradition are the static face of this society and hold it together whilst, on the other, technology and globalisation are the dynamic forces that keep things rapidly moving forwards. Oddly, Saudi society carries all sorts of contradictions that are very complex to understand and explain (Al-Rasheed 2013). As a researcher in this complex context, one must step back and observe, but this is made harder by the speed of change taking place at present. Even people's everyday talk often focuses on 'what will happen next' and 'what is about to change', reflecting the degree of this rapid change. Moreover, traditions and social control comprise a great force of resistance and opposition to change, and there appears to be an ongoing battle between conservatives and liberals, with changes in women's roles, rights and statuses being positioned at the very centre of this battle (Sholkamy 2011). Women are the symbols of honour, and the criteria for measuring whether the religion, tradition and honour of Saudi society are being upheld (Doumoto, 2005).

Interviewees were asked about the changes in Saudi Arabian society in recent years, and the discussions about changes in the NGO world brought up the issue of changing attitudes towards volunteering in general. Four NGOs mentioned the increase in voluntary activities in Jeddah in the aftermath of the 2009 flood when, for the first time, many parts of Jeddah were flooded by rain, these have a lost in human and in infrastructure of the city. The Jeddah floods of 2009 had a noticeable impact on the attitudes of citizens (both men and women) towards volunteering. According to the manager of NGO 3, "there has been a huge shift in volunteering since the Jeddah floods. We saw men and women working side by side, responding to such [a] tragedy." NGOs 2, 4 and 5 also emphasised the increase in the popularity of volunteering after the Jeddah floods. The co-founder of NGO 4 stressed that many other voluntary groups have emerged since, noting how the "volunteering culture has become so popular, many volunteer groups are forming and they are increasing every

year”. A female manager added, “it is like being duplicated.” Interestingly, the male manager noted: “I think that 70% of [the] driving force in volunteering are from women, they are very active”. This acknowledges the roles and achievements of women working for NGOs.

This brings us to the topic of change regarding women’s roles in NGOs – something that a number of interviewees focused on. For instance, the manager of NGO 9 gave particular attention to women’s empowerment when she talked about change, commenting that societal change has been “huge and has a positive influence on us”. The manager of NGO 8 also focused on women when talking about change, pointing to a noticeable increase in the public’s awareness on issues regarding women’s empowerment that has taken place in the last two years, which she described as “a breaking point with an increasing awareness”. However, as mentioned in the media chapter, this manager concluded that the major force behind this increase in awareness is the social media. She stressed two factors here – the timing of the change and the reason for the change. Moreover, this manager expressed the view that another force behind the changes that have begun to occur for women in Saudi Arabia has been “the King, who has played [a] huge role in participating in women’s roles at all society’s levels.” Although she insists that “initiatives from women are weaker than [from] men”, she predicts that if these changes kept going at the rate then it could be “expected that in the next 5 to 15 years, men and women’s scales will balance if the same level of awareness is maintained.”

The manager of NGO 14 also noticed that there has been an increase in women’s awareness about their rights and empowerment in recent years. The manager of this medical charity commented that there has been “change in general – more awareness and knowledge – they [women] ask and know more, and want to know more. But still we have late stage discovery



for breast cancer.” Moreover, the manager of NGO 12 described the changes in Saudi Arabia as representing a “huge change within eight years”. Citing a study that this NGO had conducted about the perception of human rights in Saudi, the manager explained that these changes have been produced through “tools that effect people, such as media, education and public opinion” and claimed that “punishments should be implemented on those who violate human rights.” The manager (male, PhD, 40s) personally conducts awareness lectures for the public, even in small villages around the city. The manager added: “We found that there is a lack of understanding in general of human rights”, stressing that awareness is much lower in more remote, rural areas and that they are trying to include such areas in their projects for raising awareness about human rights.

The interview analysis has indicated the widespread acknowledgment of the change happening taking place right now. On the other hand, examining people perception on change regarding women in particular was one of the survey questions asked people about changes in the Saudi society in relation to women. Table 10.5 below shows the survey analysis results on people’s opinions about recent changes regarding women. The highest percentage (26.7%) described changes that have occurred regarding women as good, whilst 24.2% thought that changes for women have been promising. Two equally numbered groups of respondents (17.5%) thought that the changes that have occurred for women have not met the desired levels, and that more needs to be done in terms of organisation and legislation for women.

**Table 10.5**

<b>What do you think of the recent changes on women's status?</b>				
		<b>Responses</b>		
		<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>	
x2(a)	<b>Promising</b>	29	24.2%	
	<b>Good</b>	32	26.7%	
	<b>Crosses some religious boundaries</b>	2	1.7%	
	<b>Not at the desired level</b>	21	17.5%	
	<b>Need more organization and legislation</b>	21	17.5%	
	<b>No particular impact</b>	5	4.2%	
	<b>Don't know</b>	8	6.7%	
	<b>Other</b>	2	1.7%	
<b>Total</b>		120	100.0%	

Views from the survey thus showed that more than half of the respondents thought that the changes that have been made regarding the status and rights of women are either good or promising, which indicates a generally positive opinion concerning such changes. However, other respondents held more critical views about the changes that have been made, regarding them to have not reached the targets that they desired, and holding that more planning is needed.

### **10.3 Limitations to Empowerment**

The interviews revealed that the main limitation the managers of these NGOs (mostly non-profit organisations) believe that they face in their work is a lack of funding, followed by problems including cultural barriers and operational difficulties. For instance, NGOs 2, 3 and 9 have employment issues – a lack of trained female staff and staff shortages. Another

difficulty that was often pointed to was acquiring events permits, which means that it takes months to get the go-ahead for every event they intend to put on. However, there were some interesting comments regarding events, such as that mentioned by NGO 1 (youth NGO).

