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## Arab Sustainable Development Report

# Women's Rights and Gender Equality for Sustainable Development:

Discussing the Proposed SDGs within the  
Context of the Development Problematique in  
the Arab Region



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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

# **Women's Rights and Gender Equality for Sustainable Development:**

**Discussing the Proposed SDGs within the Context of the Development  
Problematique in the Arab Region**

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## **I- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The proposed sustainable development goals (SDGs), released in June 2014, embodied a departure from the reductionist approach of the millennium development goals (MDGs), which did not address the larger policy framework within which gender equality and women's empowerment are pursued. The design of the proposed SDGs is an attempt to tackle structural issues, including inequality within and among countries.

The proposed goal 5 of the SDGs, on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, captures some of the major demands of women's groups and movements presented during the development discussions held through the 1990s, and which were not captured in the MDGs. Overall, the proposed goal 5 of the SDGs, together with gender-focused dimensions covered under other proposed SDGs, is broader and touches on more structural dimensions compared to the narrow approach to gender equality reflected in the MDGs.

However, the SDGs do not go further than the set of commitments undertaken by states during the 1990s development conferences and under human rights conventions. Furthermore, the SDGs still lack real ambition for urgent transformational change. One of the major shortcomings of the SDGs is the limitation of the proposed targets and their accompanying means of implementation in regard to addressing structural changes needed to realize substantive equality between men and women, including in the areas of employment, the reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work, and women's control over assets.

Compared to other regions of the world, the Arab region still witnesses most significant gaps between women and men in education, the economy, and political empowerment. Women's conditions in the region are highly influenced by deep and diverse de jure discrimination, patriarchal attitudes, and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women.

Deficiencies curtailing development in the Arab region are largely determined by discrimination against women and deficits in women empowerment. Overall, the kind of growth achieved in the Arab region during the last three decades did not work for women and equality, nor did it work for a lot of other societal factions and groups. The realities of women in the Arab region are further influenced, directly or indirectly, by the recurrence of conflicts, including state crisis, wars, occupation, and implications of religious fundamentalism.

Popular uprisings witnessed in several countries of the region since 2010/2011 did not materialize in opportunities to address traditional challenges that women have struggled against. To the contrary, there has been a threat of re-emergence of old struggles that women have attempted to address in the region. Yet, the significance of citizen's will and influence, manifested in the context of the revolutions and uprisings that took place in the region, will necessarily allow for more spaces of struggle against patriarchal norms and religious fundamentalism, and towards women's rights and equality.

In the way forward towards finalizing the SDGs, it is essential to restrain regressive steps that would water down the principles and commitments previously undertaken by States in the area of women's rights, reaffirm the political will to achieve progress on these goals, and actively re-enforce the human rights agenda in the design of the goals.

Within this context, addressing women's rights and gender equality and justice cannot be detached from the dynamic structural transformation of development models needed in countries of the region. It requires recognizing and acting upon the interconnected nature of risks and opportunities in the development framework that is being sought, and the need for a multi-faceted intervention at the economic, social, and political levels, as well as at the national and global levels.

Central to this discussion is addressing the role of the state, including in preserving and adequately utilizing policy space through dynamic design of national economic, social, and environmental policy

tools and mobilizing development-focused institutions. Besides, one of the main tasks in the Arab countries starts with reforms in the legislative frameworks.

The added value of the SDGs agenda will rest to a large extent with operationalizing the means of implementation associated with the goals, including the commitments on financing for sustainable development at the global and national levels. In the national context, effectively reflecting gender considerations in financing for development policies requires a gender conscious design of tax policies and national budgets.

Overall, deepening and effectuating accountability mechanisms for the SDGs requires looking beyond simplified indicators. It entails extending the monitoring task to cover economic and social policies that form the contextualizing environment of the SDGs.

Within this context, this paper is prepared to the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) as a background paper contributing to the Arab Sustainable Development Report. It focuses on gender equality as a core element to achieve sustainable development. It tackles gender mainstreaming as a strategy to overcome gender inequalities. A broad consensus has emerged on the notion that addressing poverty should be interlinked with addressing inequalities, particularly gender inequality – all within an integrated and transformative framework rooted in a commitment to human security and environmental protection. Indeed, the international community emphasized in the Rio+20 outcome document that: “gender equality and the effective participation of women are important for effective action on all aspects of sustainable development”. Additionally, it reaffirmed “the vital role of women and the need for their full and equal participation and leadership in all areas of sustainable development,” and underscored the collective decision “to accelerate the implementation of our respective commitments in this regard as contained in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as Agenda 21, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the United Nations Millennium Declaration”.

As such, the paper focuses on discussing SDG 5, and other proposed SDGs tackling the gender dimension, within the context of the development problematique in the Arab region. It reviews the situation of women’s rights and gender equality in Arab countries. It discusses the interface between sustainable development, economic growth, and inequalities from a gender-conscious perspective. The report provides recommendations in regard to selected policy changes that are needed in the Arab region to serve women’s rights and gender equality and justice and the sustainability of the development process, specifically focusing on policies regarding productive sectors, wage and tax, social protection, and trade and investment. These policy areas are selected primarily due to the systemic implications on women’s conditions and rights that would result if gender-focused reforms are taken in these areas. The selection of these policy areas also considers the political dynamics in the context of discussing the SDGs and the way forward in the process of designing the post-2015 agenda. This selection does not exclude the importance of other policy considerations for women’s conditions in the Arab region, including issues related to ecology and climate change. The latter is important specifically given the climate change implications on the agricultural sector where most of women’s work is concentrated in the region and on food security. However, the scope of this report does not allow an in-depth discussion for this policy issue.

## **II- Background/introduction**

### **1. Overview of main gender-related outcomes from sustainable development conferences**

The discourse on women’s rights and gender equality in sustainable development has evolved since the 1992 United Nations (UN) Summit on Environment and Development (i.e. the Earth Summit held in Rio) and over the series of UN development summits held throughout the 1990s. Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration (1992) established that “women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development”.

## **CEDAW: towards substantive equality between men and women**

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which entered into force in 1981, had obligated Member States party to the Convention to condemn all forms of discrimination against women and to take steps “by all appropriate means and without delay” to pursue a policy of eliminating this discrimination” (Article 2 of CEDAW). Most Arab countries have ratified the convention<sup>1</sup>.

Article 2 of CEDAW sets out steps that a State party must take to eliminate discrimination, including adopting appropriate legislative and other measures. Most Arab countries have undertaken a reservation on this Article; they indicate willingness to comply with the obligations as long as it does not counter to Islamic Sharia<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, Article 4(1) of CEDAW recognizes the legitimacy of “temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women”.

State parties’ obligations under CEDAW extend beyond ensuring absence of a discriminatory legal framework; policies must also not be discriminatory in effect. CEDAW requires that states achieve both substantive and formal equality, while recognizing that formal equality alone is insufficient for a state to meet its affirmative obligation to achieve substantive equality between men and women<sup>3</sup>.

The fundamental principles that spearheaded the agenda of sustainable development and that of women’s rights and gender equality in sustainable development have been established in 1992 and reinforced in the Rio +10 Summit (known as Johannesburg Summit 2002 and entitled ‘Building Partnerships for Sustainable Development’). These principles include the precautionary principle, the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities, and free, prior, and informed consent, especially in regard to indigenous and women's communities and spaces<sup>4</sup>.

Since the 1990’s and the stages of preparations for Agenda 21 that resulted from the Earth Summit, women’s groups have stressed that empowerment of women is essential for achieving equity between and within countries<sup>5</sup>.

Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 (under Section III of the report on “Strengthening the role of major groups”)<sup>6</sup> was entitled ‘Global Action for Women Towards Sustainable and Equitable Development’<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The Arab countries who had ratified the CEDAW include: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. See: [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en).

<sup>2</sup> For more details, see: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations-country.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>, and [www.worldwewant2015.org](http://www.worldwewant2015.org). For more discussion on CEDAW, see: Balakrishnan and Elson “Auditing Economic Policy in the Light of Obligations on Economic and Social Rights”, available at [http://www.pdx.edu/sites/www.pdx.edu/econ/files/media\\_assets/spring11/Balakrishnan2.pdf](http://www.pdx.edu/sites/www.pdx.edu/econ/files/media_assets/spring11/Balakrishnan2.pdf) (visited December 28, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities stems out of the recognition of historical differences in the contributions of developed and developing States to global environmental problems. It recognizes the common responsibility to contribute to addressing these challenges, while acknowledging the differences in circumstances and capabilities of states. Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration states: “States should cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth’s ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit to sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.” It finds its origins in equity considerations and equity principles in international law. The precautionary principle appeared in Principle 15 of the Rio declaration (1992), which provides that “In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation”. The principle of free, prior, and informed consent is embedded in the right to self-determination. It entitles communities to effectively determine the outcome of decision-making that affects them, not merely a right to be involved.

<sup>5</sup> See: World Congress of Women for a Healthy Planet (1992), Women’s Action Agenda 21, more information available at: <https://www.iisd.org/women/action21.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> See: Report of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992), UN documents A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. III), available at: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-3>, (visited November 7, 14).

The chapter was considered a major stride in articulating global commitments towards advancing women’s rights and empowerment as part of the global sustainable development agenda. It focused on asserting the need for action to eliminate obstacles to women’s equal participation, particularly in decision-making.

These Summits (See Table 1) represented junctures for mobilizing networks of groups and activists who have continued to struggle towards ensuring that women's voices and experiences impact policy in all foras, including inside the United Nations.

Women’s groups had begun promoting their role at the UN as early as 1985. Their mobilizations at the United Nations Third World Conference on Women, in Nairobi, Kenya resulted in the “Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women”. Women organized regional and global preparatory conferences and lobbied for stronger gender language in the official documents of that conference, and others to come<sup>8</sup>.

The UN Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China in 1995 represented a major breakthrough in promoting women's participation and a renewed global commitment to women’s empowerment. At Beijing, 189 governments- including most Arab governments<sup>9</sup>-promised women "equal access to" and "full participation in" power structures and decision-making and review of "the differential impact of electoral systems on the political representation of women". They also pledged to set "specific targets" and "implement measures" to increase the number of women in government at all levels. After Beijing, many countries introduced quota systems, which led to a significant increase in the number of women being elected as city council officers or mayors<sup>10</sup>. The Beijing Platform for Action also called for gender-sensitive budgets<sup>11</sup>.

<b>Conference/ Activity</b>	<b>Focus area</b>
1946: United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).	Ensuring the empowerment of women and gender equality (E/RES/2/11, 21 June 1946), and providing recommendations to the Council on the obstacles relating to women’s rights in political, economic, civil, social, and education fields.
1975: The first world conference on the status of women convened in Mexico City.	Adopted the first world plan for action that called upon governments to develop strategies that would bring gender equality, eliminate gender discrimination and integrate women in development and peace-building.
1980: The second world conference on the status of women convened in Copenhagen.	Focused on special action needed in areas such as employment opportunities, adequate health care services and education.

<sup>7</sup> See: “Gender Equality and Sustainable Development” (June 2012), UN Chronicle, Vol XLIX No. 1 & 2 2012, available at: <http://unchronicle.un.org/article/gender-equality-and-sustainable-development/>.

<sup>8</sup> Before and during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, the Women's Action Agenda for a Healthy and Peaceful Planet defined the new and emerging issues of the twenty-first century. It recognized the growing evidence of climate change and the threat of increased militarism as perhaps two of the greatest challenges of the planet, as well as the need for women to add a new set of instruments to traditional advocacy and action in order to avoid rolling back even the most modest gains that had been achieved since Rio in 1992.

<sup>9</sup> See: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf> (visited December 11, 14).

<sup>10</sup> See: “WEDO Primer: Women and Sustainable Development: A Local Agenda” (May 2001), available at: [http://www.wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/localagenda\\_primer.htm](http://www.wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/localagenda_primer.htm) (visited November 9, 14).

<sup>11</sup> Gender-sensitive budgets are the result of mainstreaming gender considerations in the design of public finance and allocations of the national budgets. The gender-sensitive budget is one where policy makers take into consideration the needs for fulfilling women’s rights and gender equality when designing the budget allocations across sectors and investments, and one that makes clear the proportion of national budget addressing gender equality and women’s rights.



1985: United Nations Third World Conference on Women, in Nairobi, Kenya.	Focused on equality in social participation and in political participation and decision-making. The conference recognized the necessity of women’s participation in discussions in all areas and not only on gender equality. It resulted in the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women.
1992: The Earth Summit.	Resulted in Agenda 21 including chapter 24 on “Global Action for Women Towards Sustainable and Equitable Development”.
1995: Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.	Adopted unanimously the Beijing Platform of Action that outlined 12 critical issues <sup>12</sup> that constitute barriers for the advancement of women, and identified a range of actions that governments, the United Nations and civil society groups should take to make women’s human rights a reality.
The Beijing Review Conferences: +5 (2000), +10 (2005), +15 (2010).	<p>The 5-year review resulted in a political declaration and further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing commitments.</p> <p>The 10-year review adopted a declaration emphasizing that the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is essential to achieving internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration.</p> <p>The 15-year review adopted a declaration that welcomed the progress made towards achieving gender equality, and pledged to undertake further action to ensure the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.</p>
2000: The Millennium Summit and adoption of the Millennium Development Goals	Adoption of MDG 3 entitled ‘Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment’.
The Rio + 20 Summit (2012).	The Rio+20 outcome document provides that: “gender equality and the effective participation of women are important for effective action on all aspects of sustainable development”. Additionally, it reaffirmed “the vital role of women and the need for their full and equal participation and leadership in all areas of sustainable development,” and underscored the collective decision “to accelerate the implementation of respective commitments in this regard as contained in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as Agenda 21, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the United Nations Millennium Declaration”.

Compiled by the author based on information provided at:  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/session/presskit/hist.htm>  
[http://www.un-ngls.org/spip.php?page=article\\_s&id\\_article=1725](http://www.un-ngls.org/spip.php?page=article_s&id_article=1725)  
<http://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/world-conferences-on-women#beijing>

<sup>12</sup> The 12 areas include: poverty of women, unequal access to education, lack and unequal access to health care systems, violence against women, vulnerabilities of women in armed conflict, inequality in economic structures, inequalities in power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms to improve the advancement of women, lack of respect and inadequate protection in human rights, under-representation of women in the media, inequalities in natural resource management and in the safeguarding of the environment, and the discrimination and violation of the girl child.

## **2. Framing the discussion on sustainable development, economic growth, and inequalities; considerations from a gender-conscious perspective**

The Rio+20 Summit refocused the discussion on the three pillars of sustainable development; economic, social, and environmental policies.

The Summit was held in a period when the discussions tackling the role of the state and the importance of active policy interventions were re-emerging as major elements in a dynamic approach to sustainable development. To a significant extent, this was triggered by the implications of the global financial and economic crises that the world has faced since the year 2008.

The discussion of the role of the state includes its role at the regulatory front and more broadly in terms of taking an activist role in economic development. This entails thinking through various roles of the state in establishing well-functioning markets and development-focused institutions, as well as its role as a social investor and proactive agent for long-term investments in the real economy. These various roles cover issues of process and institution building (including establishing the legislative framework and function), and deliberate design of policies for income distribution and social and gender equality and justice. It also includes the promotion of adequate forms of economic growth that could positively stimulate the former roles.

