



VOICES OF WOMEN FROM THE ARAB STATES



UN Women Regional Office for Arab States would like to thank our partners for their dedication in realizing the publication on 'Voices of Women from the Arab States.' We also greatly appreciate the unwavering support of the country offices in the Arab States to this publication. Finally, we would like to thank the women in the region, who strive every day to realize their rights. Through their valuable contributions, the voices of women from the Arab states are being heard.

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FOREWORD



Women in Cairo, Egypt, line up to vote in the 2012 election.

Historically, across the Middle East and North Africa, women were catalysts for change, calling for democracy, equality and freedom. While chanting their national anthems, they stood side by side with men, survived detentions, suffered from beatings, and cared for each other and the wounded.

In their demand for democratic rule, inclusivity — and equal and meaningful participation in the future of their nations and in the transitional process — was, and still is, the epitome of their aspirations. An Egyptian woman voter during the 2012 presidential elections summarized this feeling: “We are pinning our hopes on whoever will win the presidency. It will not be an easy presidential term, but we are not going to be passive onlookers any more. We will let our voices be heard, disagree and have our say to improve our quality of life.”

Despite availing unprecedented opportunities for gender equality, the transitional phase also led to women finding themselves on the side lines in

decision-making processes; their prominent role in the uprisings has not been reflected in their political representation. The struggle for equality, therefore, goes far beyond the Tahrir squares of the region, and will continue far beyond the so called Arab spring.

Our work, as UN Women, is very much immersed in the day-to-day changes, and in the small steps women take towards empowerment, as such we are still able to share success stories of UN Women’s work towards more gender equal societies in the region.

UN Women works with women from all walks of life to ensure that they can participate as full citizens and effectively contribute to their societies

“...we are not going to be passive onlookers any more. We will let our voices be heard, disagree and have our say to improve our quality of life.”

— An Egyptian woman voter during the 2012 presidential elections.

as leaders. To this end, UN Women trained female politicians, parliamentarians and policy makers to be better equipped in their assumed responsibilities. Reaching out to the most vulnerable women, UN Women also worked to ensure the distribution of national ID cards in Egypt enabling women to access polls, vote, seek membership in political parties, and access government services.

Keeping an eye on the transformation of the socio-political and economic framework in the region, UN Women developed strategies to increase women's earning potential. In Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, the occupied Palestinian territory and the United Arab Emirates, UN Women's interventions were diverse and included salaried jobs, micro- and small enterprises, and agricultural production. In Egypt and Jordan, UN Women supported labour legislation reform and worked with the private sector to implement the Gender Equity Seal (which focuses on gender equality in firms and their supply chains).

Despite improved conditions, violence against girls and women — honour killings, trafficking, sexual harassment and domestic violence — are still rampant. Statistically, it is estimated that one out of five girls in the region—and one out of three in Yemen—will be married before the age of 18. Simultaneously, while female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is declining in many countries, some are still seeing rates as high as 90 percent. A worrying new form of violence is on the rise in the public sphere in which women are attacked, abused or sexually assaulted simply because they are women.

Combatting domestic violence remains at the core of UN Women interventions, including support at policy development and service delivery level. Surveys and studies were conducted on the incidence rates of violence against women in Algeria, Iraq, Mauritania and Morocco. Funded by the UN Fund for Gender Equality and other donor entities,

country-specific and sub-regional programmes were delivered in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco and the occupied Palestinian territory to position women on the frontlines of justice delivery and to increase their access to the justice system. Additionally UN Women works on advocacy to raise awareness about eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.

It is with pride I note that both Egypt and Morocco have established centres of excellence in gender-responsive budgeting. This was achieved with UN Women's support to promote gender equality in planning and budgeting processes and stronger institutional accountability to fulfil gender equality commitments.

None of this would have been achieved without the dedication of UN Women's team in the Arab States region. Their unwavering hard work towards more gender-equal societies has yielded fruits. More progress is currently being achieved despite the fact that we live and work under some very challenging times. UN Women is proud of its team.