Cultural limitations were also cited by NGOs as something that reduced their effective functioning – particularly gender segregation which means, for instance, that all events should be single gendered, although recently there has become increased acceptance of more relaxed methods of segregation, such as putting men and women on different sides of a room within the same event. However, this increased acceptance is not universal, with the manager of NGO 1 reporting that there have been complaints from women about the presence of men in the same room as them, and vice-versa, with a man verbally insulting women for talking out loud for instance. The manager relayed how “one mother, although she was well-educated, was very angry at the event, and decided to leave when she saw that there were men in the room”. The manager acknowledged that her NGO did not mention in their advertisement for the event that it would be a mixed gender one, but said that if people inquired about the event then they would inform them of this. This NGO mentioned that one of the women was verbally attacked by one of the male audience for “covering well” or wearing her head-scarf properly when she made a comment during this event. The manager expressed her disappointment of these incidents, given that the intention of her NGO in organising such a mixed gender event had just been to encourage all the parents to be involved in an event for their children, and did not have any intention of invoking any sort of reaction from the public. The manager added that their primary aim was to encourage fathers to become more involved with their children, but some of the audience failed to understand this, and the mentality of some of the older generation was still to resist any change. In her opinion, the younger generation, by contrast, do not mind

change: “we see that the young generation of fathers and mothers does not mind mixing at all, but the older generation does not accept this very often.”

The manager of NGO 8 also mentioned the problems caused by certain mentalities, not only in terms of many people being resistant to change, but also in terms of many being corrupt: “We want to enhance this role [women’s roles] and to solve the cultural and religious inherited barriers. This is one of the difficulties dealing with this kind of mentality, and they are everywhere – they are narrow-minded and even corrupt.” Similarly, when asked about difficulties facing their work in empowering women, the manager of NGO 13 provided the example of an assault that was conducted on her brother by his work colleagues as the result of rumours that were circulated in the news. The manager conveyed how she had been affected by gossip, and how it had impacted on her family as well: “Unfortunately we don’t have a publishing law that punishes people for publishing lies.” As a domestic violence NGO, this NGO is frequently attacked by some newspapers, and on one instance this led to the whole board of directors resigning. The manager (female, psychologist, 40s) explained that after a while, they had realised that they have to just keep working instead of wasting time and energy defending what they do.

NGO 8’s manager thus thinks that women should stand up for themselves and speak out to reject any form of discrimination against them. She also blames many women for giving up their rights simply because fighting against a brother or a husband is not socially acceptable, expressing frustration that they would rather lose and keep silent because they feared a scandal than fight for their rights. A number of NGOs made some negative comments about men, including the manager of NGO 8 who claimed:

We don't discriminate against men but, if you look carefully, you will find that men have been out in public before women, and they have better facilities and, many times, you will find the men's section is packed and the women's section is not as full, and it is poorly equipped. (female, 30s)

Here, the manager points out that there are some obvious differences regarding the materials and buildings that men and women are provided with. Talking about men's mentalities and how they might resist women's demands, she added: "On [a] personal level, women have much more roles in their lives, and men always will resist their demands, but they have to be committed and stick to their decision". Also, the founder of NGO 7 said: "men do get sometimes jealous for women's success, because women tend to be more active in our society." A similar comment was made by the male manager of NGO 4, with both saying that women are more active than men within NGOs.

Cultural difficulties were also mentioned by NGOs 12, 13 and 14 as limitations to their work. For instance, NGO 12 has had difficulties with people's opinions and perceptions of them as a human rights NGO. They acknowledged this fact, and worked on correcting public opinion about them. As mentioned earlier, NGO 12 developed and implemented several tools for achieving some of the desired changes. As the manager explains:

We experienced difficulties: at the beginning people had pre-judged us as something new, Western, [as being] intruders and encouraging women's liberation. But after they saw our work, they accepted us much more. We aim for a strategic plan to adopt the plan nationally with [a] national human rights organisation. (Male, 40s, PhD)

Moreover, he added that although they have had some success in altering public opinion about them and human rights in general, they work on a “limited capacity”, and because achievements on human rights can be slow, this can cause frustration for many people. According to the manager, “some officials do perceive us a threat – we are pressing and monitoring, not executives.”

NGO 14, on the other hand, are facing cultural difficulties surrounding the issue of breast cancer and the taboos associated with it. The manager provided an example of what some women say to each other: “don’t search your body – if you do so, you might get it.” According to this manager, there is widespread fear of the disease, which even involves checking for breast lumps, and adding to this problem, there is a lack of health educators. This NGO is working on raising awareness about breast cancer and educating the Saudi society and women in particular about it.

Corruption was another problem that interviewees reported having to deal with. For instance, the manager of NGO 8 commented that although the government has presented numerous initiatives for women, there are many inside the government who are corrupt and obstruct the implementation of these initiatives. She provided the example that although they have been contacted by the Ministry of Labour to do work that encourages women’s employment, including in the industrial sector, the application of initiatives and reforms regarding women’s employment is impeded by corruption inside the public sector. In her opinion, many of the attempted reforms by the top levels of government are not successfully executed as the result of corruption.

Closely related to the problem of corruption is the difficulty that women face in getting fair treatment within the judicial system. This problem was mentioned by NGOs 8 and 13.