The prime responsibility for economic development, a major pillar of sustainable development, lies with the concerned state<sup>13</sup>. According to Yilmaz Akyuz, success depends on effective design and implementation of industrial, macroeconomic, and social policies, as well as appropriate pace and pattern of integration into the global economic system.

To succeed countries need to have the adequate policy space, which is often narrowed down as a result of multilateral and bilateral rules in the area of trade, investment, finance and debt<sup>14</sup>, in addition to environmental constraints as a result of global warming and increased instability of climatic conditions<sup>15</sup>. Consequently, the questions of gender equality and women's rights cannot be dealt with without dealing with these underlying constraints that the global economic system poses for advancing gender equality.

Sustainable development requires looking beyond the mere levels of achieved economic growth, to unpack how economic growth is created, and how trade, investment, and finance dynamically interact with development objectives. The extent to which these policies serve progress on the equality and justice fronts should form main indicators for measuring policy success or failure.

Imbedded in such considerations of economic growth is the understanding that a 'trickle down' approach to the economy will not work to address sustainability and equality. It is essential to unpack the assumption that economic growth would automatically spill over into more spaces for women's economic empowerment. This requires looking closer at what kinds of growth policies are good for women, women's employment, and progress on women's economic and social rights. It is important to actively investigate the policies that would contribute to empower and enforce the rights of women, and the kind of gender-based positive discrimination measures and laws that are needed to redress the discrimination by law and practice that is evident today.

Consequently, it is not enough to add-on social and gender considerations to policies that are merely focused on market dynamics for growth objectives and on providing 'enabling environment' for the

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<sup>13</sup> Yilmaz Akyuz (2013), "Post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development", South Centre, available at: [http://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Post-2015-and-SDGs-Perspectives-of-the-South-Centrer1\\_EN.pdf](http://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Post-2015-and-SDGs-Perspectives-of-the-South-Centrer1_EN.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> See UNCTAD Trade and Development Report (2014), available at: <http://unctad.org/en/pages/PublicationWebflyer.aspx?publicationid=981>.

<sup>15</sup> Yilmaz Akyuz (2013), "Post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development", South Centre, available at: [http://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Post-2015-and-SDGs-Perspectives-of-the-South-Centrer1\\_EN.pdf](http://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Post-2015-and-SDGs-Perspectives-of-the-South-Centrer1_EN.pdf).

private sector<sup>16</sup>. The design of the policy approach itself should focus on enabling progressive public policies, including in regard to productive capacities and industrialization, labor markets, wage policies, among other social policies.

Within this context, addressing women's rights and gender equality and justice requires as well the consideration of women's representation and participation in the economy, in institutions, and in policy-making circles. It also entails thinking beyond the market and the state to address other dynamic forms of economic, social and political interactions that are embedded in societal relations.

Women's civic and political rights as well as their economic, social, and cultural rights are closely interlinked. Gender-conscious economic policy making, as discussed above, would contribute to breaking the cycle of political and personal rights' repression they often face. Addressing the distribution of economic resources and promoting economic inclusion and freedoms is closely intertwined with achieving more representation and participation in the public political and economic spheres, and at the household level.

Such activist interventions, as discussed in this section, are a pre-requisite in the pursuit of sustainable development that embeds progress on women's rights and gender equality and justice. Indeed, addressing such fundamental questions about the role of the state and nature of economic growth are the preliminary task in seeking sustainable development that could be achieved through gender-conscious approaches to representation and policy making.

### **3. Discussing the SDGs and the post-2015 development framework; views from different stakeholders**

#### ***a. Lessons learned from the MDGs***

The discussions on the SDGs and the post-2015 development framework have manifested a clear recognition, both among states and other stakeholders that the MDGs fell short of addressing policies necessary to fulfill the goals in a sustainable way. The goals have been seen as a dilution of the ambition and vision of the Millennium Declaration<sup>17</sup>.

The MDGs are perceived as a framework approaching development with a focus on poverty and aid, and does not embrace a large segment of the population in the developing countries, especially in middle-income countries<sup>18</sup>. According to Gita Sen, the MDGs did not address the larger macroeconomic and development framework within which policies or programmes for gender equality are located or how conducive that framework is for gender equality<sup>19</sup>.

Within the MDGs, gender was narrowly defined<sup>20</sup>. The MDGs lacked a broader approach addressing women's rights and empowerment in the political, economic, and social spheres. Beyond MDG 3 that tackled gender equality and women's empowerment', the goals did not address the gender dimensions

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<sup>16</sup> See: Women's Major Group Contribution for the Fifth Session of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals; Analysis and key recommendations on Sustained and Inclusive Economic Growth and Macroeconomic policy questions based on comments to the UNTST Issue Brief (25-27 November 2013).

<sup>17</sup> See: Gita Sen (2013), "Gender Equality in the post 2015 development agenda: lessons from the MDGs".

<sup>18</sup> Yilmaz Akyuz (2013), "Post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development", South Centre, available at: [http://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Post-2015-and-SDGs-Perspectives-of-the-South-Centrer1\\_EN.pdf](http://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Post-2015-and-SDGs-Perspectives-of-the-South-Centrer1_EN.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Gita Sen (2013), "Gender Equality in the post 2015 development agenda: lessons from the MDGs".

<sup>20</sup> MDG 3 entitled 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment' includes narrow indicators on political representation and employment and one target on education. Indicators include the share of women in wage employment in the agricultural sector and proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. The target assigned to MDG 3 focused on eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education by 2015. The relationship between the indicators and the target were unclear. For more discussion of this point, see: Alexandra Spiedloch (April 2013) "Gender Equality in the post-2015 development agenda: where does it stand?", Lana Baydas (2014) "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Post-2015 Development Agenda", presented to Arab High Level Forum on Sustainable Development, Amman, Jordan (April 2014), and Gita Sen (2013).

and dynamics associated with the other MDGs, including those on poverty, environment, governance, education, and global partnership for development.

The discussions on the SDGs and post-2015 development framework have reflected a realization, both from states and civil society organizations, of the importance of moving beyond addressing symptoms to dealing with causes of global inequalities and the enabling policy context needed to achieve sustainable development. The experience with the MDGs has reinforced the necessity of addressing structural transformation, including in the economic models and policies underpinning the way resources are used, distribution and redistribution is organized, and production and job creation is pursued.

***b. Reflections from international and regional governmental and non-governmental foras***

Following on the above, this section will highlight selected views from governmental and non-governmental spaces, which were undertaken in the process of formulating the proposed SDGs.

The Group of 77 and China<sup>21</sup>, which includes the Arab states, have stressed the importance of “a genuine departure from the market-based policies of development fashioned on the so-called 'Washington Consensus' to a new set of open macroeconomic policies that avoid the contractionary and unequal impact of the liberal approach, in order to maintain a reasonably stable macroeconomic environment, pursue explicitly long-term growth and employment, and lower income inequality”<sup>22</sup>.

From a regional perspective, the Arab High-Level Forum on sustainable development held in Amman, Jordan in April 2014<sup>23</sup> noted the need to address inequities and inequalities while looking beyond income poverty to consider the quality of health, education services, and employment. The Forum pointed out the need for progressive social policies and protection systems, including universal social protection floor that cover all social groups. Participants in the Forum considered that the post-2015 development framework and SDGs must explicitly consider the impacts of global trade and financing at the global, regional, national, and local levels.

In a regional meeting organized by the Arab NGO Network for Development in cooperation with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (UN-ESCWA) and the League of Arab States<sup>24</sup>, participants stressed that “a reliable post-2015 development agenda is not only about setting development goals and quantitative indicators”, but “rather, the new development agenda must integrate transformative changes to global governance systems and national policy choices in order to achieve development”. This necessitates “a shift towards a model centered on enhancing national productive sectors that require an enabling trade and investment architecture, and revision of distribution policies ...”, according to the outcome document from the meeting.

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<sup>21</sup> This part is based on presentation by Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, at the Regional Forum on “Addressing economic and social inequalities: the need for a new development model”, organized by the Arab NGO Network for Development in cooperation with UN-ESCWA, League of Arab States, Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, Ford Foundation (June 2014, Beirut, Lebanon), available at: <http://www.annd.org/english/allNews.php?page=3>.

<sup>22</sup> The Group of 77 and China underlined as well “the importance of improving global economic governance and strengthening the United Nations’ leadership role in promoting development”. In regard to fulfilling the SDGs, the Group adds that “developing countries should be supported by an enabling international environment, which includes a supportive and just economic and financial international system where the rules are fair and pro-development”. Source: statements of the group of G77 and China during the sessions of the Open Working Group on the SDGs.

<sup>23</sup> For more information about the Forum, see: <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNUM=3315e>. The Forum was organized in cooperation between ESCWA, the League of Arab States, the United Nations Environment Program, the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, and the Ministry of Environment in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Participants in the forum included High level Arab governmental representatives from the economic, social and environment sectors in addition to UN development agencies active in the region, specialized agencies of the League of Arab States and regional civil society organizations

<sup>24</sup> The meeting was organized in June 2014, in Beirut. It gathered around 130 participants including representatives of non-governmental organizations from across the Arab region, labor unions, experts and academics. The meeting was supported by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, and the Ford Foundation.

On gender equality and women's empowerment, the discussions<sup>25</sup> among States and other stakeholders in the process of designing the proposed SDGs affirmed that "gender equality is an end in itself and an essential means for sustainable development and poverty eradication", noting that "gender inequality is the most pervasive form of inequality in the world"<sup>26</sup>.

The Women's Major Group<sup>27</sup> –a group comprised of over 500 women's human rights environment, and development organizations, activists and academia, including eight non-governmental organizations from the Arab region- very tellingly promoted the message "we will not be mainstreamed into a polluted stream". This message reflects the conviction that striding towards achieving women's rights is closely connected and interlinked with struggling towards structural economic transformation and systemic change in the development model, and one cannot be achieved without the other<sup>28</sup>.

In the same line, in February 2014, more than 340 women's groups from around the world, including groups from Sudan, Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan, noted in their statement entitled "A Feminist Declaration for Post 2015" the necessity of fundamental structural and transformational changes to the current development model. The statement highlighted the importance of redistribution of unequal and unfair burdens on women and girls in sustaining societal wellbeing and economies, intensified in times of violence and conflict as well as during economic and ecological crisis. Such transformation, according to the statement, requires reviewing the current security paradigm of investing heavily in militarization, reversing the model of overconsumption and production, and ensuring new ecological sustainability plan that respects planetary boundaries. The groups called for gender equality to be considered in a crosscutting approach across all the goals, strategies, and objectives, and as a stand-alone goal to achieve gender equality, women's empowerment, and the full realization of women's human rights.

### *c. Reflections on the proposed SDGs: perspectives from women rights groups*

The proposed SDGs, released in June 2014, embodied a departure from the reductionist approach of the MDGs, and an attempt to tackle structural issues including inequality within and among countries.

The Women's Working Group, comprising more than 500 women's rights groups and activists, welcomed the standalone goal on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls proposed (i.e. the proposed goal 5 entitled 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'). The Group welcomed as well the inclusion of gender equality and women's rights under several other

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<sup>25</sup> These discussions took place in the form of a 30-member Open Working Group (OWG) of the UN General Assembly that was tasked with preparing a proposal on the SDGs. The OWG was established on 22nd of January 2013 by decision 67/555 (see [A/67/L.48/rev.1](#)) of the General Assembly. The Member States decided to use an innovative, constituency-based system of representation, whereby most of the seats in the OWG are shared by several countries. Material related to the OWG deliberations, including reports from the sessions and summary outcomes, are available at: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg8.html>

<sup>26</sup> The deliberations pointed to the importance that "gender equality, women's rights, and women's empowerment in the SDGs be aligned with CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action, the ICPD, and the Rio+20 outcome document". The discussions also pointed to "broad support for a number of priority actions including preventing and eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, empowering women legally and economically, and strengthening women's voice, participation in decision-making and leadership in all areas of life, and recognition, reduction, and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work, disproportionately borne by women and girls". The discussions in the OWG touched on "the need to respect and fulfill the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all individuals, including access to sexual and reproductive health information, education, and services". Source: Co-Chair's Summary bullet points for OWG-8, available at: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg8.html>

<sup>27</sup> The Women's Major Group came out of the Earth Summit process (1992).

<sup>28</sup> Civil society groups have often noted the importance of reversing structural barriers, including access to decent work, unequal responsibility for unpaid care work, violence against women, decision-making over finances and resources, and land rights, so that gender equality and inclusive growth go hand in hand. See: Action Aid (2012) "Righting the MDGs: contexts and opportunities for a post-2015 development framework", referenced by Alexandra Spielfoch (2013) "Gender Equality in the Post-2015 Development Agenda", published by the Heinrich Boell Foundation.

goals, including equal rights to education and life-long learning, decent work, and equal pay for work of equal value (See table 2)<sup>29</sup>. Another important target under goal 2 of the SDGs (i.e. the goal entitled ‘End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture’) speaks of securing equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, and financial services with the aim of contributing to ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture.

The proposed goal 5 of the SDGs captures some of the major demands of women’s groups and movements presented during the development discussions of the 1990s, and which were not captured in the MDGs<sup>30</sup>. These include issues such as violence against women that was a major debate in the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna (1993), the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo (1994), and the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing (1995). These demands also include the issue of care work and the relation of care work to the ability of women to participate in the labor force, which was the focus of discussions in the Fourth World Conference on Women. These issues also include political equality in decision-making and constitutional guarantees for gender equality<sup>31</sup>.

<b>The Goal</b>	<b>The reference to women’s rights and gender issues in the goal</b>
1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere	1.2 by 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.  1.b create sound policy frameworks, at national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies to support accelerated investments in poverty eradication actions.
2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture	2.2 by 2030 end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving by 2025 the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under five years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and older persons.  2.3 by 2030 double the agricultural productivity and the incomes of small-scale food producers, particularly women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets, and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.
4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all	4.3 by 2030 ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.  4.5 by 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with

<sup>29</sup> See: Women’s Major Group Statement (July 2014), “Women’s 8 Red Flags following the conclusion of the open working group on sustainable development goals”.

<sup>30</sup> See: Gita Sen presentation at the High-level Round Table on Priority Theme

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Kyf7g-WZiU> .

<sup>31</sup> Gita Sen, Ibid.

	<p>disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations.</p> <p>4.7 by 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.</p> <p>4.a build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.</p>
6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all	6.2 by 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.
8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all	<p>8.5 by 2030 achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.</p> <p>8.8 protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments of all workers, including migrant workers, particularly women migrants, and those in precarious employment.</p>
11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable	11.7 by 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.
13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts	13.b Promote mechanisms for raising capacities for effective climate change related planning and management, in LDCs, including focusing on women, youth, local and marginalized communities.
17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development	<p>Data, monitoring and accountability</p> <p>17.18 by 2020, enhance capacity building support to developing countries, including for LDCs and SIDS, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.</p>

However, the Women’s Major Group, referred to above, noted that “the SDGs still lack real ambition for urgent transformational change that the world needs in order to achieve gender equality, women’s human rights, sustainable development in harmony with nature, and end of inequalities”<sup>32</sup>. The Group noted the absence of integrating the human rights framework fully into goal 5 of the SDGs.