You are about to read UN Women's Regional Office for Arab States' success stories, these stories, which are ones of the strength of individuals more than anything.

The stories you are about to read are live testaments to the fact that indeed those are difficult times but they are also full of opportunities that generate in us the continuous commitment to the work we are doing, and to the struggle we so fondly take on.

Yours Sincerely,
Dr. Sameera Al-Tuwaijri
Regional Director Arab States
UN Women



120 CRAFTSWOMEN EMPOWERED THROUGH RES'ART IN ALGERIA



Chérifa (48) was born in Algiers into a fairly conservative family and subsequently moved to Chenois, her father's village of origin, in the rural area west of the city. She excelled in school but was also known in the neighbourhood for her skill in making northern Algeria's famous embroideries. At home, she learned the intricate techniques of ftoul, nabel and the technically difficult chebika.

However, Chérifa did not see herself as a crafts-woman; she dreamed of becoming a teacher: "I was in year two in high school and at that time with that level you could teach. I told my mother: 'I want to be a teacher,' and she said, 'We must talk to your father first.' When I told my father, he said 'No, not a chance!' In his mind, women were not supposed to work. He said, 'You cannot study; you'll be staying at home.'" Chérifa continued, "I cried a lot and quit school. At the age of 17 I learned to make machine-made embroidery. I discovered I had a gift and that I was better at it than my teacher. Still, there was something missing: my dream to teach others."

When Chérifa's father retired and his income was no longer sufficient to ensure the needs of the household, he finally accepted his daughter's

working outside the house. With the help of Res'Art, an organization that promotes the empowerment of craftswomen and is supported by UN Women as part of its economic empowerment programme, Chérifa was able to realise her dreams. Chérifa slowly gained confidence as Res'Art enabled her to participate in several training courses and exhibitions; she even won a national award for her embroidery.

She was chosen by Res'Art at the end of 2011 to be involved in the training of trainers supported by UN Women — one of only four women to get through the selection process. She explained, "When they took me to Tamanrasset (a city in the South of Algeria, 2,000 kilometres from her home) and told me I was going to train 80 women and girls, I was

very happy! I trained the ‘old woman’, ‘the middle-aged woman’ and ‘the young woman’; it wasn’t easy.”

“My dream now is to teach all the techniques I know in Algiers, Setif and Tamanrasset. I would love for people to say ‘It was Chérifa who taught us!’” She added, “It is through moral support, new ideas, training and Res’Art that I could realize my dream to teach, and I hope to reach more women in Algeria.” Chérifa is no longer afraid to leave home and travel. She has obtained her driving license and is planning to buy a car. She hopes other women will also achieve their dreams.



Training at Res’Art in Tamanrasset, Algeria

Res’Art

In 2001 the National Association of Algerian Women (FEC) created Res’Art, a network of women who excel in traditional crafts. Starting with six women in 2010, the network now includes 120 women in 14 regions of the country. With the support of UN Women, the association created a peer-to peer network to reinforce the women artisans’ skills through an exchange of practices and techniques and to improve their product marketing. Res’Art then embarked on a process of selecting women who excelled in crafts and could train trainers.



Training by Res’Art in Algeria

"I wish I could walk around without being hurt by inappropriate words." Activists form country's first 'human chain' against sexual harassment.

UN Women/Fatma Elzahraa Yassin

'I WISH...' The First Human Chain in Egypt Against Sexual Harassment



In January 2011 the world witnessed Egyptian women and men in Tahrir Square and across the country calling for change and exercising their political and civil rights to public assembly and expression. Since then, however, there have been alarming reports of sexual harassment and an increase in violence against women in public spaces. Following numerous reports of sexual assaults during protests, UN Women released several statements condemning the violence: 'UN Women is concerned by reports of the high prevalence of sexual assaults against women in public spaces. UN Women adds its voice to calls for all parties to take a firm stand and show zero tolerance for all forms of violence against women and girls.'