These problems of corruption or abuse of power in the justice system are based, as the manager of NGO 8 notes, on the fact that it “will always depend on the judge whether you will cause a problem for him, and from which family ... you [come].” The point the manager is making here is that the rulings on each case are based on the judge’s individual interests, biases, preferences and value judgments. However, she also puts some of the blame on women who do not defend their rights, especially in cases where “women ... do not claim their rights, for example ... [when a woman doesn’t] want to sue her brother for taking her share of their father’s will”. The manager also campaigns for a human rights section in courts, whose function would be to monitor judges and follow human rights violation cases. NGO 13 also said that every time they have a domestic violence case they “pray for a good judge.” She added that to solve this problem, a Personal Status Law is needed, as “by law you make people obey the rules”. Both NGOs agreed that there are problems with the personal preferences and biases of judges, especially for cases involving women’s rights, where numerous issues are involved. Despite recent reforms in the judicial system, “the country still lacks a penal code and any reliable mechanism to hold officials accountable” (Human Rights Watch 2010:2).

**Table 10.6**

<b>What are the main difficulties facing women in Saudi Arabia?</b>			
		<b>Responses</b>	
		<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>
x7(a)	<b>Balancing home and work responsibilities</b>	44	13.2%
	<b>A lack of awareness over the importance of their roles</b>	44	13.2%
	<b>The confusion between religion and tradition</b>	45	13.5%
	<b>Women's ignorance about their rights</b>	36	10.8%
	<b>The ambiguity of women's laws and legislation</b>	31	9.3%
	<b>Women have not been given enough trust to carry out their responsibilities</b>	15	4.5%
	<b>Dealing with official procedures without male guardians</b>	35	10.5%
	<b>Lack of enough information for women</b>	29	8.7%
	<b>Mobility and transportation problems</b>	43	12.9%
	<b>Women are viewed as being inferior by some people</b>	7	2.1%
	<b>Don't know</b>	1	.3%
	<b>Other</b>	3	.9%
<b>Total</b>		333	100.0%

The survey analysis of the main difficulties facing women in the Saudi society is illustrated in table 10.6 above. The top three categories represent the main barriers that respondents believe women to be facing in terms of being empowered to lead a full life, and at the top of these is the issue of confusing religion with tradition 13.5%, followed by a lack of awareness of the roles women have in society (13.2%), and the problem of balancing their home lives with their work lives (13.2%). 12.9% of respondents thought that mobility and transportation provided the central difficulty, while 10.8% thought that women lack



knowledge about their rights and 10.5% thought that difficulty of carrying out official procedures without male guidance is the most significant problem facing women.

#### **10.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the tactics that are used by NGOs to address issues relating to women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia. The first part of the discussion concerned the way in which empowerment discourse is employed; which terms are used to discuss and promote it and which are eliminated for the sake of cultural acceptability; and which frames are employed to discuss empowerment. The analysis showed that the use of appropriate religious and cultural frames is commonplace, with NGOs tending to avoid using the word 'empowerment', even if these NGOs believe in the value of it and strive to achieve it. This rationale and tendency to avoid the explicit use of the word did not clearly fit with the findings about the public's attitude to the word empowerment, with 28% viewing it as a practical word (and having a positive attitude to its use). Certainly, both the interview and survey analysis showed there to be a certain amount of cautiousness about using the word, however, both because of its Western associations and its vagueness.

Two other strategies run alongside the use of empowerment discourse – capacity building as a practical interpretation of empowerment; and cooperation between men and women inside women's NGOs. Both strategies were viewed favourably, and as adding to the strength of these NGOs. However, interestingly, no hostility towards male counterparts was identified, either through the interview or the survey analysis. Men were involved with almost all NGOs in different ways, but mostly for their expertise. Finally, two other issues relating to women's empowerment were discussed in this chapter – the changes that have occurred in relation to the status and rights of women from the interviewees' points of view; and the barriers and limitations to women's empowerment that remain in the Saudi

society. The changes in the status and rights of women in Saudi Arabia over recent years are obvious to see, and were revealed by the analysis; and cultural barriers and corruption were found to be the two major limitations facing women's empowerment.

## Chapter Eleven: Conclusion

This chapter summarises the conclusions that were drawn through analysing the data collected in the study and cross-referencing this with the literature review on empowerment and women's issues pertaining to the Saudi context. The research questions which guided this investigation were the following: 1) What strategies do Saudi NGOs use for women's empowerment? 2) What role do these strategies play in NGOs' goals of establishing women's empowerment? 3) What factors influence the particular strategies that are adopted for promoting women's empowerment in NGOs? and 4) To what extent are the strategies that Saudi NGOs use to pursue women's empowerment effective?

This thesis has explored the issue of women's empowerment, and how it is perceived, discussed, facilitated and promoted in Saudi NGOs. Before presenting the findings, it is important to note that women's empowerment in Saudi society is a very complex and emotive issue which has numerous consequences and ramifications for those researching it. The investigation of this issue had to be carefully thought through by the researcher due to its sensitivity and the unique character of the Arab Gulf countries, which make them different to any other in the world (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). The literature review on women's empowerment globally does not thus capture this uniqueness. For example, women's empowerment in the developing world (including in Africa and Asia) is more concerned with the financial empowerment of gender equality. Likewise, the form of empowerment that has been pursued and established in the West is not welcomed in Saudi Arabia, as it does not fit with the conservative nature of Saudi society. Finding the right literature that

relates to the particularities of the Saudi culture was difficult, due to the limited studies on women's empowerment there. Choosing the area of women's organisations to explore the issue of women's empowerment was critical, and opened appropriate channels to allow the researcher to discuss the issue— in NGOs. However, the discussion about NGOs and women's empowerment had to be analysed in the context of the culture. In their attempts to pursue women's empowerment and create changes in society, NGOs have to negotiate this change using strategies that can facilitate empowerment for women without undermining the status quo.

The first section of this chapter describes the uniqueness of the Saudi context in relation to the empowerment strategies employed by NGOs. This is then followed by a summary of how the five strategies for empowerment identified in the qualitative analysis were employed in the NGOs that were studied. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the research and takes a critical approach towards some of the issues identified in the analysis. Finally, the chapter outlines the contribution to knowledge that this research has made, and provides recommendations for further research in this area.