The “Beyond 2015” campaign, which includes over 1000 civil society organizations from 130 countries, reiterated this point by noting that “the proposed SDGs do not properly frame goals and

<sup>32</sup> Women’s Major Group (July 2014), “Women’s 8 Ref Flags following the conclusion of the Open Working Group on SDGs”. The Women’s Working Group comprised of over 500 women’s human rights, environment, and development organizations, activists, and academia, has substantively engaged in the consultations and negotiations throughout the process of discussing and drawing up the SDGs.

targets around existing human rights obligations...clear references to human rights would strengthen the SDGs by clarifying the responsibility and answerability of the Goals”<sup>33</sup>.

The Women’s Working Group pointed out as well the absence of reference to the human right to food, the right to water and sanitation, women’s right to decision making on peace and security, the rights of indigenous peoples, and the right of women to control their sexuality free of coercion, discrimination, and violence. The Group further noted that at the Rio +20 Summit governments recognized that the rights of women, men, and young people to control all matters related to their sexuality was critical for sustainable development, but failed to reflect that in the SDGs<sup>34</sup>.

The Women’s Working Group have also noted that half of the goals lack references to gender equality and women’s human rights particularly in the context of decision making on climate, oceans, ecosystems, fisheries, water, energy, and rural communities. The goals do not recognize the differential impacts of environmental threats on the lives of women and girls, or their distinctive role in contributing to sustainability, and peace building<sup>35</sup>.

Another shortcoming of the SDGs is the limitation of the proposed targets and their accompanying means of implementation, especially in regard to addressing structural changes needed to realize substantive equality, such as in areas of employment, the reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work, and women’s control over assets<sup>36</sup>.

Overall, the proposed goal 5 of the SDGs, together with gender-focused dimensions covered under the proposed goals 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, and 17 is broader and touches on more structural dimensions compared to the narrow approach to gender equality reflected in the MDGs. However, it does not go further than the set of commitments undertaken by states during the 1990s development conferences and under human rights conventions.

### **III- Arab States’ performance on gender-related development indicators and obligations in the area of women’s rights**

ESCWA’ 2011 report entitled “MDGs from Gender Lens” concludes that “the slow pace of progress towards achieving the MDGs is largely determined by the deficits in gender equality and the empowerment of women, coupled with a lack of capacity and willingness to streamline gender concerns into MDG-based national development plans and poverty reduction strategies”. Previously, the Arab Human Development Reports<sup>37</sup> situated discrimination against women as one of the main deficiencies curtailing development in the Arab region.

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<sup>33</sup> Beyond 2015, “Key Comments to the Outcome Document of the Open Working Group on SDGs”, available at: <http://www.beyond2015.org/sites/default/files/FINAL%20Beyond%202015%20Key%20Comments%20to%20the%20OWG%20SDG%20outcome%20document.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> During the OWG session held in July 2014, a statement delivered by H.E. Ambassador Nozipho Mxakato-Diseko of South Africa on on behalf of 58 Member States<sup>41</sup> reiterated the demand for 3 targets related to sexual and reproductive health and rights. The statement said “in order to complete the ‘unfinished business’ of the Millennium Development Goals, and building on the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and related agreements, the respect, promotion and protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all must be an essential foundation of a universally-relevant, transformative, high-impact and cost-effective sustainable development agenda across its social, economic and environmental dimensions”. The joint statement added: “Under the proposed goal on Health: ‘Achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, including quality, comprehensive, integrated and affordable sexual and reproductive health information, education and services that include modern methods of contraception. Under the proposed goal on Gender Equality: ‘Ensure the respect, promotion and protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all’” and “under the proposed goal on Education: ‘Achieve universal access to comprehensive sexuality education for all young people, in and out of school, consistent with their evolving capacities’”. Source: “Conflict zones in the SDG negotiations” (6 August 2014), by Ranja Sengupta (New Delhi), Bhumika Muchhala (New York), and Mirza Alas (Heredia, Costa Rica), Third World Network.

<sup>35</sup> See: Beyond 2015 campaign.

<sup>36</sup> See: Beyond 2015 campaign and Women’s Working Group.

<sup>37</sup> The UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States published a series of the Arab Human Development Reports starting with a report entitled “Creating Opportunities for Future Generations” in 2002, followed by three reports entitled “Building a



Compared to other regions (i.e. Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa), the Social Watch Gender Equity index, which measures the gap between women and men in education, the economy and political empowerment, finds that the Middle East and North Africa region, encompassing Arab states, comes at the bottom of the list in terms of achievement in these areas (See Annex 1).

The following section compiles observations and data from review of the MDGs in the Arab region and review of reports by the CEDAW Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for selected Arab countries<sup>38</sup>. The concluding observations by the CEDAW Committee highlight some of the major shortcomings currently facing Arab countries in terms of policy, legislative frameworks, institutional structures, stereotypes, and other harmful practices against women (The observations are presented in a general form. For details on country cases see Annex 2).

It is worth noting that under the Universal Periodic Review process, taking place under the auspices of the Human Rights Council, the number of recommendations on women's rights as a proportion of the overall number of recommendations received by Arab countries have ranged between 15% and a significant 31% (see detailed information in this regard and a list of recommendations on women's rights received and accepted by Arab countries under Annex 3).

## **1. Education and health**

The Arab MDGs report entitled "Arab MDG report: facing challenges and looking beyond 2015"<sup>39</sup> addresses progress toward gender parity in education, in the Mashreq, Maghreb, and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (except in LDCs). Most Arab countries are close to universal net primary enrollment rates. However conflicts and crisis in several countries, such as Palestine, Iraq, Syria, and Libya hold significant impacts at this front in the short and long terms. Furthermore, poverty remains one of the major factors defining access to education.

The report notes that at the tertiary education level, regional disparities exist. Countries with limited national wealth have much more men in tertiary education than women. This is unlike wealthier countries of the region, like the GCC. In the GCC countries, the Gender Parity Index, measuring the relative access to tertiary education between men and women, is 1.58, compared to 1.22 in Maghreb countries, and 0.43 in least-developed Arab countries. In Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, the enrollment of women in tertiary education is double that of men<sup>40</sup>.

Yet, access to tertiary education does not necessarily reflect empowerment towards access to the labor market or wider role for women in these countries as contributors to economic cycles. Access to labor markets and women's economic contribution is often hindered by structural barriers in the labor market itself, especially in middle-income countries of the region, as well as cultural stereotypes and barriers.

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Knowledge Society" (2003), "Towards Freedom in Arab Society" (2004), and "Empowerment of Arab Women" (2005). A fifth report entitled "Challenges to Human Security in Arab Countries" was published in 2009. See: <http://www.arab-hdr.org/contents/index.aspx?rid=5>.

<sup>38</sup> Reports reviewed extend back to 2010, including: Iraq 2014, Bahrain 2014, Algeria 2012, Oman 2011, Kuwait 2011, Qatar 2014, Tunisia 2010, and Egypt 2010. Thanks extended to Raya Fariz at the Arab NGO Network for Development for helping in the review of the reports. The areas of observation by the Committee that were reviewed for the purposes of this report include: constitutional framework and discriminatory laws, national machinery for the advancement of women, stereotypes and harmful practices, violence against women, participation in political and public life, nationality, education, employment, health, rural women, and marriage and family (for more details see Annex 2 with extracts from the revised CEDAW reports).

<sup>39</sup> This section is based on the data compiled by the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) in the "Arab MDG report: facing challenges and looking beyond 2015", chapter on MDG 3, pages 22-25.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. ESCWA, page 23.

The CEDAW committee had observed that while levels of enrollment increased in Arab countries overall, there is often lack of information regarding drop out rates. In some countries there is segregation of students based on sex in public schools and universities. The Committee had observed as well females' concentration in traditional feminized education areas and underrepresentation in technical-vocational education, and noted the consequences of these trends for women's underrepresentation in the paid labor force.

On health, much of the lack of progress on MDGs indicators and targets in some Arab countries is due to the lack of access to or poor quality of health care<sup>41</sup>. ESCWA shows that achievements on some indicators, like access to antenatal care, differ between the richest and poorest quintiles in the Arab countries except Yemen, which indicate the lack of adequate availability of public health services.

ESCWA reports<sup>42</sup> that the regional maternal mortality ratio has decreased by 27% between 1990 and 2010, although progress between 2000 and 2010 had stalled compared to the 1990s. These aggregate numbers hide differences among Arab countries. The Mashreq and Maghreb countries registered a decline of 60% in maternal mortality between 1990 and 2010. The GCC countries have reached the level of 15 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010, which is lower than the average in developed regions (16 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010)<sup>43</sup>. In regard to access to reproductive health, Mashreq countries achieved improvements on the number of births attended by skilled health personnel, while least developed Arab countries like Yemen and Sudan have not achieved much progress on this front. On a regional level, the percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel increased from 54% in 1990 to 69% around the year 2010.

On health, the CEDAW Committee observed the limited budget allocations to the health sector in several Arab countries, which negatively impacts the quality of health care services. Furthermore, the special needs of women with disabilities remain often not identified and addressed.

## **2. Employment and conditions of rural women (See Annexes 4, 5, 6, and 7)**

Participation of women in the labor market in the Arab region did not exceed 27% in 2011, which was the lowest rate in the world<sup>44</sup> (See related graphs 1 a & b. Note that the high rates registered in Gulf countries are explained through the high numbers of expatriate female workers in these societies). This is coupled with a high unemployment rate, which was around 20% in 2012 and decreased to 17% in 2013, compared to 8.5% unemployment among men<sup>45</sup>. This limited decrease could in part be explained by the readjustment in countries that witnessed transitions, such as Tunisia and Egypt, where unemployment had increased in light of the revolutions (See related graph 2 a & b and graph 3).

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<sup>41</sup> ESCWA, "Arab MDG report: facing challenges and looking beyond 2015", page 30-31.

<sup>42</sup> ESCWA, "Arab MDG report: facing challenges and looking beyond 2015", page 30-31.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. ESCWA.

<sup>44</sup> World Bank statistics, referenced by ESCWA 2014. The rate is 56% in low and middle-income countries, and 68% in countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

<sup>45</sup> ESCWA (2014), "Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2013-2014", page 67.

**Graph 1 a & b: participation rate of females in the labor force\* (ages 15+)**



**Source:** World Bank Statistics. Compiled by Bihter Moschini, the Arab NGO Network for Development.

\* Labor force participation rate is the proportion of the population ages 15 and older that is economically active, thus all people who supply labor for the production of goods and services during a specified period.

The MDG report<sup>46</sup> points out that women continue to hold less than 20% of paid jobs outside the agricultural sectors<sup>47</sup> compared to double that rate achieved in the global markets. In addition, women who find paid employment are, on average, paid less than men for the same work. The report highlights that women's wages in manufacturing as a share of men's wages in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, and Syria are 66%, 68%, 50%, and 79% respectively<sup>48</sup> (see related graph 4). Similarly, women's share in senior management positions, including as legislators, senior officials, and managers, remains limited at around 10% in most Arab countries, compared to 25% globally.

On employment, the CEDAW Committee had observed the very low participation of women in the formal labor sector in Arab countries, in particular in the private sector. In many Arab countries, the legal framework does not guarantee equality between women and men employees, according to the Committee (i.e. does not prohibit direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds enumerated under the International Labor Organization Conventions). There is often lack of a specific legislation that defines and prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace. Several countries lack information concerning the levels of remuneration that is disaggregated by sex. In some countries, women are

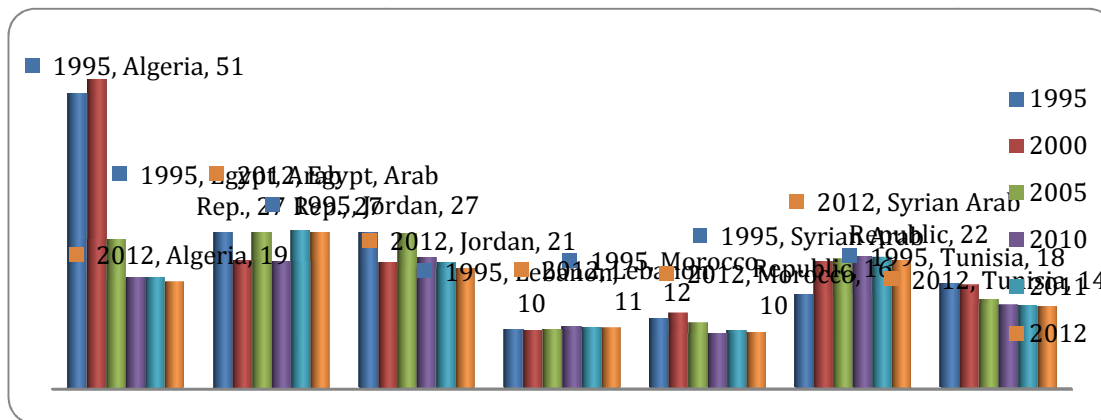
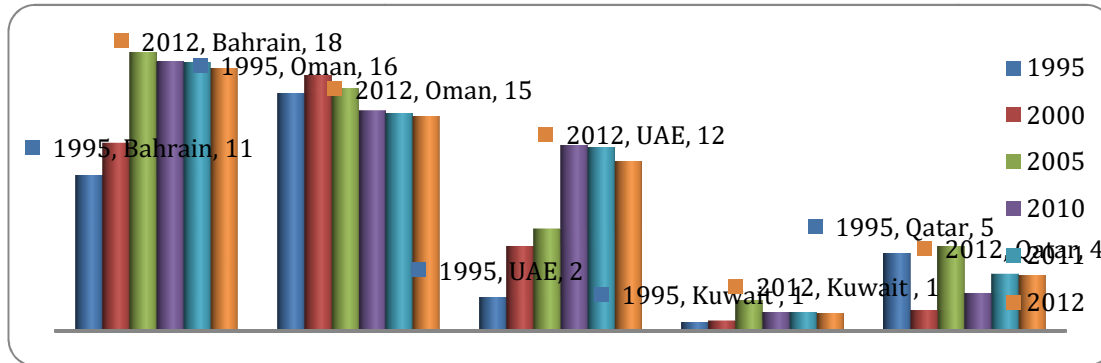
<sup>46</sup> ESCWA (2011), "Progress in the Achievement of the MDGs in the ESCWA Region: A Gender Lens".

<sup>47</sup> United Nations Statistics Division, 2012.

<sup>48</sup> United Nations Statistics Division, 2012.

required to present a letter of consent from a male guardian to obtain employment. Furthermore, in several Arab countries, there are serious concerns regarding harassment of migrant domestic women workers.