To respond to the disturbing trend, UN Women launched its first volunteer-led initiative, 'I wish...', which addresses sexual harassment against women in Egypt, in May 2012. Aiming to portray the dreams of a harassment-free country for both female and male citizens, the organizers decided on the name of 'Nefsy,' meaning 'I wish'. The initiative was inspired by snowballing social media discussions on sexual harassment in Egypt, and a group of independent activists took the conversation to an offline public. They wanted to organize activities in the public sphere that raised awareness and caused a ripple effect, both by building support against sexual harassment and creating debate within Egyptian society using the most simple of approaches: the country's first 'human chain' against sexual harassment.

An invitation to participate in the 'human chain' event organised on a Wednesday in May 2012 was shared through Facebook, and different messages, such as "I wish I could walk around without being hurt by inappropriate words," were distributed on simple sheets of paper to approximately 80 participants. Women and men of all ages and backgrounds lined the sidewalks of Cairo's busiest streets, such as Gam'et El Dewal Street in Mohandessin. They held their messages, ready to engage passersby.

Compelling messages such as 'I want to stop hating being a girl' and 'I want to ride a bus without being touched' drew substantial attention to the vulnerability that many women face in public and sparked conversations among those shopping, working and commuting, on the sidewalk and in traffic. It also

captured the attention of social networks, online portals, blogs and newspapers, sparking the interest of popular TV personality Amr Adib. He read the messages and broadcasted photos from the event on his daytime television show, *Al Qahera Al Youm* (Cairo Today).

Male participants also held signs that read 'No matter what a girl is wearing, it's always the harasser's fault' and 'Harassment doesn't make her happy', giving the initiative greater credibility and support. During the event, a man who was collecting garbage asked the participants holding the signs what they were doing. When they explained the purpose of the human chain, he decided to join them. He stood with the activists for two hours holding one of the signs. When asked why he had decided to join, he said: "I see harassment on a daily basis, and I was robbed late at night once. Can you imagine how a young woman would feel?"

By publicizing the protests organized by the Egyptian youth, UN Women spread the word about the initiative. On the Arabic UN Women Facebook page ([https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=](https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.370034183044880.78129.245764998805133&type=3)

[a.370034183044880.78129.245764998805133&type=3](https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.370034183044880.78129.245764998805133&type=3)), the photos went viral. The number of fans jumped by 4,000 people; the photo album was viewed by 50,000 Facebook users; and through comments, shares and clicks, it engaged at least 45,000 of them.

Other human chains were organized in Cairo to interact with the public, and similar events were also carried out by young men in Alexandria, Mansoura and Menya. The movement even spread to Jordan, where a chain was organized to highlight issues including equality for women and men, honour crimes, stereotypes and gender roles.


Excited by the instant impact of this 80-person initiative, its organizers have already begun planning other offline street movements, using social media and videos as multiplier and mobilization tools to raise awareness. They are also recruiting more volunteers to design flyers and disseminate information on social media platforms, as they hope to further broaden discussion on a topic that has for too long been considered taboo and kept Egypt's women vulnerable.

Safe Cities

The 'Safe Cities Free of Violence Against Women and Girls' is a flagship UN Women global programme that aims to develop models of how to make cities and communities safer for women and girls. The model is being developed in five cities around the world — Cairo, Kigali, New Delhi, Port Moresby and Quito. The Safe City Cairo Programme is currently being implemented in three low-income communities: Manshiet Nasser, Ezzbat El Haggana, and Imbaba. Over a period of 5 years, it aims to achieve results at impact level, such as reduction and prevention of sexual violence, including sexual harassment, reduction of fear and increase of autonomous mobility of women and girls in public spaces. UN Women is a lead UN agency working together with UN-HABITAT, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNOD and UNCT, as well as with national ministries, local government and numerous partners in civil society, private sector, media and social networks. Some examples of achievements include the introduction of **women's safety audits**, which empower local women to identify safety conditions in their neighborhoods and build women's safety partnerships with local