### **11.1 A Discussion of NGOs' Five Empowerment Strategies**

This thesis has presented the approach of Saudi NGOs using five broad strategies for negotiating changes in women's status and rights, adopting and eliminating these different tactics according to the context and people they are working within. The thesis has given an overview of the complex factors involved in the development of ideological changes in Saudi Arabia. There are a number of contrary views on gender roles and empowerment there, which are reflected in the ideologies behind NGOs, and their activities for promoting

women's engagement in the country. These diverse views are arguably evidence of the rapid socio-cultural changes taking place in the country. This thesis identified five major strategies used by NGOs to promote women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia: inviting guests and arranging events; building alliances; using the media; appealing to religion; and framing women's issues. Through these strategies NGOs have been able to facilitate and promote women's empowerment, utilising ongoing negotiations in relation to current ideological cultural identities. Each strategy consists of several tactics that indicate the awareness that NGOs have with respect to carrying out practices that avoid undermining the cultural identity of Saudi society, especially regarding women.

As previously noted, the status of women in Saudi Arabia is one of the main symbols that is taken to show that the country is holding on to its traditions, and this issue is at the centre of all the debates about modernisation and social change there (Montgue, 2010; Al-Rasheed 2013 and Al-Nablsi 2009). Therefore, various strategies are constantly being developed by NGOs' in their activities, practices, discourses and images to deal with this changes and challenges of women's empowerment. Noticeably, careful consideration about what the public might say or feel about NGOs is constantly in their minds as they carry out activities aiming to promote women's empowerment. It is important to also note the role that the United Nations plays in promoting women's empowerment around the world through its Millennium Development Goals, in which indicators are set and reports produced on development in general in each region, and on women's empowerment in particular. In 2015, all Arab Gulf Countries (GCC) and Egypt have Sustainable Development Goals that stress the importance of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=2002&nr=174&men>

[u=35](#)). Interestingly, the Saudi Ministry of Economy and Planning has put the MDGs' report on their homepage just to the side of the national development plans (<http://www.mep.gov.sa>).

Legitimacy and credibility are highly sought after by NGOs, as determine the effectiveness of their work and therefore people's acceptance. The research findings show that legitimacy and credibility were not only sought from the government and religious authorities, but from the public in general, as the Saudi society as a whole works as a tool for social control. In other words, it is very important for NGOs to not only attract people, but to be accepted by people and to appeal to them if they are to make a difference and cause changes to be implemented. Centrally, NGOs use different strategies to maintain their credibility so that they can attract people, draw attention to issues and mobilise support. Importantly, however, some NGOs have had the vision to employ their efforts strategically, whilst others have been satisfied with the traditional classical model of charity work, and have not tried to influence policy or public opinion.

Islamic feminist philosophy was adopted to explain many aspects of the ways in which religion is viewed as a source of empowerment in Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, it is important to take different feminist approaches into account, and the difficulty of drawing a neat line between each type. However, at the end of the day, all the different forms of feminism aim at improving social justice for women. With the increasingly global world, transitional debates, and exchanges of ideas and values, the differences between varying feminist approaches are becoming less important, and rising efforts are being made to connect shared values in order to pursue the common goal of improving humanity.

Furthermore an ideology known as 'Islamic feminism' has emerged in the literature as a way to advocate the reinterpretation of some Islamic teachings that encourage a higher

visibility of – and active participation by – women in society (Devriese, 2008). It thus seems that Islamic feminism has played a role in the decision-making of some NGOs, and was observed in one of the NGOs under study. However, advocates of this ideology generally do not mind some aspect of Western empowerment, as long as it does not go against Islamic teachings. In the analysis it was found that this approach has not encountered many objections from conservatives, as it does not openly go against religion. Yet, an ongoing negotiation with religious authority is still being pursued by NGOs and the government, with the aim of implementing reforms for women. These changes, initiated by both parties, could represent threats to the Kingdom's current patriarchal and religious status. However, at the same time, this conservative religious authority is ironically seeking power as the legitimate face of the government. Moreover, some NGOs strategically employed religious males in order to have the double effect of male support in a patriarchal society and the legitimacy conferred through religious affiliation.

The use of religious discourse is a strategy NGOs employ to pursue their goals. However, religion, as the results showed, is not only used as a tool for empowerment, but is also a value discourse that is constantly considered during and within the use of other empowerment strategies. The findings of the study show that religion is related to NGO decision-making, that it has a major influence on people, and that it is identified as an inspirational tool by NGOs. Yet, it appears that the majority of NGOs – including conservative and unreligious ones – have employed religion as a tactic to seek legitimacy, gain credibility and attract people. Ultimately, religion provides a base in relation to which many decisions are made, as well as being a goal to pursue in itself, and is always blended in some way or another in NGOs' work, with a religious outlook being seen within all the interviews. However, some NGOs have explicitly drawn the line on the use of religion,

acknowledging it as an appropriate personal inspiration, but not something to be used for professional credibility. As the findings show, the majority of the NGOs studied used religious references for legitimising their work. For most NGOs, religion is often used as a way of trying to win their arguments, as it works on sentimental, inspirational and practical levels, and if it does not work in one of these ways, it will often work in another.

Religious references and justifications are generally used by NGOs to address the legitimacy of women's participation in building Saudi society, and their rights to paid employment and education. Interestingly, however, only one NGO used the reinterpretation of religious texts to correct and reinterpret texts in favour of women. Although this approach has been used successfully in other Arab countries, such as Egypt and Morocco, its use remains limited within the Saudi context (Ahmed, 1992). The significance of this initiative by NGO 8 is that it aims to make legitimate religious claims regarding women's issues only in the most appropriate contexts. The reinterpretation of religious texts to influence and challenge the extent conservative interpretations of Islam relating to women is not an easy task, Yet this NGO showed an awareness of the need to tread carefully using this approach, making inroads and changes gradually.