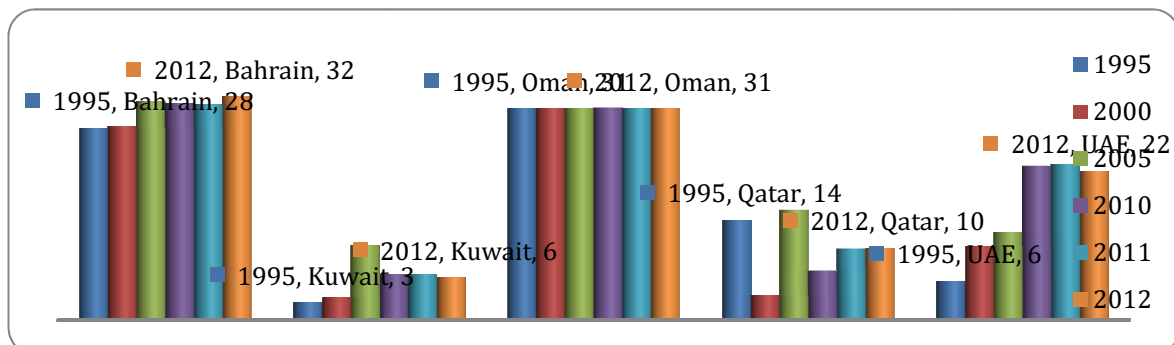
**Graph 2 a & b: Women unemployment\***

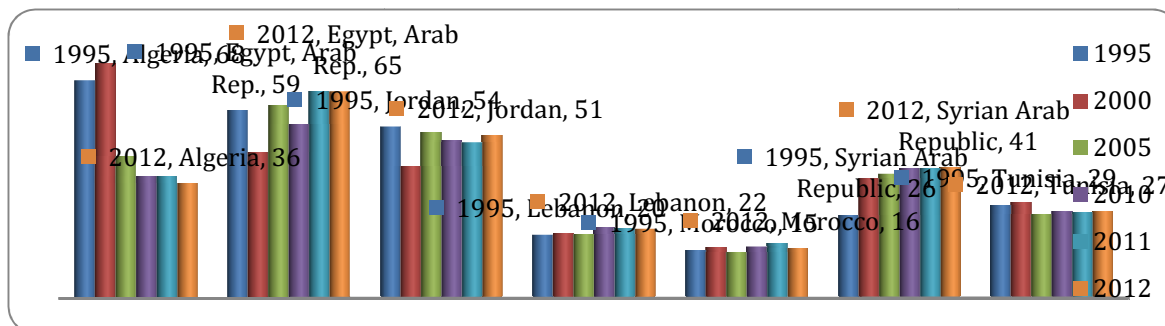


**Source:** World Bank Statistics. Compiled by Bihter Moschini, the Arab NGO Network for Development.

\* Unemployment refers to the share of the labor force that is without work but available for and seeking employment.

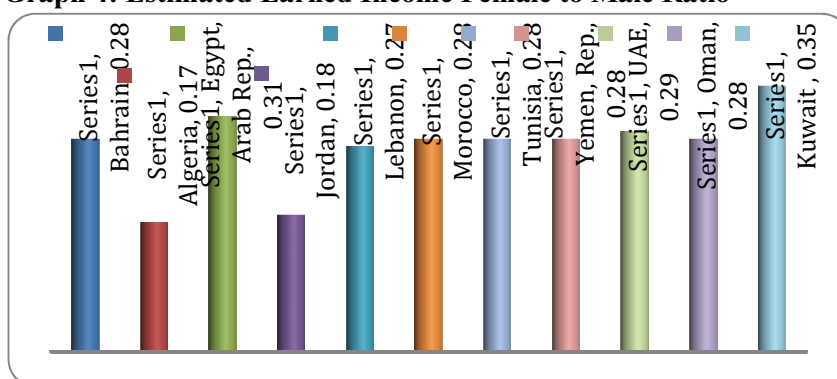
**Graph 3: Unemployment among young females (ages 15-24)\***





**Source:** World Bank. Compiled by Bihter Moschini, the Arab NGO Network for Development.  
 \* Youth unemployment refers to the share of the labor force ages 15-24 without work but available for and seeking employment.

**Graph 4: Estimated Earned Income Female to Male Ratio**



**Source:** World Economic Forum  
[http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR14/GGGR\\_CompleteReport\\_2014.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR14/GGGR_CompleteReport_2014.pdf)

Choices of women on the economic front have been narrowed down by a combination of factors emerging from the structural limitations of the economy, legislative gaps, as well as cultural and social norms<sup>49</sup>. The weight of these factors in shaping realities varies across different Arab countries.

Some of the main areas for action in support of advancing women’s rights in the region include empowering rural women. It is worth noting that the rural populations in Arab countries make up more than 40% of the overall population<sup>50</sup>.

On conditions of rural women, the CEDAW Committee had observed in several Arab countries the difficulties they face in gaining access to health care, social services, education, and in participating in decision-making. The Committee registered as well the limited access of rural women to credit and property/ land, which is often the result of prevalent custom and traditional practices. The Committee also observed the particular exposure of rural women to poverty and early marriage.

Some Arab countries have taken steps towards developing national strategies and integrated development programs in this area, in addition to establishing observatories, special funds, and centers to offer services and build capacities in this area<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> ESCWA (2014), “Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2013-2014”, page 63, available at <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/main.asp?division=edgd>.

<sup>50</sup> World Bank statistics (2013), available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/topic/agriculture-and-rural-development> (visited December 6, 2014).

<sup>51</sup> See: ESCWA report on the Committee on Women in its 60<sup>th</sup> session, Kuwait (2014).

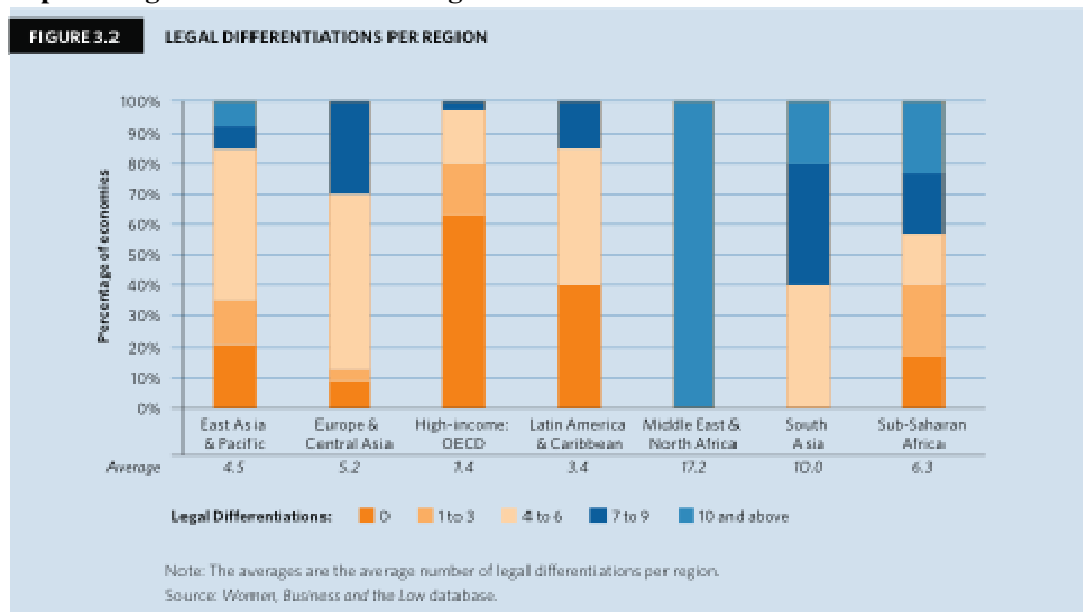
### 3. De jure discrimination

In terms of de jure discrimination, 14 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are found to have 10 or more legal differences in areas covered by the report “Women, Business, and the Law: Removing Restrictions to Enhance Gender Equality”<sup>52</sup>. Compared to other regions, such as Sub Saharan Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, and South Asia, the MENA region has the highest number of countries with such levels of discrimination registered in laws (See graph 5). Greater lack of parity is associated with lower labor force participation by women, according to the report.

In the area of marriage and family, the CEDAW Committee had documented several discriminatory laws regarding women, including laws related to inheritance, child custody and guardianship, and divorce, in addition to the requirement of a matrimonial guardian as a condition to enter marriage by adult women, permissibility of polygamy. On nationality, several Arab countries deny women the right to transmit their nationality to their children or restrict that to specific cases<sup>53</sup>.

Besides, the Committee had observed repetitively that most Arab countries lack comprehensive civil and criminal law provisions defining and prohibiting discrimination and violence against women, contrary to their obligations under the CEDAW. Discriminatory laws and provisions are evident in the Nationality Code, the Penal Code and the Code of Personal Status, the Criminal Code, and in some countries it extends to the Prisons Act, Education Act, and Private Sector Labour Act.

**Graph 5: Legal differentiation among men and women**



**Source:** World Bank/ International Finance Corporation, 2012. Women Business and the Law 2012. p.14. Available at: <http://wbl.worldbank.org>.

### 4. Violence against women

There is high prevalence of domestic violence against women and girls in countries of the Arab region, especially against women migrant domestic workers. Besides, these challenges are amplified given the significant increase in the number of women as displaced and refugee communities across the Arab region.

<sup>52</sup> World Bank and IFC (2014), “Women, Business, and the Law: Removing Restrictions to Enhance Gender Equality”.

<sup>53</sup> Such as the cases of divorce, death or statelessness of the father of the child under the case of Kuwaiti law.

Yet, one of the main depicted shortcomings in addressing violence against women is the lack of comprehensive laws, which combine action at the prevention level, as well as protection and compensation of victims, and criminalization of violence<sup>54</sup>. The CEDAW Committee had noted the lack of specific laws on violence against women in most Arab countries, including on domestic violence and marital rape. In addition, the Committee observed that statistics, research, and documentation on violence against women are often lacking. It also noted the lack of policy requiring medical personnel to monitor and report cases of domestic violence against women in many Arab countries.

The research by ESCWA indicates the limitations of criminal law systems in the region, including on the principle of due diligence<sup>55</sup>. It also points to the absence of referral systems in the majority of Arab countries, leaving victims of violence not properly protected.

In many Arab countries, the Penal Code exempts a rapist or a kidnapper from punishment if he subsequently marries the victim. The CEDAW Committee often notes its concern about the impunity that is too often enjoyed by the perpetrators of these acts as demonstrated by the very high number of complaints withdrawn. Furthermore, the Committee has been concerned by the impression provided by many States in the region that family relations prevail over the protection of women and the suppression of violence against women.

Some governments in the region have taken steps towards developing national strategies, preparing draft bills on domestic violence and legislation prohibiting trafficking in women, establishing referral systems of victims, and starting monitoring and follow-up centers, including complaints centers and shelters<sup>56</sup>. Some countries established specialized police units.

## **5. Participation in political and public life (See Annexes 8 and 9)**

The Inter-Parliamentary Union indicates a slight improvement in women's participation rate in parliaments of Arab countries, increasing from 13.8% in 2013 to 15.9% in 2014. However, the Arab region remains at the lowest rank in this regard compared to other regions<sup>57</sup>.

The results also hide discrepancies among Arab countries (see graph 6); for example while in Tunisia additional three parliamentary seats were occupied by women in 2014, in Egypt women's share of the national parliament dropped from 12% before the revolution to 2% afterwards due to abolishment of the quota system and the design of the electoral law<sup>58</sup>.

On participation in political and public life, the CEDAW Committee had observed that women are largely underrepresented in public and political life. This is often attributed to patriarchal attitudes regarding the role of women, the Committee adds. Some Arab countries have instituted a quota system. However, the participation of women in the governmental legislative bodies, judiciary, public administrations, diplomatic corps, and local government bodies is still limited<sup>59</sup>.

The Committee has noted its concern in some reports that women's representation in trade unions, as well as in managerial and decision-making positions, and on boards of directors in private economic sectors, continues to be low.

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<sup>54</sup> ESCWA (2014), "Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2013-2014", page 63, available at <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/main.asp?division=edgd>.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. See ESCWA E/ESCWA/ECW2013/IG.1/4

<sup>56</sup> ESCWA (2014), "Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2013-2014", page 63, available at <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/main.asp?division=edgd>.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. ESCWA (2014).

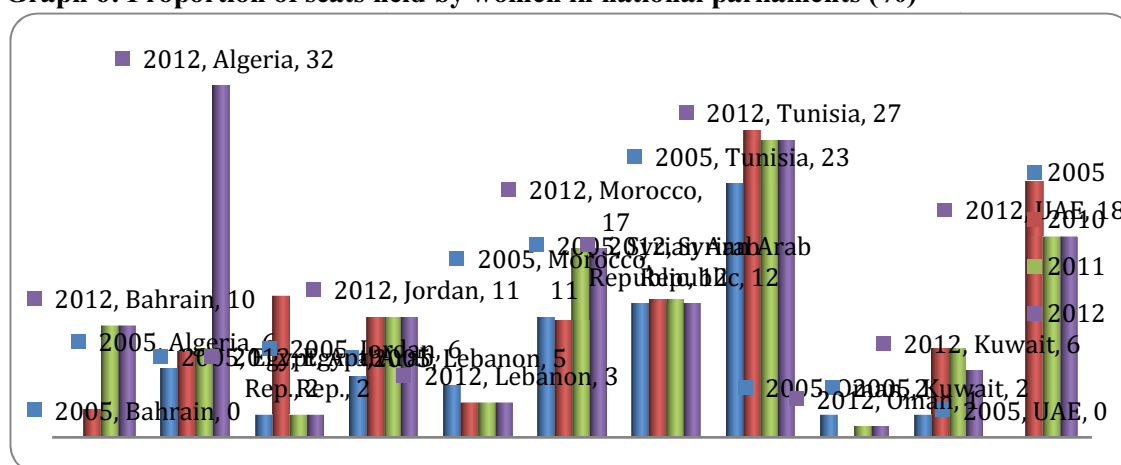
<sup>58</sup> Ibid. ESCWA (2014), page 59.

<sup>59</sup> In some countries, like Jordan, progress was achieved in women's participation in the diplomatic corps, which increased from 3.8% in the year 2000 to 17.9% in 2013. In Jordan as well, the proportion of female judges increased from 1.2% in the year 2000 to 15.5% in 2013. Source: ESCWA (2014), "Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2013-2014", page 64.

Some Arab countries have taken steps on gender mainstreaming in public policy making, including developing plans to integrate gender perspectives at all levels within public institutions and priority sectors for women, and establishing gender units and networks to build capacities of staff in these areas. Some tools used by Arab countries include gender mainstreaming in national and sectoral surveys, studies and public budgets, and establishment of sex-disaggregated statistical databases, and gender-sensitive budgets<sup>60</sup>. Some Arab countries have enacted the quota system in representative councils, specially local and provincial councils and parliaments as means to promote women's participation in decision-making.

Yet, the national machinery for the advancement of women, as observed by the CEDAW Committee, is often under-resourced or is not fully independent. In most countries there is lack of clarity about the impact of the activities of this machinery on gender equality.

**Graph 6: Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%)\***



**Source:** World Bank. Compiled by Bihter Moschini, the Arab NGO Network for Development

\* Women in parliaments are the percentage of parliamentary seats in a single or lower chamber held by women.

## 6. Stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes

On stereotypes and harmful practices, the CEDAW Committee had observed pervasive patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women in all reviewed countries.

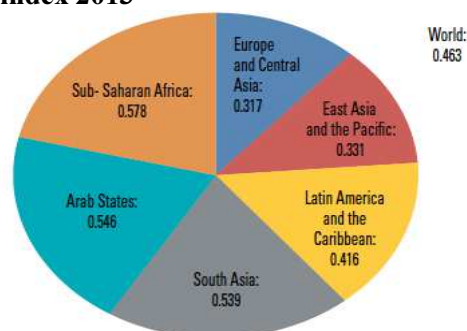
Stereotypes overemphasize the roles of women as wives and mothers, the Committee notes. In some countries of the region, the committee raised concerns on the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles, responsibilities, and identities of both women and men. The Committee notes as well the resurgence of adverse cultural norms and traditions in several Arab countries, which perpetuate discrimination against women and girls reflected in disadvantageous and unequal status in employment, decision-making, marriage and family relations, and violence against women.