authorities, which are now mainstreamed into the planning processes of the Egyptian Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban Development. Responding to the increased level of sexual violence against women during the mass protests, UN Women supported and helped document the human chain formed by young women and men to protest increased sexual harassment in public spaces. The photos of the chain posted on UN Women's Facebook page went viral and helped to engage thousands of new viewers. The Safe City Cairo Programme is an example of achieving impact through partnerships, local ownership and results-based programming.

In addition to UN agencies, other main partners include: CARE-Egypt (key NGO facilitating partner) and the Social Research Centre (impact evaluation partner), the Cairo-Giza Governorate, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Local Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Council For Women, and others; diverse grassroots and women's organizations, such as Anna El Hekaya Group, the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) and the Future Girls Association for Development (FUGAD).



YOUR ID CARD, YOUR RIGHTS ("BETA'TEK, HOKOKEK"): The Citizenship Initiative in Egypt

"I wanted to vote in the last presidential elections, but I couldn't because I didn't have an ID card; but now I can vote, receive subsidized gas cylinders and get other public services whenever I need them," said one of the women participating in the Citizenship Initiative.

At the age of 85 Hajja Sedikka had never had a national identity (ID) card. She had lived her life without being recognized as a citizen, and she had been denied access to state services, including subsidies and the right to vote in elections. She had also been unable to inherit wealth because she lacked the required document that would have given her this right. This changed one afternoon, when a community leader told her that a mobile unit issuing IDs had come to the village so that the women of Beli in the Qalyoubia governorate could get cards. Ms. Sedikka did not hesitate for even a moment and immediately made her way to the mobile unit, funded by the Citizenship Initiative project supported by UN Women and UNDP.

Having an ID card enables a woman to access the polls and seek membership in political parties. The Citizenship Initiative, however, goes beyond elections

and political rights. It insists that the human rights of every citizen, particularly women, to legally exist. With a national ID card, Egyptian women can exercise their economic and social rights. They can access government services and health care, including literacy programmes, and acquire pensions. They can also access vaccinations and education for their children. In addition, the cards create opportunities for women to engage in the labour market, take out loans and make use of banking and microfinance services. UN Women ensures that Egyptian women have access to these basic rights through its support of the Citizenship Initiative.

One year after the revolution in Egypt, the Ministry of State for Administrative Development, the Social Fund for Development and the Civil Status Organization, supported by UN Women and UNDP, launched the Citizenship Initiative, a three-year

project which aims to provide ID cards to women who do not have them and thereby ensure their basic rights as citizens during the democratic transition in Egypt.

The first phase of the Citizenship Initiative, the registration process, began in April 2012 in Qalioubiah, a governorate located in the Nile Delta region in Lower Egypt. The initiative is currently operating

in four governorates—Qalyoubia, Giza, Sohag and Assuit—where more than 150,000 women have filled out registration forms and 117,000 women have received ID cards to date. Hajja Seddikka does not want young girls to go through what she has been through. She fully encourages every woman to get an ID card, quoting the motto of the Citizen Initiative, ‘Your ID, your right’.

Citizenship Initiative

The total number of women without ID Cards, according to the Civil Status Organization (National Registrar) of the Ministry of Interior, is around 5 million. The overall goal of the three-year project is “to ensure women’s basic citizenship rights during the democratic transition in Egypt” by enabling poor and marginalized women living in rural or marginalized areas to obtain their national ID Cards. The project aims to issue two million National ID Cards for Egyptian women through mobile registrars’ accessing marginalized areas where these women live. The registration will enable women in the short run to access polls, vote, and seek membership in political parties. The ID Cards will also enable them to access government services, including medical care in public hospitals, processing

for a property title or deed, literacy programs, banking services, jobs in formal sector working positions and Social Fund for Development loans facilities. The Citizen Initiative is a joint UN project, led by UN Women in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme and implemented by the Ministry of State for Administrative Development and the Social Fund for Development in collaboration with the Civil Status Organization in the Ministry of Interior. It has been launched as a national initiative supported by the Government of Egypt together with financial contributions from the Governments of Austria, Belgium, Spain and Sweden and the United States Agency for International Development.