NGOs also use other more organised strategies to pursue their goals, such as hosting events, inviting guests and building alliances. The use of guests and events are part of most NGOs' sets of activities and, in this study, they were analysed in terms of their roles in women's empowerment. The findings showed that events such as conferences and forums are popular among NGOs and bring them popularity, access and resources. However, the significance of events comes from the issues that are discussed in them and the guests that are invited, and such arrangements are constantly being considered by NGOs in relation to the particular goals they are pursuing, the arguments they need support for, and the claims



they want to construct. The analysis revealed that academics and professionals were one of the most popular guests sought for NGO events, due to expertise, as they are able to offer professional opinions on the issue being discussed. Inviting academics has also been used as a tool to influence audiences, as they can provide scientific backing for certain viewpoints, the strength of which is reinforced by their professional qualifications. As noted above, religious guests provide a similar strength of credibility to NGOs through offering authoritative religious opinions on the issues being discussed. Noticeably, most NGOs have religious guests in at least one session of their events.

Inviting royal guests was also seen favourably by NGOs, as these guests bring prestige, access, resources and credibility to NGOs (Glosemeyer, 2004). However, securing royal guests is never an easy task as it requires NGOs to have good connections and access to such guests in the first place, and that is not something that all NGOs can easily acquire. Nonetheless, the significance of royals is comparable to that of religious guests, as they provide legitimacy and support in terms of a variety of possible resources (Le Renard, 2014; Hamilton, 2010). Having a royal guest opens doors that would be locked otherwise, a good example being that of the female royal member who joined the executive board of NGO 9 after being a regular guest there, because she believed in what they were doing and knew how much difference her involvement would bring. Access to royals generates more contacts, which can be used to create networks and to mobilise resources for NGOs, as they act as a linking point with other organisations, donors, sponsors and the government.

The NGOs studied generally showed a tendency to cooperate and form alliances with other organisations, mainly for the purpose of exchanging resources. Their relationships with the government often reveal an interesting type of cooperation. Unexpectedly, NGOs displayed a tendency towards cooperating and exchanging benefits with the government,

and an acknowledgement of the government's good intentions has been shown through their reform attempts. However, NGOs were also critical about the corruption that occurs inside the government, and often referred to this as a major obstacle to their work. Most NGOs either receive government members or work with the government, and some NGOs have had a strong influence on them.

A number of the women's NGOs studied have not been afraid to ask questions of the government and to more necessary correct them. Through this lobbying they have been actively involved in their relationship with the government, pushing their own agendas during the negotiation process. Remarkable success was achieved by one NGO through their lobbying to change laws, policy and legislation regarding women's work. (Interestingly, the word 'lobbying' was only mentioned once in the whole interview process, and it is a word that I have never previously encountered in the Saudi context.) Through a more indirect approach to influencing the government, another NGO put forward their requests regarding the image they wanted for women – for them to be presented side-by-side with men in a flyer. NGOs were thus able to mobilise policy and influence the government's decision as a result of their media strategy.

As noted above, the images of and messages about women that NGOs are trying to convey to the public are facilitated through using the media – another tool NGOs used to empower women. The NGOs studied mainly used the media for publicity and advertisements. However, some NGOs used it to influence the public by introducing activism and raising awareness about issues facing women. More importantly, the virtual space created by social media has been a gateway for activism in Saudi Arabia, where a lack of civil society and activism is not viewed favourably because of the tribal nature of the society (Ehteshami and Wright, 2007). Consequently, the social media has created a massive force for change

in the Saudi society, enabling many people to have the opportunity to make their voices heard over a short period of time (Agarwal *et al.* 2012; Maisel, 2013). Moreover, the social media has paved the way for introducing change through drawing attention and mobilising support, which has provided an added advantage for NGOs in their activism. Hence, this virtual space that the social media has created has enabled activists and female activists in particular to mobilise the public, advocate issues, or at least be visible in a society where they were mostly passive.

However, the ongoing battle between conservatives and liberals has taken place in the social media as well, and has further stressed the disputes between them. Arguably, the hostility between conservatives and liberals has grown as a result of social media, and people are increasingly realising the danger that such arguments have for national development. Nonetheless, such disputes represent a healthy sign of change, where conservatives are refusing change and want to maintain the current status, and liberals want to implement more reform and introduce modernisation faster. Although the government has kept an eye on the social media, it has remained mostly silent until an issue has threatened to get out of control. For instance, a press release was held by the spokesman of the Ministry of Interior, the day before the intended 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2013 women's driving champing, warning against any distribution of the public order referring to the recent social media activity (<http://sabq.org/28Gfde>).

Framing issues by presenting them in a particular way is another strategy that NGOs use in their attempts to discuss issues and to present them in a non-threatening and culturally acceptable way. As mentioned before, education and employment have secured their places as legitimate areas to approach women's reforms (Metcalf 2011). The results revealed, many NGOs used the increasingly trending social media sites wisely to draw attention to

cases and issues that are not controversial. Examples of issues such as health awareness and employment legislation for women are considered to be legitimate topics for discussion, as is domestic violence, despite its relation to the male-dominant society. Interestingly, this shift in the perception of such a private issue was triggered by press releases of violence against a little girl by her father, and the case was made a matter of public opinion rather than a family issue. This example turned this taboo topic into a national discussion, and enabled the establishment of NGOs to deal with this problem and to lobby for legislation on it.