It is worth noting that in 2013, the Arab region ranked 5<sup>th</sup> out of 6 regions in the world on the gender inequality index, reflecting the severity of inequalities on in the area of reproductive health, empowerment and labor market participation (See graph 7).

<sup>60</sup> ESCWA report on the Committee on Women in its 60<sup>th</sup> session, Kuwait (2014).



**Graph 7: Gender inequality index 2013\***



Source: UNDP, 2014.  
Note: The higher the GII value is, the more disparities there are between males and females.

Source: ESCWA “Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2013-2014”, page 57.

\*The gender inequality index 2013 is one of the human development indicators reported annually by the UNDP, which reflects gender-based inequalities. It captures the loss of achievements in a country due to gender inequality, focusing on three dimensions (1) reproductive health (2) empowerment and (3) labor market participation.

## **7. Addressing gender equality in a context of recurring conflicts, state crisis, and religious fundamentalism**

The realities of populations in the Arab region are influenced, directly or indirectly, by the recurrence of conflicts, including state crisis, wars, occupation, and implications of religious fundamentalism.

While the implications on people’s rights and broader political, social, and economic realities differ in these circumstances, they all leave women subjected to various forms of violence and exclusions. It is not expected that the region will be free of these cycles of violence in the short term; thus the manifestation of this violence will inevitably continue shaping the lives of women and men living in the region.

Four major categories of vulnerabilities could be depicted in the context of the Arab region; women living under military occupation, women living in areas controlled by radical fundamentalists and armed groups, women refugees, and internally displaced women including those who had to leave their homes demolished by occupation. Women victims of these realities could often fall outside the scheme of statistics, and policy-making could remain blind to their specific situations and needs. Accordingly, discussing the SDGs in the Arab region requires reflection on the specific nature of complex realities resulting from these contexts and the consequent needed interventions.

According to ESCWA<sup>61</sup>, the situation of women in refugee camps, especially the case of Syrian refugees, represents a dramatic setback in the struggle against discrimination and violence against women. For example, reports on cases of rape, early marriages, violence, and expansion in the number of households that became the sole responsibility of women have been prevalent upon the crisis in Syria. Indeed, this situation is a reflection of how women and their bodies remain the fore arena for manifestation of violent power struggles in the region.

<sup>61</sup> ESCWA, power point entitled “Presentation of the Arab Integrated Report on implementation of Beijing platform of Action +20”, slide 22, presented in the regional experts meeting on Beijing outcomes (Beirut, October 2014).

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women underlined in its general recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations the importance of ensuring “that immediate humanitarian assistance needs and protection requirements are complemented with long-term strategies in support of the socioeconomic rights and livelihood opportunities of returnee, internally displaced and refugee women, and enhanced leadership and participation, with a view to empowering them to choose durable solutions that suit their needs”.

The Committee also stresses that “obligations of State Parties to the CEDAW apply extraterritorially to persons within their effective control, even if not situated within the territory, and that State Parties are responsible for all their actions affecting human rights, regardless of whether the affected persons are within their territory”<sup>62</sup>.

#### **8. What changes in light of the peoples’ revolutions and uprisings in the Arab countries; was it a conjuncture in terms of women’s rights and gender equality and justice?**

Women in their multiple capacities and roles; as activists, students, protestors at the industry level and with labor groups, and as intellectuals, teachers, mothers, civil society mobilizers, among other capacities, have played various roles in making the revolutions and uprising a reality in the Arab region.

Peoples’ revolutions and uprisings have brought forward the complex questions tackling the interface between political governance, social and economic policies, and peoples’ right to development. The witnessed revolutions and transitions made it clear that the sustainability of democratic practice cannot be maintained without a dynamic role by citizens who actively practice their full citizenship, in its economic, social, political, as well as cultural dimensions. These include the fulfillment of women’s rights and gender equality and justice on all these fronts.

While aspirations and optimism for change swept across the region in light of the peoples’ uprisings and revolutions, the threats of a backlash against women’s rights quickly emerged after the fall of the regimes in several of the Arab countries, including Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. Developments in the political dynamics in the region revealed a complicated context, where women’s rights and struggles witnessed a significant backlash and spaces for taking forward women’s demands were quickly closing<sup>63</sup>.

The backlash against women’s rights and women’s groups was the forefront for the materialization of the backlash against the call for change in the region. Whether Islamist political parties that came to power or military regimes that struggled to take power back, they met over clamping down on attempts to situate women’s rights at the core of envisioning the democratic transitions being sought in several countries of the region. This was visually reflected in the streets through the assault on women’s activists<sup>64</sup>.

In the first round of elections after the uprisings, political parties of an Islamist identity won majority in both elections in Egypt and Tunisia, along that in Morocco. Women remained far from fair representation in most national parliaments (See Annex 8 for statistics in regard to women’s

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<sup>62</sup> Para. 15 of recommendation no. 30 of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. This obligation requires that States regulate non-State actors under the duty to protect. Accordingly, States must exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and ensure redress for the acts of private individuals or entities that impair rights enshrined in the Convention. The obligation extends to cover acts of national corporations operating extraterritorially. See para. 10 of recommendation no. 30.

<sup>63</sup> For more comments see: Kinda Mohamadieh (2012) “No Revolutions without Equality and Justice; Putting Women’s Rights at the Center of Rethinking Development Paradigms in the Arab Region”, published in Journal “Development” 2012, 55(3), (369-381), Society of International Development.

<sup>64</sup> Examples include: the ‘blue bra’ incident in Cairo, the assault on women’s groups marching on March 8<sup>th</sup> Day in Cairo, the assassination of female political activists in Libya, the harassment faced by female protesters in Yemen, and the widespread political arrest and imprisonment of women activists in Syria.

participation in national parliaments in Arab countries and women's political participation overall). Moreover, the role of religion in terms of defining women's roles and political, economic, and social status was expanding.

Even cases where positive developments took place, such as the establishment of the quota system at the party lists level for the October 2011 National Constituent Assembly (NCA) election in Tunisia, were manipulated. Many parties ignored the spirit of the law requiring inclusion of women on party lists by offering them the lowest positions on the lists.<sup>65</sup>

It is worth recalling that the narrative in support of women's rights and breaking the binary between religious and secular approaches to women's rights was appropriated and used by some Islamists groups that came to power in the region, such as 'Ennahda' party in Tunisia<sup>66</sup>. Within such context, women's rights became part of the political game whereby groups use it as a tool for gaining an image of liberalism, or for responding to the political ideology of their opposition, while not integrating gender equality in their practice nor internalizing the struggle for women's rights, equality, and justice in their core work programs<sup>67</sup>.

Despite the backlash against women's rights, evident in differentiated manners and intensities in various Arab countries, women actively took part in the constitutional debates both in Tunisia and Egypt. The drafting of the new constitutions was a site for struggle for women's rights and equality. In Yemen, in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, women took an active role in the national dialogue conference and the Constitutional Drafting Commission, where a proposal was endorsed to include an article in the constitution to guarantee 30 percent women among those serving in government<sup>68</sup>.

Overall for women in the Arab region, the revolutions did not materialize in opportunities to address traditional issues they have struggled against. To the contrary, there has been a threat of re-emergence of old struggles and there is a persistent need to focus on expanding spaces for women's demands vis a vis other political, social, and civic stakeholders. Moreover, the threat of relegating women to the margins of political, economic, and social life is still evident. Such trends could be witnessed in the history of women's role in revolutions and political changes in the region. In the case of Algerian revolution for independence (1954 to 1962), while women were in the leading lines of the revolution, they were quickly sidelined from the political foras.

Yet, the significance of the manifestation of citizen's power in the context of the revolutions and uprisings that took place in the region will necessarily allow for more spaces for struggle against patriarchal norms and religious fundamentalism, and towards women's rights and equality. This cause can be pursued more actively through garnering the fruits of citizens' empowerment, mobilization of activism in various forms in the region, and enhancing the role of women across unions.

#### **IV- Mobilizing the SDGs in pursuit of gender equality and justice for sustainable development in the Arab region**

The overview provided in previous sections indicates that addressing women's rights and gender equality and justice in the Arab region cannot be detached from the dynamic structural transformation

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<sup>65</sup> Mounira Charrad and Amina Zarrugh (2013) "The Arab Spring and Women's Rights in Tunisia", available online at: <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/09/04/the-arab-spring-and-womens-rights-in-tunisia/> (visited November 29, 2014), referencing the Associated Press 2011.

<sup>66</sup> Mounira Charrad and Amina Zarrugh (2013), Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> See: Yusry Mustafa 2011, referenced in Kinda Mohamadieh (2012) "No Revolutions without Equality and Justice; Putting Women's Rights at the Center of Rethinking Development Paradigms in the Arab Region", published in Journal "Development" 2012, 55(3), (369-381), Society of International Development.

<sup>68</sup> The presidentially appointed group assigned to write the constitution was one member short of reaching the minimum margin of 30 percent; this included only four women sitting on the 17-member panel. Source: "Despite a precarious 30 percent quota for women in government, Yemeni activists say women's rights have been sidelined", Al Jazeera, 2 September 2014.

of development models. This includes a rethinking of economic, social, and broader sustainable development policies in the countries of the region.

The kind of growth achieved in the Arab region during the last three decades evidently did not work for women and equality, nor did it work for a lot of other societal factions and groups. Despite economic growth and labor productivity gains in many Arab countries, the wage share of national incomes had either stagnated or declined<sup>69</sup>. Wage depression has been associated with the kind of labor market flexibilities adopted and the prioritization of competitiveness in export-oriented sectors. Consequently, countries achieved economic growth while poverty, unemployment, and inequalities were on the rise<sup>70</sup>. Inequalities, reflected in wage depression, increase in unemployment, and overall social vulnerabilities were increasing among regions (center and peripheries), among men and women, and the young and older populations.

Within this context, addressing women's rights cannot be undertaken in a piecemeal approach that focuses on specific indicators and marginalizes the broader policy context<sup>71</sup>. Systemic revisions of policies addressing women's rights and gender equality and justice ought to be integrated into the overall revision of policies and interventions aimed at building the productive sectors, eradicating poverty, creating decent employment, pursuing redistribution, reforming education, and setting comprehensive social protection policies.

Rethinking development models necessitates rethinking a variety of economic policy tools, including trade, investment, finance, tax, and budget allocations. These policies ought to be redesigned in support of nationally identified long-term dynamic development processes, and within a sequence that is aligned with the achieved levels of development and targeted development objectives. Moreover, rethinking development models invites a revision of regulatory frameworks and a rethinking of the mandates of public institutions.

This process requires internalization of the environmental constraints over economic growth and development, given the instability of climatic conditions resulting from centuries of industrial development in advanced economies and unsustainable production and consumption patterns. Women's vulnerability to the fall out from climate change is deepened given the challenging economic, social, and cultural contexts they face. Attending to women's livelihoods in various areas of development policy making, especially women involved in the agricultural sector, is essential. This includes designing climate change policies, decision-making, and initiatives with a gender responsive approach.

Central to this discussion is addressing the role of the state. As noted in previous sections, discussions on the role of the state resurfaced in light of the global financial and economic crises. In the Arab region, this discussion was also driven by the changes foreseen in light of the popular mobilizations and revolutions spreading across several Arab countries.

Often, the state in the Arab region took a passive strategy, to the contrary of an "activistic and idealistic" role<sup>72</sup>. This was part of adopting the approach to economic affairs that promoted hands-offs liberalization policies and shrinking role of the state, which has been the dominant approach since the 1980s. The revolutions and popular mobilizations in the Arab region were an opportunity to consider

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<sup>69</sup> Kinda Mohamadieh (2012) "No Revolutions without Equality and Justice; Putting Women's Rights at the Center of Rethinking Development Paradigms in the Arab Region", published in Journal "Development" 2012, 55(3), (369-381), Society of International Development.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, Mohamadieh (2012).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, Mohamadieh (2012).

<sup>72</sup> Reinert, 1999; referenced in Kinda Mohamadieh "No Revolutions without Equality and Justice: The Struggle for Women's Rights in Rethinking Development in the Arab region" (2012), published by Society for International Development.

possibilities for new economic models and societal contracts in the Arab countries<sup>73</sup>, which has at its heart the process of rethinking the role of the state.

While the proposed SDGs currently lack attention to several systemic issues that are essential to achieve structural transformation in developing countries like the Arab countries, they do provide important targets whose achievement could make a difference in women's lives across the region. The following section will comment on selected areas essential for sustainable development through gender-conscious structural transformation in the Arab region. Some of these areas are well addressed by the proposed SDGs. Others ought to be strengthened, including through deepening and clarifying the gender-focused dimensions, which is a task that could be pursued over the rest of the inter-governmental negotiations on the SDGs and the post-2015 development framework.

### **1. Productive capacities including the agricultural sector**

Arab economies have generally witnessed a regress in productive sectors. This has been manifested in stagnating shares of agriculture and manufacturing as a percentage of the gross domestic product (GDP) and a rapid expansion in low value added services activities, combined with a regress in the contribution of productivity to employment<sup>74</sup>.

Addressing the unemployment challenge in the Arab region cannot be detached from addressing the challenge of reviving the productive capacities and breaking away from the concentration on patterns of low added-value productivity and low job generation. Consequently, addressing women's right to work requires consciously situating this quest within broader policies that address structural barriers facing industrialization and revitalization of productive sectors and employment generation in the region.

Re-establishing the productive policies in the areas of agriculture, industry, and services would necessitate structural transformation that is only enabled through a deliberate and dynamic policy framework under which trade, investment, and finance are designed to support and expand policy space and not burden it<sup>75</sup>. This requires recognition that these policies are not gender neutral; they do not leave the same implications on men and women. States are required to monitor this differentiated impact, and to design gender-conscious policies that avoid structural discrimination and provide for elements that redress existing biases and inequalities.

Review of the conditions facing rural women from a human rights lens reveal the challenges they face in gaining access to health care, social services, education, and participation in decision making. Rural women suffer limited access to credit and property/ land, and are particularly exposed to poverty and early marriage<sup>76</sup>.

Policies related to the agricultural sector could highly influence the opportunities for enhancing women's participation in this sector, including the possibilities of changing their participation from a vulnerable status to a paid and decent work framework. In the broader context, the agriculture sector is central to the challenge of food security in the region, and women's wellbeing and work is central to this challenge.

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<sup>73</sup> See: Arab NGO Network for Development "Statement Tunisia 2011", Adib Nehmeh (2014) The Neo-patrimonial State and the Arab Spring, and ESCWA Report "The promises of Spring; Citizenship and Civic Engagement in Democratic Transitions".

<sup>74</sup> See: Arnim, R., Rada, C., Abdel Gadir Ali, A. & Abu-Ismaïl, K., 2011. Arab Development Challenges Background Paper 2011; Structural Retardation of Arab Economies: Symptoms and Sources. UNDP (United Nations Development Program), 2011.

<sup>75</sup> Kinda Mohamadieh (2012) "No Revolutions without Equality and Justice; Putting Women's Rights at the Center of Rethinking Development Paradigms in the Arab Region", published in Journal "Development" 2012, 55(3), (369-381), Society of International Development.

