



Women's Desk

Report for the Term 2003 – 2006

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THE
WORLD
FEDERATION

OF KHOJA SHIA ITHNA-ASHERI MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

Registered charity in the UK No. 282303



1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Women's Desk was formed prior to the 2003 Dubai Triennial Conference. A consultation with over 250 ladies in Milton Keynes (UK) in that month highlighted the desire to engage with women from our community and to work alongside them at community level. The Desk was given the task of assessing needs relating to women's issues whilst forming strategic policies.
- 1.2 Recommendations from the Women's Consultation Conference formed the basis of the Strategic Plan in 2003. The Desk co-ordinators began by engaging women from many communities in order to gauge their needs and current role within the community; and to recommend how best to represent their interests within the World Federation.
- 1.3 The Desk co-ordinators have met several obstacles in their work - the most difficult of all being lack of communication and commitment from members. Despite this, a lot has been achieved during this term and progress has been made.

2 DISCUSSION

2.1 Khojamatch.com

- 2.1.1 At the previous conference in Dubai, the benefits and drawbacks of an online match-making site for youngsters was discussed. It was agreed to launch the site with a three phase approach.

- 2.1.2 **Phase 1** [September 2004] Khojamatch.com was initially manned by two administrators and two Matchmakers. Vigorous vetting procedures were put in place to ensure a secure system free from misuse.

Figures taken in June 2006 show that there are:

- 3 Administrators (one female, two male)
- 61 Male Matchmakers
- 52 Female Matchmakers
- 351 Male Members
- 347 Female Members

- 2.1.3 Khojamatch has managed to successfully match 14 couples. Khojamatch has proven its remarkable success with a vast network of over a 100 volunteers working across the globe, and has maintained its secure and confidential status throughout.

- 2.1.4 **Phase 2:** [At present]: The aim of the 2nd Phase is to establish the website in order for it to be recognised for its efficiency throughout the global community.

- 2.1.5 In this Phase the users will be sent brief details of a match directly, hence reducing the work of the matchmaker, who will then only need to assist the user if they are interested in the match. This will give more independence to users and prepare



them eventually for Phase 3, whereby users will be able to fully communicate with matches without the help of Matchmakers, hence cutting down on time taken to find an appropriate match.

- 2.1.6 Khojamatch will be very cautious in implementing Phase 3 which will depend on how well the users are able to use the system in Phase 2. The Administration team will monitor the processes, guide the Matchmakers and Users and fully educate them about using the system effectively.

2.2 Pre-Marriage Guidance

- 2.2.1 During the Women's Workshops in the 2003 Triennial Conference, concerns were raised regarding the rising divorce-rate within the community. Delegates shared their views on the modern challenges and concluded there was a need to effectively guide our youngsters.

Delegates from Canada spoke of their efforts in 'educating' couples through the initial stages of married life and recommendations were made to expand on this and introduce effective 'Marriage Education' for engaged couples of the community.

- 2.2.2 As a result of these concerns, the Desk aimed to provide training for community members to become 'Marriage Educators' within their local communities. A pilot training programme was put together over 3 days in Milton Keynes which was run by a UK based organisation ('Marriage Care'); with 26 members attending. Participants were given tools to pass on to couples when confronted with conflict.
- 2.2.5 Marriage Educators held their 1st Pre-Marriage Guidance Seminar (Birmingham, June 2005). Twenty couples attended and the feedback received suggested that it was a successful event. Another seminar was held this year in London.
- 2.2.6 To reflect the needs of our youngsters living in North America; the Desk decided to provide a programme run by a local organisation in October 2004. Dr. Scuka of the National Relationship Enhancement Programme conducted the training in Orlando, which was attended by 22 participants. The Canadian delegates agreed to take the lead on developing the programme with NASIMCO for all North American Jamaats.

2.3 Effective Parenting

- 2.3.1 The Strategic Plan recommended that the Women's Desk support parents in raising their children.
- 2.3.2 The Women's Desk put together a pilot project to further parents' skills in becoming more effective in their children's upbringing. The first seminar on Effective Parenting (Birmingham, December 2005) was conducted by Dr Bari, an educationalist from London.



- 2.3.3 The Desk organised a follow up course for participants in May 2006. The 2nd Seminar focused on the value of spending quality time with teenagers. Discussion groups explored social ills, the influence of neighbourhood & the importance of Islamic activities.
- 2.4 Networking with Women's Organisation within the Community**
- 2.4.1 The Desk aimed to create a global network of Khoja Shia Ithnasheri Women, enabling women from all Jamaats to contribute towards the progress of our community. Women make up more than half of the population and therefore need to be present at the decision making process.
- 2.4.1 The Executive Council conference held in Toronto in March 2004 saw an increase in women's participation. After a separate Health programme held for women, participants were able to join the main conference. Co-operation with the Africa Federation enabled a Health Programme specifically for ladies during the last Executive Council meeting in Mombasa.
- 2.4.2 There is increased participation by women in a handful of Jamaats where they have been appointed as members of the Executive Committees. More participation from ladies is also seen on a regional level, with some co-ordinators appointed to specifically address the needs of the ladies in their region.
- 2.4.3 The Women's Desk organised a Consultation Day in London for all UK Chairladies and their committees. The focus of the day was raising awareness of the work done by the Desk and consultation on the Marriage Contract Template. All the participants gave their views and discussed the benefits and possible drawbacks of the contract.
- 2.4.4 The main reassurance sought by the participants was that this contract would not be misused by either party. Participants stated that they liked the idea, with many favourable comments; notably that it provided the couples with 'security' (in their marriage) and that 'it 'open[ed] doors to effective communication'. It was agreed that although change may be hard to implement, the importance for such a contract in the present climate was paramount.
- 2.5 Engaging with the Youth**
- 2.5.1 In order to achieve an understanding of the female youth's needs, the Women's Desk organised a joint event with the Youth Network Desk (Loughborough, UK, June 2005).
- 2.5.1 Young participants discussed the Khoja Culture and the importance of their identity in today's world. Most of the participants on the day concluded that they were proud to be Khoja, but needed to see many changes in the way programmes for youth were conducted in the various Jamaats. Majalis and lectures to be held in a language that they understand and to be more interactive. Specific Youth Programmes to be held during



Ramadhan and Muharram as participation at these times was higher than other times during the year. It was strongly felt that there needs to be an open dialogue between the older and younger generations to enable them to better cater for their needs.

- 2.5.2 The Desk invited girls to the Consultation Day where they were able to share their views on the strengths and weaknesses of their particular Jamaats. Dissatisfactions were aired and recommendations made to improve joint ventures with the youth.
- 2.5.3 All Chairladies present during the day agreed to take the recommendations further and develop practices to involve youth in shaping the future of their community.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The World Federation will actively encourage all member Jamaats and Regional Federations to empower our women, to participate extensively in the work of our community and to play an important role in creating policy and strategy on every
- 3.2 The Women's Desk strongly recommends Pre-Marriage Guidance for all engaged couples prior to recitation of Nikah. The utilisation of a Marriage Contract will be strongly advocated to them by local Jamaats and Regional Federations.