However, in order to use the media strategically, NGOs need to pay careful consideration to their audiences, framing issues to make them culturally appropriate, and using language effectively to portray a convincing image. Noticeably, this study found that many NGOs consider their audiences when selecting the type of media they are using and the messages they are trying to send. Moreover, some NGOs select language or images in response to their audiences. For example, in two cases, English was used to attract a younger, educated and more open-minded group. Thus, using English allowed this NGO to restrict their message to the more moderate group that they were interested in. Just as English was employed to attract and communicate with a younger age group by some NGOs, Arabic was used to communicate with older age groups, with more formal language being adopted.

Generally, the discourse that NGOs used was tactical. However, the term 'empowerment' presented a challenge for the managers of many NGOs. The term was not fully embraced by NGOs, but not fully rejected either. Some stated that they did use the term, while others avoided it, yet they all agreed that their goals included encouraging the values and agenda of empowerment. In other words, the actual word was often not stated by NGOs in their

public discourses; however the content that the word refers to was clearly pursued in their values and objectives.

In one instance alone, an NGO manager (academic) was very critical about the term, warning against the hidden agenda of Western feminism and differentiating between ‘empowerment’ as a concept that encourages women to challenge religious values, and the term ‘enabling’, which she employed would be more appropriate to use. As she explained, the meaning of a term depends on how it has been used. Ironically, she herself used it as a title for her NGO, as one of her goals is to raise awareness about the Western agenda presented in the UN Convention CEDAW (Eliminating Discrimination Against Women), which she claimed is used to influence the identity of Islamic women. It appears that one of the main reasons behind avoiding the use of the term ‘empowerment’ is the fear of being labelled as ‘Western-influenced’.

Terms imported from the West are often perceived as a threat, enforcing the modernising agenda and depriving Saudi society from its identity (Karam and Afuoni 2014). As Al-Sarrani and Alghamdi (2014:97) put it, “Western feminists are consistently seen a threat and an indirect way to colonize this part of the world”. In this regard, Mir-Hossaini argues that Islamists, in particular, frequently portray ‘feminism’ as “an extension of colonial politics and a Western plot to undermine the Muslim way of life” (2011:69). Indeed the very notion of feminism is often perceived as Western, and as “an alien assault upon religion” – a view reinforced by Islamists not only in Saudi Arabia but also elsewhere in the Islamic world (Badran, 2011:80).

Thus, empowerment is associated with the West, and is relatively new to the Saudi context – even if it is starting to emerge as a practical term for describing initiatives relating to the

promotion of women's roles in its society. In the Saudi society, there is general suspicion about the employment of Westernised agendas, especially regarding women, who – as mentioned earlier – are viewed as the symbolic markers of the retention of traditions. Interestingly, contrasting views on the use of the term 'empowerment' were reflected in the survey, which showed more positive attitudes towards the word, whose aims were mostly described as being 'good' and 'practical'. In contrast, NGOs managers have been cautious about employing the term 'equality' or 'empowerment', preferring to use 'social justice' in order to distance themselves from a Western feminist model of gender. Moreover, 'empowerment' is also used as an operational term by NGO staff, but NGOs tend to be cautious about using it publicly. Having said that, the term is gradually becoming accepted by society at large, as its values are being encouraged within Saudi society, although NGOs clearly adopt a cautious and selective approach to the language they adopt to pursue their objectives and strategies. The significance of this selective mechanism is due to the fact that Saudi NGOs not only aim to be accepted by their society, but to influence and impact it by using the most effective discourse at their disposal.

The diverse channels employed by NGOs for targeting their intended audiences, as well as the different views reflected in the interviews, provide further evidence of the rapid social changes taking place in the country. Different ideologies are noticeable, with a number of individuals still wishing to preserve traditions and conservative interpretations of religious texts, which are reflected in their ways of life, while other different ways of thinking emerged in the analysis as well. Some NGOs were very positive about the Western model, and hence would often adopt English as their language for communicating in social media, as well as relying on academics and professionals to give credibility to their agendas rather than religious speakers. Many others, however, were cautious about adopting apparently

Western models. Again, using culturally appropriate tools is very common in NGOs. Indeed, many NGOs appeared to take a step back from adopting the Western model and tried to establish a middle-ground between traditional conservative positions and Western models of empowerment. Such NGOs would focus on issues such as education and employment for women, because these are seen as legitimate, non-controversial topics.

In terms of the role of men in NGOs, the findings showed unexpectedly positive attitudes towards men. This thesis has concluded that working with men is highly preferable for NGOs, which work with men regardless of their orientations, although special arrangements have to be considered. This matter has to be addressed in the light of the unique context of the Saudi society, where relationships between the sexes have to be restricted by boundaries, if not by total segregation.

The opinions of men were mainly sought in women's NGOs for their expertise as guests, consultants or members of the board of directors. Surprisingly, there was no hostility towards men in general indicated by the comments in any of the interviews. On the contrary, women attributed some of their success to men's support (Zaatari, 2014). Although no hostility towards men was detected in the NGOs under study, it is important to note that the Saudi society is a very patriarchal one, and that male dominance is embodied in all the laws and legislation of the state. Many unfortunate cases of the control and oppression of women continue to be practised under the banner of 'tradition'. Additionally, one of the limitations of the study may be seen in relation to the geopolitical status of the city of Jeddah, where progressive dynamics between women and men are arguably much more apparent than in other cities in Saudi Arabia, and other parts of the country. Drawing on my own reflections on the issue of empowerment, women have been able to increase their status, create new spaces and new discourses where they can

demonstrate their will and their dedication to participate and achieve their aims (Karam and Afiouni, 2014). On a personal level, everyday negotiations within the family on managing studies, together with the home, provide a reflection of the women's population in Saudi Arabia, where women have to work harder to assert themselves as partners in building the society.