<sup>76</sup> See : summary of CEDAW Committee Reports in previous sections.

Redressing the decline in the agricultural sector given its social and economic contributions cannot be undertaken without an active role by the state in clarifying a longer-term policy for developing the sector. Such a strategy should address the legal framework needed to support productive investments in this sector. This legal framework should be respectful of the rights of the rural communities, and empowering small-scale farmers that are the majority of the communities involved in this sector in the Arab countries, and among which women's participation is concentrated.

The proposed SDG 2 entitled 'end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture' include as targets "doubling the agricultural productivity and the incomes of small-scale food producers, particularly women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets, and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment". This is an area of priority concern for women's rights and equality of opportunities in the Arab region.

Going forward, this SDG should be reflected in a process of reviewing agriculture policies in countries of the Arab region. This review ought to cover investment and trade rules related to agriculture policies, the role of the state as provider for public investments in the sector, and as a supporter for services essential for the enhancement of the role of women in this sector.

## **2. Wage and tax policies**

The draft SDGs have underlined the importance of full and productive employment and decent work for all women, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value (See proposed target 8.5, listed in Table 2 above). Unemployment is concentrated among women and young persons in the Arab region (See graphs 2 and 3).

Monitoring women's conditions in the region reveal very low participation in the formal labor sector, as noted in previous sections. The CEDAW Committee observations note the lack of guarantees in the legal framework for equality between women and men employees based on the grounds enumerated in International Labor Organization conventions.

Wage depression is not specific to women in the region, but women additionally suffer from a deep wage gap. In some cases, the gender wage gap rises to 50%<sup>77</sup>.

An employment and wage-led development strategy is essential to address women's rights and equality. It requires active distribution and income policies, including policies such as minimum wage legislation, strengthening social security systems, and respecting the space for union operations<sup>78</sup>.

The proposed SDG 5 includes a target to "recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate". This reflects a realization that economic dynamics depend on the availability of care work. Yet, unfair social organization of care (that keeps care as a domain of households and women) is at the basis of persistent gender inequalities<sup>79</sup>. Recognizing and valuing care and domestic work requires legislative and policy change throughout State systems<sup>80</sup>. Beyond its economic impact, fulfilling such a target would leave positive impact on restrictive social norms that work against women in the Arab region.

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<sup>77</sup> See: summary of CEDAW Committee Reports in previous sections.

<sup>78</sup> Women's Major Group Contribution for the Fifth Session of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals; Analysis and Key Recommendations on Sustained and Inclusive Economic Growth and Macroeconomic Policy Questions Based on Comments to the UNTST Issue Brief (25-27 November 2013).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. Women's Major Group.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. Women's Major Group

### *On fiscal and tax policies*

Fiscal policies, including revenue-raising tax policies and expenditure, are an essential tool for States to meet their human rights commitments, combat poverty, and fulfill the obligation to use maximum available resources to realize economic, social and cultural rights<sup>81</sup>.

Tax systems across the Arab region share similar facets, including low proportion of tax revenues as a percentage of GDP, which ranges between 10 and 17%, and a focus on reducing state deficit compared to a more comprehensive developmental approach to investing in economic and social progress<sup>82</sup>.

One of the most significant faults shared by tax systems in Arab countries is the focus on indirect regressive taxes, such as the general sales taxes on all basic and luxury goods without differentiation. This leads to a negative effect on poor families, by increasing the tax burden on these households and individuals<sup>83</sup>. Tax systems in the region are also characterized by absent or limited taxes on wealth, and discrepancies in tax brackets between individuals and corporations, whereby the latter benefit from significant exemptions.

The UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights have noted that “low levels of revenue collection have a disproportionate impact on the poorest segments of the population...particularly the case for people who experience multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage; for example, ... women are more likely to be directly dependent on social protection and health systems for at least some period of their lives because of their sexual and reproductive health and maternity-related needs. Women also serve as unpaid alternative care providers when public services are not adequately funded, increasing their time burden and limiting their opportunities to engage in paid work, education, training or leisure, while also negatively affecting their enjoyment of rights such as health, education, participation and social security”<sup>84</sup>.

In her analysis, the UN Special Rapporteur noted that “in order to redress structural inequalities, including gender inequalities, States should evaluate the differential impact of existing and proposed fiscal policies on different groups, in particular those who suffer from structural discrimination. For example, certain tax arrangements that directly or indirectly disincentivize women’s participation in the labour force or promote the male bread-winner family model could threaten women’s enjoyment of human rights”<sup>85</sup>.

Furthermore, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights points to the importance of reviewing tax structures, codes, and instruments for explicit and implicit gender bias and in order to ensure that they do not reinforce existing gender inequalities, including through their impact on unpaid care work<sup>86</sup>.

According to the UN Special Rapporteur, progressive tax systems, in particular direct taxes, are one of the most important tools available to Governments in addressing income inequality. Personal income tax is one of the most progressive and important kinds of tax in this regard. Indirect taxes, such as

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<sup>81</sup> See: The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 2. Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, A/HRC/26/28 (22 May 2014), Human Rights Council 26<sup>th</sup> session, available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/Fiscalandtaxpolicy2014.aspx>.

<sup>82</sup> See results from the regional strategy meeting on taxation and social justice in the Arab Region, organized by the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), in cooperation with Christian Aid, Beirut (21 and 22 March 2014). More details available at: [www.annd.org](http://www.annd.org).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. Arab NGO Network for Development.

<sup>84</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, A/HRC/26/28 (22 May 2014), Human Rights Council 26<sup>th</sup> session, available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/Fiscalandtaxpolicy2014.aspx>.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. A/HRC/26/28 (22 May 2014); See Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Articles 5 and 16.

<sup>86</sup> See: A/HRC/26/28 (22 May 2014).

those based on consumption (such as value-added or sales taxes) are typically regressive, because they generally constitute a larger proportion of the income of people living in poverty<sup>87</sup>.

Transferring and redistributing wealth through taxation has the potential to redress systemic discrimination, including that based on gender and to spur progress towards substantive equality.<sup>88</sup>

Under the proposed Goal 10 entitled “reduce inequality within and among countries”, target 10.4 explicitly calls for adopting “policies especially fiscal, wage, and social protection policies and progressively achieve greater equality”. Under the proposed SDG 17 addressing means of implementation, UN Member States addressed the importance of “strengthening domestic resource mobilization, including through international support to developing countries to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection”. These goals should integrate a gender-conscious approach.

Feminist economists have argued that a gender analysis of taxation must go beyond the principle of sameness to recognize that different treatment may be required to achieve substantive equality and that different treatment is not necessarily biased<sup>89</sup>. For example, tax policy could play an important role in incentivizing the transfer of property to women<sup>90</sup>. Tax systems could be developed with the conscious target of advancing agriculture and agricultural production to contribute to food security. Furthermore, assessing and correcting gender biases implicit in tax policy implies for instance implementing fiscal mechanisms for compensation of discrimination, such as tax exemption for people living in poverty due to gender identity<sup>91</sup>.

To fulfill the CEDAW obligations, such as the obligation under Article 5 to “modify social and cultural patterns of men and women to eliminate practices based on the idea of sex stereotyping or the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes”, States should design tax systems with the objective of transforming gender roles that are inequitable<sup>92</sup>.

For those purposes, it is important to analyze the impact of national tax policies on women, and the kind of gender roles and relations that tax policy re-enforces. States should conduct human rights assessments of fiscal policy periodically and with broad public participation, including analysis of the distributional consequences and tax burden borne by different income sectors and disadvantaged groups.

### **3. Comprehensive rights-based and gender-conscious social protection policies**

Social protection is addressed under multiple of the proposed SDGs. Goal 1 on “ending poverty in all its forms everywhere” sets a target for implementing “nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable”. Under Goal 5 on gender equality, target 5.4 addresses the recognition and value of unpaid care and domestic work through “the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate”. Under Goal 10 on reduction of inequality within and among countries, target 10.4 addresses the importance of adopting “policies especially fiscal, wage, and social protection policies and progressively achieve greater equality”.

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<sup>87</sup> See Isabel Ortiz and Matthew Cummins, “A Recovery for All”, UNICEF, 2012, p. 210.

<sup>88</sup> Ignacio Saiz, “Resourcing Rights: Combating Tax Injustice from a Human Rights Perspective”, in Aoife Nolan, Rory O’Connell and Colin Harvey (eds.), *Human Rights and Public Finance* (Oxford, Hart Publishing, 2013), referenced in UNSP report A/HRC/26/28.

<sup>89</sup> See: Diane Elson work on tax policy.

<sup>90</sup> See: Christian Aid Report (July 2014) “Taxing Men and Women: Why Gender is crucial for a fair tax system”. The report documents the experience of Nepal where a tax exemption was used to incentivise transfer of property assets to women, resulting in threefold increase in women’s land ownership between 2001 and 2009.

<sup>91</sup> A/HRC/26/28 (22 May 2014).

<sup>92</sup> See: Diane Elson, referenced in Christian Aid Report (July 2014) “Taxing Men and Women: Why Gender is crucial for a fair tax system”.



These targets address the broader social protection policies as well as the social protection systems and measures, including social protection floors. This approach reflects a recognition that social protection policies ought to extend beyond social protection floors and be designed in a comprehensive approach that reaches all.

According to the ILO, the majority of social security programmes are formal, employment-based and contributory. Within this context, women often face two related difficulties in accessing these programmes. First, women are often earning less than men when employed or are in the informal economy or unemployed. Women are also highly represented in sectors of employment that tend to be poorly protected by labour and social security legislation, such as agriculture. This is the case in the Arab region, as revealed from previous sections. Second, the care and domestic work undertaken by women remains not formally recognized, which often renders them ineligible to participate in social protection programmes. Thus, many women are not in a position to contribute to, and therefore benefit from, social insurance schemes<sup>93</sup>.

Women in the Arab region as evident from the statistics reviewed in previous sections, demonstrate lower rates of participation in the labor force and higher levels of unemployment compared to men, as well as more concentration in the informal economy. Consequently, they tend to be cut out from coverage of the contributory social security schemes<sup>94</sup> and fall outside the remit of the social protection schemes. For example, in Lebanon, households headed by women account to around 120,000 persons, which are the most exposed due to the weakness of the social protection policies, and schemes and the scope of coverage. In Morocco, 30% of women only benefit from the social insurance scheme, versus 70% of men<sup>95</sup>.

In the Arab region<sup>96</sup>, social protection systems have operated differently across Arab countries. Most middle-income oil importing Arab countries have been under fiscal stress. These governments have focused their policy on fiscal consolidation of the social protection schemes and less on developing comprehensive schemes that include preventive interventions. Some countries, like Algeria, Iraq, Tunisia and Mauritania, have widened the social protection budgets to offset some of the implications of economic liberalization<sup>97</sup>.

The approach is different as well in countries that currently, or for previous elongated periods, suffered from lack of security and conflicts and occupation- such as Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Palestine. Challenges in these countries range between lack of institutional structures to lack of resources, including variations among this category as well. There is also the category of countries that refrained from undertaking comprehensive rights-based reforms despite the availability of resources.

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<sup>93</sup> Source: Gender Equality and National Social Protection Floors, updated by Jonathan Evershed, Lou Tessier on 14.10.2013, available at: <http://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowTheme.action?jsessionid=e3867f34b7e92f213e1faffb6abe00188c2f2360adc42143ee45d3575d2f15b6.e3aTbhuLbNmSe34MchaRahaKb3z0?th.themeId=3646> (visited 11 December 2014). See also: ILO (2013) "Social Protection Floors and Gender Equality: A Brief Overview", ESS Working Paper no. 37, prepared by Lou Tessier, Maya Stern Plaza, Christina Behrendt, Florence Bonnet, Emmanuelle St- Pierre Guilbault.

<sup>94</sup> ILO (2013) "Social Protection Floors and Gender Equality: A Brief Overview", ESS Working Paper no. 37, prepared by Lou Tessier, Maya Stern Plaza, Christina Behrendt, Florence Bonnet, Emmanuelle St- Pierre Guilbault.

<sup>95</sup> Report by the Arab NGO Network for Development (2014) "Social Protection in the Arab countries: another dimension of the State's crisis", available in Arabic at [www.annd.org](http://www.annd.org).

<sup>96</sup> The 26<sup>th</sup> conference of the Arab Labor Organization (1999) set the Arab Strategy for Social Insurance, and the 39<sup>th</sup> conference of the Arab Labor Organization (2012) focused on social protection as means for social justice and security for future generations. Besides the international legal framework coining the right to social security, the Arab Charter for Human Rights, adopted in 2004, provided in Article 36 for "the right of each citizen in social protection including social insurance".

<sup>97</sup> Report by the Arab NGO Network for Development (2014) "Social Protection in the Arab countries: another dimension of the State's crisis", available in Arabic at [www.annd.org](http://www.annd.org).

The ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation (2012, no. 202)<sup>98</sup> aims at ensuring universal access to, at least, essential health care and basic income security throughout the life course. It is one of the approaches that could be mobilized in order to reach out to the uncovered and close the coverage gaps in the social security system, where women often fall<sup>99</sup>. Such national social protection floors ought to be part of a broader social protection system, which is designed within a broader framework of economic and social policies oriented towards redressing inequalities and achieving sustainable development<sup>100</sup>.

Representatives of Arab countries at the High Level meeting on “Implementing the MDGs for Women and Girls, Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in the Arab region: The Post 2015 Development Agenda” (February 2014) stressed the importance of working towards the “implementation of social justice policies, poverty eradication, and health coverage, recognizing their impact on the status of women”<sup>101</sup>. The declaration recognized the importance of developing “protection and social security policies in both the formal – public and private- and non-formal sectors, including social insurance and universal health coverage including compensation in the event of sickness, and maternity benefits, paid vacations, and benefits for pensions and disability, and compensation for the work injuries, unemployment benefits, and family allowances, and to ensure universal health coverage, especially for persons working in the informal sector”. Participants in the Arab High Level Forum on Sustainable Development (Amman 2014) had pointed out that a minimum social protection floor is affordable in most Arab countries.

In the Arab region, it is important to extend the vision and coverage of the social protection programs beyond citizens towards covering residents as well. This is especially relevant given the high rate of movement across the region, including- but not solely- as migrants and refugees. The discussion of social protection policies ought to address the possible cooperation at the regional level, especially in regard to availability of resources and schemes that balance out the burdens that countries receiving refugees are facing.

Designing social protection policies in Arab countries ought to extend beyond the social security provisions and social services offered through the tax system, since women are often not accessing the formal labor market and thus remain cut off this system. Non-contributory pension schemes could cover part of the gap in protection for women. Furthermore, active integration of incentives that promote more equal share of unpaid care work could set in place a path towards change and break away from the status quo. Examples of interventions that could help in this regard include paternity leave and incentives for more equitable share of parental responsibilities, and measures to recognize and calculate care work in pension entitlements.

#### **4. Investment and trade policies and commitments**

Designing development-focused trade and investment policies is central to designing an enabling environment for the SDGs and related means of implementation. It is also essential for allowing policy space at the national level, which is defined by the ability of governments to use macroeconomic and other policy tools, including trade, investment, and redistributive policies in different and dynamic ways in order to achieve their specific development goals.

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<sup>98</sup> Recommendation concerning National Floors of Social Protection. Adoption: Geneva, 101st ILC session (14 Jun 2012). Available at: [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:3065524](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:3065524)

<sup>99</sup> ILO documents some of these non-contributory social protection programmes, such as social pension programmes in Bolivia, Namibia, Nepal, and South Africa, conditional and non-conditional cash transfers in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Nicaragua, and South Africa, employment guarantee schemes in Ethiopia and India, enhanced access to social health protection in Rwanda and Thailand. See: ILO (2013) “Social Protection Floors and Gender Equality: A Brief Overview”.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. ILO 2013.

<sup>101</sup> Cairo declaration, resulting from High Level meeting on “Implementing the MDGs for Women and Girls, Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in the Arab region: The Post 2015 Development Agenda” (February 2014).

Achieving such an objective pre-supposes an active role by the State and state institutions in dynamically designing, implementing, monitoring and revising trade and investment policies in alignment with its development needs. This includes aligning these policies with building productive sectors and advancing industrialization capacities, which are closely correlated with addressing employment generation needs and redressing inequalities, including gender inequalities.

When discussing investment policy and foreign direct investment, policy makers in the Arab region, and advice coming from various international financial institutions, have often focused on the need to establish an 'enabling environment' to attract investment and improve the business climate. This approach often focused on promoting more investment zones where investors are credited with lower regulation and taxation, and on strengthening investor rights, relaxing labor market regulations, and signing on to an increasing number of investment protection and trade liberalization agreements (the latter sometimes include chapters on investment and investor protection rules)<sup>102</sup>. Investment rules established through the international investment agreements have had severe impact on the regulatory space and capacities of developing countries<sup>103</sup>. This approach remained blind to the gender differentiated impacts of investment policies.

For example several countries in the Arab region have considered establishing Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZ) as tools to attract FDI. Both Jordan and Egypt have established several of these zones<sup>104</sup>. Evidence showed that women employment was significant among the local labor employed in these zones. In Jordan, around 60% of the Jordanians working in QIZs have been females, who are often very young, aged between 18 and 30, mostly single with secondary school education and little or no previous work experience<sup>105</sup>. However, the QIZs have been associated with serious violations of workers' rights, including extended working hours, no pay, physical and sexual abuse, and deprivation of other basic human and labor rights<sup>106</sup>. Some analysts may present the high numbers of women participation in QIZ as a positive aspect. However, it is essential to question the kinds of jobs women are being offered and whether these trends of increased employment for women reflect improvements on the equality and justice front, or re-enforce discrimination and violation of rights that women suffer from.

Experience of developing countries, including Arab countries, reveal that it is not the quantity of foreign investment that matters for development purposes, but it is the ability of governments to steer investment policy and the investment legal framework to address national development priorities and needs. The Arab High Level Forum on sustainable development addressed the shortcomings of foreign direct investment in the Arab region, where the largest shares go into real estate and mining, rather than manufacturing or services, with very low returns in terms of job creation.

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<sup>102</sup> While signing bilateral investment treaties and free trade agreements have not been empirically linked to attracting higher levels of foreign direct investment, the rules established through these agreements have often hinged on the national policy space and limited the policy tools that allow for tightening the linkage between investment and development.

<sup>103</sup> One example of such constraints is the system of investor privileges and investor-state dispute settlement rules that ignore the responsibilities of investors and marginalizes the primacy of international human rights law. States have been increasingly realizing the importance of revising such international investment rules in order to remove obstacles to the 'right to regulate' in the public interest and to prioritize the realization of human rights and development over private profit-focused interests.

<sup>104</sup> Ghoneim, A. and Awad, T. 2009, Impact of Qualified Industrial Zones on Egypt and Jordan: A Critical Analysis. *United Nations Commission on Trade and Development*. P. 3. QIZ is a US trade initiative to promote the political goal of effective normalization between Israel and its Arab neighbours, Egypt and Jordan. QIZ were created based on the amendment of the US-Israel Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 1996 to extend the preferential duty free treatment for products of Israeli origin in the US market, to include exports from geographically designated areas in Egypt and Jordan given specific rules of origin requirements.

<sup>105</sup> Ghoneim & Awad, 2009, p. 20. Ghoneim and Awad explain that these numbers can be explained by the fact that: "activities are concentrated in garment and apparel sector, which is apparently better suited for female skills and or deemed less desired by Jordanian males".

<sup>106</sup> "Statement On Labor Strikes in the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ)", 25 April 2011.

Available at: <http://www.menaobservatory.org/statement-on-labor-strikes-in-the.html> (Accessed on 8th June 2012) & "Jordan: Report notes regular abuse of workers in Qualified Industrial Zones", 16 May 2006. Available at: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/26884/JORDAN-Report-notes-regular-abuse-of-workers-in-Qualified-Industrial-Zones> (Accesses on 8th June 2012)

It is imperative that investment policy frameworks in Arab countries be revised from a gender perspective to deepen the understanding of how national investment policies and foreign direct investment affect women's roles at home and in the labour market, and how gender affects foreign investment and its contributions to development<sup>107</sup>.

Overall, the discussion around the linkages between investment and trade policies to development should not remain gender blind, especially in a context where development challenges and inequalities are disproportionately concentrated among women. It is important to monitor gender differential impacts of trade and investment policies, which should be subject to ex-ante and ex-post facto gender, human rights and environmental impact assessments.

Furthermore, linking investment and trade policies to a development strategy that gives due consideration to women's rights and gender equality and justice necessitates re-orienting the management of foreign trade and investment to support such processes, including investing in sectors that are core to women's economic empowerment. It necessitates thinking the various roles of public and private investments, differentiating between 'productive' and 'unproductive' investments, and rethinking regulatory frameworks and related institutions in support of broader gender-conscious development goals.

The post-2015 development framework ought to be the scene for questioning and evaluating trade and investment policies both nationally and on a multilateral level, based on their contribution to the proposed development goals and gender equality and justice. Currently, the proposed SDGs and related targets do not reflect such an approach. It is important to pursue this discussion under the process of negotiating means of implementation and financing for sustainable development that will be undertaken in 2015.

#### *a. Government procurement as a public investment policy*

According to the World Bank, public procurement in the MENA countries account for 15 to 20% of the GDP<sup>108</sup>. Government procurement policies are important development and industrialization tools, through which the state could support the growth of local producers and economic actors. Developing countries often use this market to give opportunities to domestic industries, small and medium sized enterprises and other small producers, and marginalized groups such as socially weaker classes and women producers<sup>109</sup>.

There are multiple attempts to liberalize this sector, opening it up to foreign providers and multinational companies, through rules established under the umbrella of the World Trade Organization and free trade agreements.

Target 12.6 under the proposed SDGs provides for promoting "public procurement practices that are sustainable in accordance with national policies and priorities"<sup>110</sup>.

For the purposes of serving women's rights and gender equality and justice, government procurement ought to be addressed as a development policy area that should be consciously designed to offer

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<sup>107</sup> See: Braunstein, E., 2006. Foreign Direct Investment, Development, and Gender Equity: A Review of Research and Policy. United Nations Institute for Social Development.

<sup>108</sup> See: <http://blogs.worldbank.org/governance/three-reasons-procurement-essential-development> and [http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/MNA/Why\\_Reform\\_Public\\_Procurement\\_English.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/MNA/Why_Reform_Public_Procurement_English.pdf).

<sup>109</sup> See: "Conflict zones in the SDG negotiations", a report by Ranja Sengupta (New Delhi), Bhumika Muchhala (New York), and Mirza Alas (Heredia, Costa Rica), Third World Network (6 August 2014).

<sup>110</sup> This target was a scene of conflict and controversy through the negotiations. In the zero draft released on 2 June, target 12.11 read: "by 2030 increase the share of sustainable products and services in public procurement, including through competitive and transparent procurement processes". Source: "Conflict zones in the SDG negotiations", a report by Ranja Sengupta (New Delhi), Bhumika Muchhala (New York), and Mirza Alas (Heredia, Costa Rica), Third World Network (6 August 2014)

opportunities for women economic actors and support their integration in domestic economic cycles. Accordingly, government procurement ought to remain an active policy tool in the hands of governments, which could be utilized as a form of public investment intervention.

#### **V- Concluding notes: Lessons learned and recommendations for the way forward**

Realizing women's rights and gender equality and justice in the Arab region is essential and core to the process of realizing democratic practice and transformation towards economic and social justice in the region.

In the way forward towards finalizing the SDGs, it is essential to restrain regressive steps that would water down the principles and commitments previously undertaken by States in the area of women's rights. Mainstreaming gender in finalizing the SDGs and defining the post-2015 development framework requires reaffirming the political will to achieve progress on these goals, and to align development policies and efforts with these commitments.

Furthermore, the post-2015 development framework should serve towards actively re-enforcing the human rights agenda, and strengthening mechanisms of work to progressively achieve human rights obligations. Embedding the SDGs, including Goal 5, in a human rights approach should be strengthened.

The rights-focused approach and language provide a context and a framework, invokes states' legal obligations, underscores that certain values are non-negotiable, brings a degree of normative certainty, and makes use of the agreed interpretations of rights that have emerged from decades of reflection, discussion and adjudication<sup>111</sup>. Most important, rights language recognizes the dignity and agency of all individuals and is intentionally empowering.

Moreover, half of the proposed goals currently lack references to gender equality and women's human rights. Integrating a crosscutting approach to women's rights throughout the SDGs would be a complementary re-enforcement of the standalone goal.

The added value of the SDGs agenda will rest to a large extent with operationalizing the means of implementation associated with the goals, including the commitments on financing for sustainable development that should emerge out of the 2015 Financing for Development Summit to be held in Addis Ababa<sup>112</sup>. This negotiations should be conscious of the gender differentiated dimensions and impacts of global and national policies central to financing for development, including trade and investment policies.

In principle, achieving sustainable progress on women's rights and gender equality front requires embedding the goals in a broader framework of structural transformations at the economic, social, cultural, and political levels. States, and other stakeholders, ought to recognize and act upon the interconnected nature of risks and opportunities in the development framework that is being sought, and the need for a multi-faceted intervention at the economic, social, and political levels as well as at the national and global levels.

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<sup>111</sup> Comments by Philip Alston (November 2014). Opinion piece entitled "The two words that scare the World Bank"; Philip Alston is the U.N. Human Rights Council's special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, available at: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/philip-alston-the-world-bank-treats-human-rights-as-unmentionable/2014/11/07/9091dafa-65da-11e4-9fdc-d43b053ecb4d\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/philip-alston-the-world-bank-treats-human-rights-as-unmentionable/2014/11/07/9091dafa-65da-11e4-9fdc-d43b053ecb4d_story.html) (visited November 16, 14).

<sup>112</sup> For more information, see the report of the intergovernmental committee of experts on sustainable development, available at: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/intergovernmental/financecommittee>, and the comments from the civil society organizations (Ex: Rightingfinance position "A human rights assessment of the intergovernmental committee of experts on sustainable development financing report" available at: <http://www.rightingfinance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/full-response.pdf>)

Furthermore, given the nature of persistent and recurring occupation, conflicts, and state crisis in multiple countries of the Arab region, States should ensure that humanitarian assistance to cover the immediate needs and protection requirements is complemented with long-term strategies in support of the socioeconomic rights and livelihood opportunities of women impacted by these conditions.

The role of the state is essential in preserving and adequately utilizing policy space through dynamic design of national economic, social, and environmental policy tools. This is closely interlinked with the capacity to rethink the role of existing national institutions. It is vital to consider the place of institutions within development policies and in regard to the fulfillment of women's rights, including how they work, what policy directions they propagate, and why they work the way they do.

The discussion of the role of institutions in regard to women's rights for sustainable development should extend beyond focusing on what is termed indicators of good governance such as the 'rule of law', 'quality of business regulations', 'efficiency', 'corruption', 'transparency' and 'participation'. A successful role of public institutions requires clear mandates that are development-focused, capable of operationalizing gender-conscious policies, and subject to questioning and accountability.

In regard to gender equality and women's rights, one of the main institutional tasks remains collecting sex-disaggregated data, a pre-requisite for defining and implementing gender-conscious policies and programmatic interventions. This task should be mainstreamed within national statistics offices in order to establish for a gender-conscious approach to national planning systems and to improve the national reporting on policies and sustainability.

Moreover, the state ought to undertake an active role at the global level, within international institutions such as the International Financial Institutions, United Nations, World Trade Organization, among other multilateral institutions and foras, seeking adequate and enabling rules and policy approaches.

One of the fundamental tasks in the Arab countries entails reforms in the legislative frameworks, including constitutions. This is essentially a process requiring political will and commitment to women's rights and gender justice as a fundamental element in the project of the democratic developmental state. This task should be undertaken with a view towards reflecting the commitments taken by governments in the area of women's rights and gender equality, redressing de jure discrimination against women, and instituting positive interventions that help address discrimination resulting from gendered social, cultural, and religious norms.

Effectively reflecting gender considerations in national policies requires a gender-conscious approach to the design of tax policies and national budgets. Tax policy and structures could play a role in terms of redistribution of resources and facilitating women's access to resources. Budget allocations could play a role in boosting opportunities for fulfilling women's rights and gender equality, including through investing in social protection policies that would expand coverage of women, and through investing in sectors where women's employment is concentrated.

### ***Looking beyond simplified indicators***

Deepening and effectuating accountability mechanisms for the post-2015 period requires extending the monitoring of the SDGs to cover economic and social policies that form the contextualizing environment of the SDGs. This requires looking beyond simplified indicators.

Establishing women's rights and gender equality and justice as core elements in policy making requires re-establishing the indicators and pillars upon which policy and related processes are evaluated. It also entails addressing issues of global governance through a framework that questions the global economic governance structures from a rights-focused approach. Indeed, the SDGs and post-2015 development framework ought to be a scene for actively monitoring and questioning global

policy issues that are core to shaping the enabling environment for achieving gender-conscious development goals<sup>113</sup>.

Such an approach to monitoring the SDGs requires thinking beyond numerical indicators, and instead developing a framework to monitor, capture, and redress contradictions between the set goals and policies adopted nationally and globally. A hybrid approach capturing quantitative trends as well as qualitative analysis would be required to capture contradictions between the policy framework and the targeted goals. Monitoring each of the SDGs should include monitoring the international aspects and policies, including economic and financial governance, that could influence or hinder the process of achieving that goal.

Furthermore, it is important to incorporate the human rights approach as a framework to monitor and evaluate the SDGs. This includes establishing linkages with existing human rights accountability mechanisms at the global level, such as the Universal Periodic Review, and strengthening them as tools for oversight on national and international economic policy making.

Complementary accountability mechanisms could be developed at the regional level. This could include consolidating the space of the Arab High Level Forum and the Arab Economic and Social Summit for review of progress on the SDGs agenda.

Pursuing and monitoring the SDGs requires cooperation among various ministries at the national level and mechanisms that would allow for an active role by civil society organizations, including women's groups and women labor unionists.

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<sup>113</sup> See: Comments at: "Dialogue with Civil Society: A Forward Looking Discussion on Post-2015 Agenda", delivered by Kinda Mohamadieh- Arab NGO Network for Development (1 July 2013); organized by UN-NGLS.