Another aspect of the rapid social changes observed in the study is the creation of new spaces that extend beyond physical locations. Empowerment strategies have used the social media effectively in order to bypass the limits created by women's traditional place inside the home, thus increasing women's visibility and participation within Saudi society. This new digital space has provided women with a context in which visibility and the expression of opinions are often welcomed, and are not subject to the type of restrictions found in public places. Furthermore, NGOs' events and other working environments have also hosted mixed audiences with segregated seating, inviting a more relaxed restriction on sex segregation than there has been for a long time. Along with the creation of new spaces that facilitate women's empowerment, such actions also help to create a new discourse in which empowerment is encouraged.

Parallel to the spaces used by women to increase their visibility and participation is the language employed to enhance and activate such spaces. Framing and selecting the right discourse is a live strategy that was observed throughout the study. Using discourses tactically, as seen through the analysis, included the use of local terms, broad and ambiguous sentences, a focus on legitimate issues (education and work), the application of 'religious restrictions', and the presentation of convincing arguments. Moreover – and closely related – was the use of the images presented by NGOs, including photos and public appearances, which intertwined directly with the use of media. Using the media to present



an image of women is a very strong strategy, directly influencing the general public and creating an image in their mind-sets. Again, like utilising the appropriate discourse, the type of image used is also considered in depth by NGOs, which systematically use images to increase the visibility of women, and to show them side-by-side with men, successfully participating in building the country. More importantly, at the end of the day, this research shows that any future social progress in Saudi Arabia will not be attained without utilising the framework of Islamic governance. In the Saudi context, the way to succeed with any form of modernisation, change or other social initiative is to stress its compliance with the Islamic framework, even if other Western or neo-liberal frames are also employed.

## **11.2 Recommendations**

This study has identified the rapid social changes taking place in Saudi Arabia, which have led to diverse and contrasting views on initiatives to support empowerment strategies. As a result, some NGOs appeared to take a step backwards, adopting a conservative approach to women's empowerment, while others made their aims explicit and promoted their activities *as* empowerment strategies. This latter approach appeared to be more daring and innovative, yet a successful one, and a recommendation could be made for NGOs to set more explicit aims in order to target their intended audiences. Furthermore, it is important that NGOs secure the government's support, as this has proven to facilitate their initiatives, and provides a further stress on the need to comply with the Islamic framework. Working more on lobbying for policies and laws will also mobilise empowerment efforts as these NGOs offer a suitable channel for mobilisation. These should be further investigated and evaluated to facilitate NGOs to carry more effective work regarding women's empowerment.

A further recommendation for future research includes considering the visibility of women in new spaces, such as social media, and investigating the role of newly created spaces in the empowerment process. Also, more investigation on grassroots initiatives, that have been neglected due to the privacy of the society, where arguably many women played major roles in changing policy, attitudes and behaviours toward women in Saudi.

### **11.3 The Limitations of the Study**

As this study was limited to a small number of surveys responses and interviews with NGO managers in one city in Saudi Arabia, generalisations of the findings are limited to the NGOs under study. Although the discussion of the findings does refer to the Saudi context, it is important to note that Jeddah is a modern city on the west coast of the country, where many women have taken more active roles and enjoy more relaxed restrictions on them. The same cannot be said about some other areas – for instance, those in the middle and southern parts of Saudi Arabia, and in rural villages generally, where many more cultural restrictions continue to be applied. However, investigating the issue of women's empowerment in Jeddah was appropriate, because initiatives regarding women first took place in Jeddah due to its relaxed and modern nature.

Furthermore, the study initially aimed to include twenty or more NGOs, but only fourteen agreed to take part, hence reducing the number of responses received. Difficulties in recruiting interviewees were also encountered, with many last minute cancellations occurring. Moreover, very weak responses were received from the surveys, as they were handed to each manager to distribute within their NGOs, and this did not produce an adequate number of responses. As a result, a backup plan was used, which involved posting

the survey on-line. This also elicited a similarly weak number of responses. However, taken in combination, these surveys were just enough to make their inclusion in the research warranted. Although the study did not rely on surveys as a main research method, this method did not fulfil its initial purpose of giving a strong indication of the views of NGO clients in Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, it did provide an insight into the Saudi public's opinions on NGOs and women's empowerment in general, and thus added another layer of analysis to help in either confirming or contradicting the interview analysis.

Another limitation of the research was that conducting the research overseas was time-consuming, as was the entire fieldwork preparation, and the logistics of the information in the study was hard to guarantee. In addition to the time and logistical issues, there were language issues, as Arabic was the main language used in the data collection for both the interviews and surveys, and in the NGO documents. Translation was the main limitation here, not only because it is a long and time-consuming process, but also because some of the meanings are hard to capture in another language. In addition, changing words and sentences into English sometimes involved a loss of their full meaning. Another problem with translation occurred during the transcription of the interviews, as they were first transcribed into Arabic, and then translated into English.

In conclusion, this study has not confirmed the existence of an organised effort to push women's empowerment forward. With the exception of one or two organisations, there has been no real attempt to systematically create an organised way of promoting empowerment in NGOs. Activism still remains limited to the discussion of broad issues and lobbying for employment-related issues that could be considered as single initiatives. Nonetheless, changes in women's status at the political, professional and personal levels are undeniably happening at an increasingly rapid rate.