## ANNEXES:

### Annex 1: Social Watch Gender Equality Index

Social Watch computes a value for the gender gap in each of the three areas in a scale from 0 (when for example no women is educated at all and all men are) to 100 (perfect equality). The GEI, in turn, is the simple average of the three dimensions. In Education, GEI looks at the gender gap in enrolment at all levels and in literacy; economic participation computes the gaps in income and employment and empowerment measures the gaps in highly qualified jobs, parliament and senior executive positions.

The East Asia and Pacific region is third in the list with an average GEI value of 69. Closely behind are the regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, with average GEI of 68, and Central Asia with average GEI of 64. Sub-Saharan Africa comes next with average GEI of 52. At the bottom of the list are the regions of Middle East and North Africa with average GEI of 43, and South Asia with average GEI of 39.

Region	Education	Empowerment	Economic Activity	GEI 2012
Central Asia	0,91	0,24	0,74	0,63
East Asia and the Pacific	0,95	0,42	0,70	0,69
Europe	0,98	0,48	0,73	0,73
Latin America and the Caribbean	0,98	0,40	0,66	0,68
Middle East and North Africa	0,56	0,14	0,23	0,31
North America	1,00	0,448	0,71	0,73
South Asia	0,67	0,14	0,36	0,39
Sub-Saharan Africa	0,64	0,29	0,62	0,52
Global Average	0,82	0,28	0,57	0,56

### Annex 2: CEDAW Committee Recommendations (included in a separate sheet)

### Annex 3: Universal Periodic Review Process: Recommendations received on women's rights as part of the UPR reviews of Arab countries (additional detailed charts included in separate sheets)

Reviewed countries	Number of recommendations received on women's rights as a proportion of the overall number of recommendations received	Percentage
Lebanon	24/147 recommendations (ranks second issue after international instruments)	16.33
Egypt	25/171 recommendations (ranks second issue after international instruments)	14.62
Tunisia	34/193 (1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle) (ranks second issue after international instruments)	17.62
Jordan	91/291 (1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle)	31.27



	Ranks first issue	
Morocco	43/176 (1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle together) Ranks first issue	24.43
Bahrain	30/188 (1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle) Ranks third issue	19.68
Yemen	94/344 (1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle) Ranks first issue	27.33
Qatar	32/112 (1 <sup>st</sup> cycle only) Ranks first issue	28.57
Algeria	53/206 (1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle) Ranks first issue	25.73
Iraq	29/179 (1 <sup>st</sup> cycle only) Ranks first issue	16.2
KSA	96/348 Ranks first issue	27.59

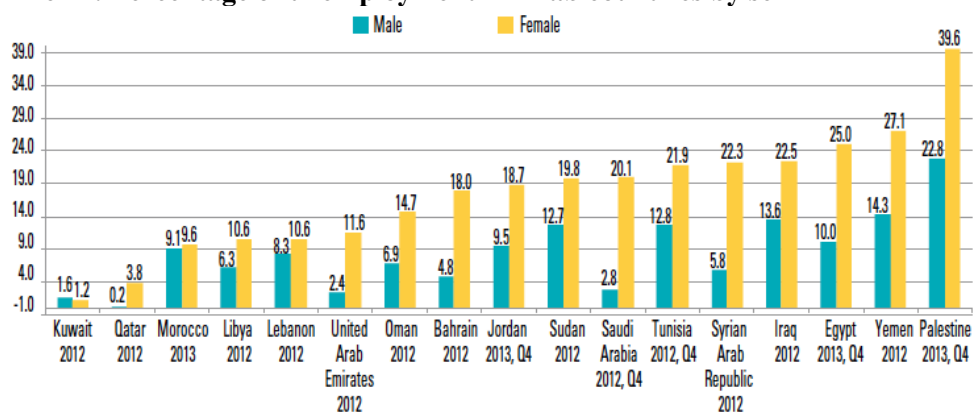
Source: Compiled by Bihter Moschini, Arab NGO Network for Development. Compilation from database available at [www.upr-info.org](http://www.upr-info.org)

<b>Universal Periodic Review Process</b>		
<b>Country</b>	<b>Issue raised in relation to women's rights</b>	<b>Recommendations accepted by the country</b>
Lebanon	Women's rights institutional mechanisms	Continue endowing its National Commission for Women Affairs with public policy making and decision making powers
Egypt	Women's rights institutional mechanisms	Consider strengthening the Complaints Office of the National Council for Women and the helpline of the National Council for Children, building on past experience and with a view to strengthening the role and effectiveness of these two institutions throughout the Republic
Lebanon	Legislative amendments	Amend the personal status laws in line with CEDAW, to ensure that women are treated in the same way as men in issues related to child custody, inheritance and divorce
Egypt	Legislative amendments	Amend the Personal Status Law and Penal Code to guarantee equal rights for women and provide guarantees that domestic violence will be effectively prosecuted
Tunisia	Adoption of strategy/national plan of Action	Put in place a comprehensive strategy to eliminate patriarchal attitudes and negative stereotypes of women in the Tunisian society as well as eliminate discrimination against women that still exists in the national legislation, in particular concerning marriage, child custody, guardianship, as well as effective and equal access to justice
KSA	National Plan of Action	Develop a comprehensive national action plan for the promotion of gender equality, with a view to addressing key challenges facing women
Jordan	Trafficking in women	Pay attention to the trafficking in women and children for sexual and other exploitative purposes, preventing and combating such trafficking, also by means of including in the Human Trafficking Act a definition of trafficking, and ensure that trafficked women and girls have access to quality medical care, counselling and shelter

Morocco	Trafficking in women	Step up effort to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and trafficking in women and children, including by ensuring that all allegations of trafficking and sexual abuses are investigated and the perpetrators are brought to justice and punished
Jordan	Honour crimes	Amend the Penal Code with the provisions to ensure that perpetrators of honour crimes do not benefit from reduction of penalty and that these crimes are treated as other violent crimes in regard to investigation and prosecution
Iraq	Honour crimes	Consider a legal reform in order to address also in an effective way the so-called honour killings or crimes
Morocco	Maternal mortality rate	Continue, with the assistance from the relevant international organizations such as the WHO, to enhance access to health care by women and further reduce the maternal mortality rate, especially in the rural areas
Iraq	Maternal mortality rate	Strengthen its efforts in the area of development as well as the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals MDGs especially, concerning the enrolment at all levels of education, the realization of the right to food and the decrease of maternal and child mortality rates
Bahrain	Awareness raising campaigns on women's rights	Carry-out awareness raising campaigns on the importance of adopting a unified law on the family and increasing the minimum age for marriage
Algeria	Awareness raising campaigns on women's rights	Introduce efficient legislative and policy measures that would promote gender equality and eliminate gender-based discrimination, including conducting appropriate awareness-raising campaigns to combat traditional negative stereotypes and attitudes on the role of women in society, with particular focus on rural areas
Yemen	Equality	Continue efforts made to upgrade the status of Yemeni women to one of equality with that of men, including with regard to their representation in society and politics, their access to education and their treatment before the law.
Bahrain	Equality	Continue its efforts to empower women economically, politically and socially, and to take all necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women
KSA	Male guardianship	Proceed with the promulgation of the necessary laws in order to abolish the male guardianship system while, in parallel, the stereotypes affecting women's enjoyment of their rights, including their personal status law, should be remedied
Oman	Male guardianship	Intensify gender efforts, amending relevant legal provisions which establish subordination to male guardianship and adopt a comprehensive gender policy and awareness campaigns aimed at all areas of society and public administration

Source: Compiled by Bihter Moschini, Arab NGO Network for Development. Compilation from database available at [www.upr-info.org](http://www.upr-info.org). Compilation from database available at [www.upr-info.org](http://www.upr-info.org)

#### Annex 4: Percentage of unemployment in Arab countries by sex

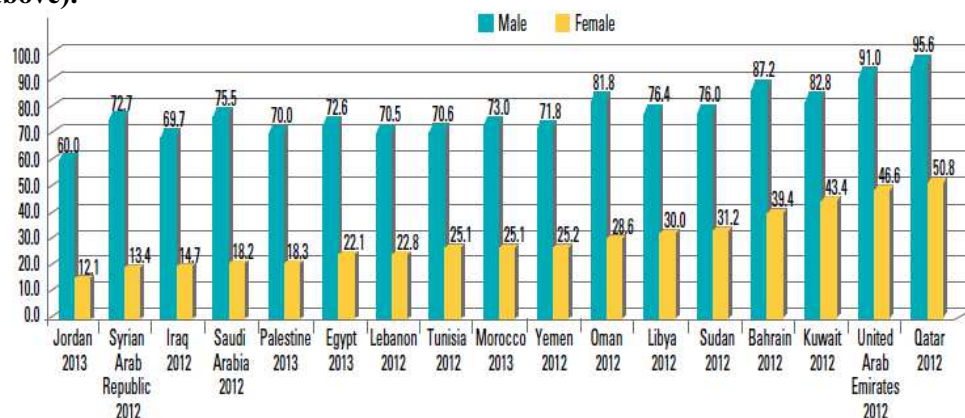


Sources: International Labour Office, 2012, and national data sources for the following countries: Egypt, Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, 2014; Jordan, Department of Statistics, 2014; Morocco, High Commission for Planning, 2013; Palestine, Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014; Saudi Arabia, Central Department for Statistics and Information, 2013c; and Tunisia, National Institute of Statistics, 2013.

Note: The figures reflect the most recent available data.

Source: ESCWA (2014), “Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2013-2014”.

#### Annex 5: Labor force participation rate by sex (Percentage of the population aged 15 years and above).



Sources: ILO, 2012, and national data sources for the following countries: Egypt, Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, 2014; Jordan, Department of Statistics, 2014; Morocco, High Commission for Planning, 2013; Palestine, Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014; Saudi Arabia, Central Department of statistics and Information, 2013c; and Tunisia, National Institute of Statistics, 2013.

Note: The figures reflect the most recent available data.

Source: ESCWA (2014), “Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2013-2014”.

## Annex 6: Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector

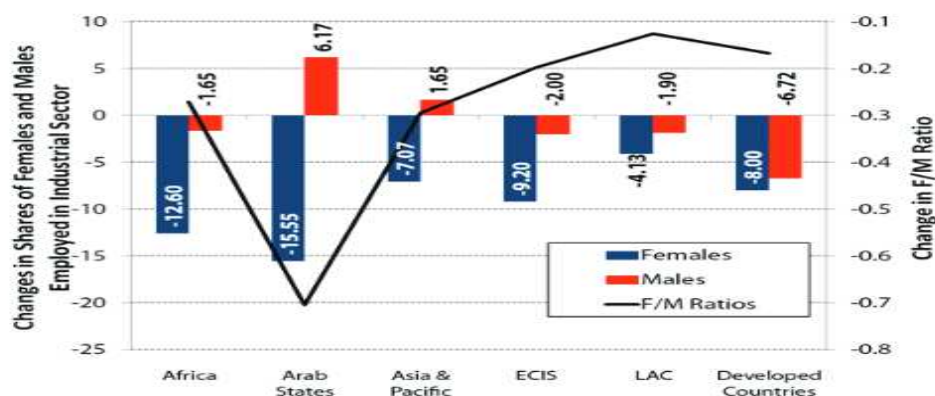
Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector



Source: Arab MDG report: facing challenges and looking beyond 2015, p. 23.

## Annex 7: Changes in regional female and male shares employed in industrial sector 1990 to 2009

Changes in regional female and male shares employed in industrial sector, 1990 to 2009



Source: UNDP 2014;

[http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Inclusive%20development/Humanity%20Divided/HumanityDivided\\_Ch5\\_low.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Inclusive%20development/Humanity%20Divided/HumanityDivided_Ch5_low.pdf)

## Annex 8: Women in national parliaments, February 2013 and June 2014

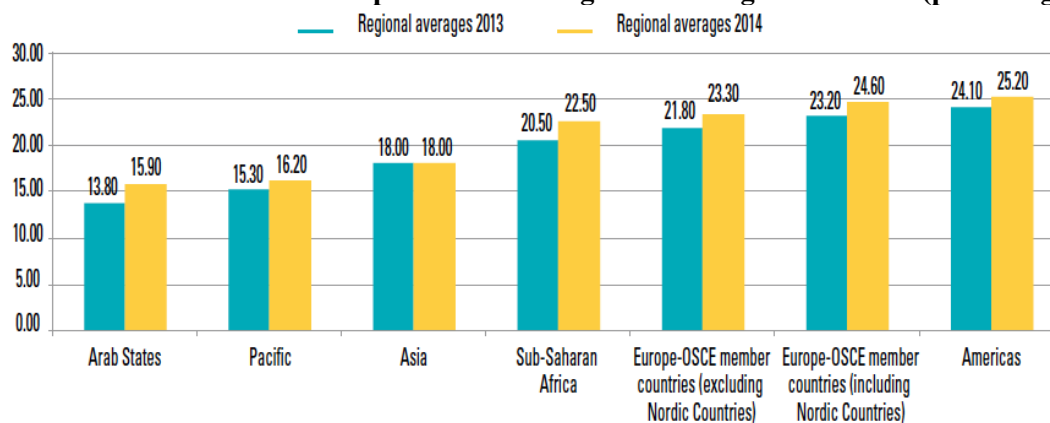
Classification	February 2013				June 2014			
	Lower or single House				Lower or single House			
	Women				Women			
Country	Elections	Seats*	Number	Share (%)	Elections	Seats*	Number	Share (%)
Algeria	5 2012	462	146	31.60	5 2012	462	146	31.60
Tunisia	10 2011	217	58	26.70	10 2011	217	61	28.10
Iraq	3 2010	325	82	25.20	3 2010	328	83	25.30
Sudan	4 2010	354	87	24.60	4 2010	354	86	24.30
Saudi Arabia	1 2013	151	30	19.90	1 2013	151	30	19.90
United Arab Emirates	9 2011	40	7	17.50	9 2011	40	7	17.50
Morocco	11 2011	395	67	17.00	11 2011	395	67	17.00
Libya	7 2012	200	33	16.50	7 2012	200	33	16.50
Djibouti	2 2008	65	9	13.80	2 2013	55	7	12.70
Jordan	1 2013	150	18	12.00	1 2013	150	18	12.00
Syrian Arab Republic	5 2012	250	30	12.00	5 2012	250	30	12.00
Bahrain	10 2010	40	4	10.00	10 2010	40	4	10.00
Kuwait	12 2012	65	4	6.20	7 2013	60	1	1.7
Lebanon	6 2009	128	4	3.10	6 2009	128	4	3.10
Comoros	12 2009	33	1	3.00	12 2009	33	1	3.00
Egypt	11 2011	508	10	2.00	Parliamentary election expected end 2014			
Oman	10 2011	84	1	1.20	10 2011	84	1	1.20
Yemen	4 2003	301	1	0.30	4 2003	301	1	0.30
Qatar	7 2010	35	0	0.00	7 2013	35	0	0.00

Source: IPU. Data available from <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif010614.htm> (last accessed 1 September 2014).

\* Number of seats currently filled in national parliaments.

Referenced in: ESCWA (2014), “Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2013-2014”.

## Annex 9: Women’s Political Representation: Regional Averages 2013-2014 (percentage)



Abbreviation: OSCE, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Source: IPU. Data available from <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm> (last accessed 1 September 2014).

Note: The averages reflect both single/lower and upper houses combined.

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