Women in Saudi Arabia have been working twice as hard as men to mark their place in the country's development. Inside NGOs, women – as leaders and recipients – have taken small and shy steps towards proving themselves through means that are already perceived as being legitimate by society at large. This study has documented and witnessed this turning point for Saudi women as, within the duration of this study, a variety of laws and decisions have been implemented for protecting women's rights and interests. However, some obvious issues relating to the status of women in the country remain unresolved, such as the ban on women's driving, which does not fit well with the high number of women holding university degrees and financial means of their own. This issue alone has created frustration among many women, as it does not appear to be supported by any religious or rational justifications, but rather reflects a traditional patriarchal way of thinking. In spite of the recent political move from the government to appoint women as a third of the Majlis Al-shura (Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia), no effective change has taken place on the driving ban. This issue is an embarrassment for the government, because there is no logical explanation to justify it other than groundless traditions and social norms. This is a clear example of how, in spite of the attempts to promote and increase the participation of women as active citizens, implementing change at the policy level continues to present numerous challenges.

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# Appendix

## Interview Guide

Interviewee name:	Date and Time:	Interview
Duration.....		

About the NGO.

Establishment/ Founder:

Centre, association or NGO is a long process we are YIG consultant.

Mission and gaols:

Services :

Courses and workshops (what, by whom).....

Events and guests.....

Target population.....

Funds.....

Building Alliances

Main supporters (elites, academics).....

Kind of support.....

Relationship with other org. (local, International).....

Partnerships.....

.

Relationship with Government (Ministry).....

Media

Tools.....

Advantages and disadvantages.....

Image and visibility.....

Women's Issues

Perception of women's empowerment.....

Terms and concepts (empowerment, rights).....

Relationship with men.....

Change in society.....

Difficulties.....

Religion

Importance.....

Usage of text/ interpretation.....

Religious figures.....

Legitimacy.....

Motivating force.....

Personal information: Age: 20 to 39      40 and above     

Education.....      Contact Address.....

## Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Strategies of Women's Empowerment in Saudi NGOs

Name of Researcher: Khadija Nasseef

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential.  
I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials,  
and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research

I agree to be audio recorded during interviews.

I agree to take part in the above research project.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant    Date    Signature

*(or legal representative)*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Lead Researcher    Date    Signature

*To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*

## **Information Sheet**

**The Research title: Strategies of Women's Empowerment in Saudi NGOs.**

**Researcher Name: Khadija Abdullah Nasseef. A PhD student at the University of Leeds.**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

### **What is the project's purpose?**

This research will be carried in Saudi NGOs that are operated by women or have women's section within in the city of Jeddah. Each NGO will be examined according to their empowerment's strategies, what is the negotiation process with community and officials and their ability to balance empowerment with the conservative nature of the society.

### **Why have I been chosen?**

From each NGO there are few participants will be chosen to take part of this research.

### **Do I have to take part?**

Taking part of this research is totally voluntary. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

After signing consent from you will be asked for an interview to answer some question regarding your NGO. Mainly, there will be one in-depth interview that could last up to one hour and half hour. If needed, there will be some further follow up interview. This interview will be used as a research material for the next 10 years.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There no visible potential risk. Any unexpected discomforts that could arises during the research should be brought immediately to the researcher attention.

**Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports because all participants' identity will be anonymous.

**Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?**

If you give me the permission an audio recording will be used. This will help me to analyze the interview accurately afterwards. The audio recordings of your interview will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the research will be allowed access to the original recordings

**What will happen to the results of the research project?**

Within four years the result will be issued as a part of a PhD thesis then later could be published without any identification of any person involved. You will be informed with the results later and you can obtain a copy of the published materials.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

This research is part of University of Leeds in sociology and social policy department and it is funded by King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

**Contact for further information**

**Contact information in Saudi Arabia:**

Mobile: 00966503359498

Home: 0096626946383

Contact information in UK:

Mobile: 00447570377852

Home: 00441132642611

Emails: [khadojy@gmail.com](mailto:khadojy@gmail.com)/ [sskan@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:sskan@leeds.ac.uk)

Finally ... I would like to thank you for taking part in this research your contribution will be so valuable for this research. I appreciate your time and effort thank you.

**Questionnaire for recipients/ beneficiaries:**

Age group (below 40, above 40)

Educational level

Marital Statues:

Education:

Occupation:

How long have you been coming here?

How did you hear or know about this NGO?

Did you participate with other NGOs through this NGO before? - Yes - No

Do you have any other friend or relatives that are coming here? - Yes - No

In general what the main benefit or advantage from this NGO?

courses and workshops - Lectures - Aid or assistance

Other.....

How do you think about NGOs role in promoting women's lives?

Through raising awareness

Building skills and knowledge

Financial assistance

Gaining confidence or self esteem

Don't know

Other.....

Do you prefer that an NGO has expertise from:

Local experts -Arab experts -International Does not matter

Other specify please





Some times

Occasionally

Never recall

Don't know

20. Do you think the use of religion will add to the credibility of this organization?

-Yes                      - Not necessarily      - Don't know

21. In your opinion, in presenting and discussing women issues this organization should?

Use religious justification

Academic or scientific evidence

Both religious and scientific approaches

Local real problems

None of the above. (other.....)

Don't know

22. Would you say that there is a relationship between religion and women's issues in Saudi Arabia?                      - Yes                                      - No

23. What kind of terms do you prefer to be used in approaching women (empowerment, equality, freedom, independence, social justice...)

Specify if possible.....

24. What kind of women's issues should Women's NGOs focus on?

Economic issues

Legislations regarding women

Skills and capacity building

Community or social problems

Other .....

Don't know

25. Do mind if this NGO offer any services for men (lectures, courses)?

Yes -No

Why.....

26. Would you say that having men consulting or involving in women's NGOs is helpful or more legitimate?

Yes - No

Why.....

27. What is your opinion of the recent changes regarding women?

Promising

Good if applied

Don't affect me

Not as you wanted

Don't know

Other.....

28. What do you think of the term women's empowerment?

More western

Usable and useful

Not favourable

New to you

Don't know