Hajja Seddikka, (85) arrives in a ‘TOK TOK’ to get her ID card



ACHIEVING E-QUALITY IN THE IT SECTOR IN JORDAN: A Continuous Flow of Success Stories

Unperturbed by the flood of advice from her family and friends to choose an easier path in life, Maha Mouasher (27) ignored their objections and chose a career in information technology (IT). For two years she has worked as the IT Regulatory Officer at the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) in Jordan. “I have never been fazed by the constant reminders that labeled IT as a very challenging field of study for a female,” she says with a smile. “On the contrary, I was always willing to go the extra mile and excel in a difficult yet intriguing male-dominated subject.”

Another female rising to the occasion is Suad Abdel Hafez (25), who was determined to prove that computer engineering could be a ‘subject for girls’. Currently, Suad works as a System and Network Administrator at Maersk, a well-established shipping company in Jordan.

The stories of Maha and Suad reflect the impact IT academies, supported by UN Women in partnership with Cisco Systems, have had on the lives of female IT graduates who seek non-traditional careers and have helped women make inroads into a traditionally male-dominated sector. Without the intensity of UN Women’s efforts, Maha and Suad would have had a much harder time accessing the IT sector.

Maha wanted to learn more about hardware products and, as a university student seeking excellence and enhanced knowledge, “I jumped at the opportunity to learn from CISCO Academy,” she commented. Understanding the challenges of a field traditionally dominated by males, Maha completed four levels of the Academy, passing the 12 exams at each level and obtaining the CISCO certification that makes her an expert in configuring routers and switches. In her current position she regulates the three mobile operators in Jordan – Zain, Orange and Umnia – along with Internet providers.

“I absolutely consider myself the product of the CISCO Academy. The programme made my post-

graduate studies in Computer Engineering go a lot more smoothly. It made it possible for me to be chosen out of 25 applicants for my current job. There is no stauncher supporter of this Academy than me. I didn't hesitate when I was offered the opportunity to mediate, to get Mu'ta University to adopt the Academy's programme in order to open closed doors for more female IT students," she concluded.

Suad graduated in 2009 with a BSc in Computer Engineering from Al Balqaa' Applied University. "Some friends told me about CISCO Academy, and I consider myself lucky to have joined because it provided me with the right knowledge to become a System and Network Administrator. Without this knowledge I would not have been able to handle the work I am doing now."

Suad is managing 60 users and 70 remote users in Jordan and Iraq. She has also worked on restructuring the network at Maersk. Moreover, she intends to enrol in more courses on networking to be able to work on larger networks.

"I would definitely say that my advantage is being a CISCO Certified Network Associate (CCNA) and a member of the Jordan Engineering Association. I



Maha Mouasher working as a IT Regulatory Officer.

have gained considerable experience by visiting other sites in Jordan and participating in site surveys and structuring networks," Suad explained.

With a gleam in her eyes and a decisive tone, Suad concluded by saying, "I would advise other girls to take up the challenge and discover the world of networks and computers. I know it's weird for girls to be working in IT, but who says we can't do it?"

IT Academies

In 2002 UN Women embarked on an ongoing partnership with Cisco Systems, one of the leading telecommunications companies in the world, and launched the Achieving E-Quality in the IT Sector programme in Jordan. It supported the establishment of IT academies in most public universities and many local community centres in Jordan to equip students, especially women, with internationally certified diplomas in technical subjects and introduce graduates

to the labour market. Available statistics show that out of more than 6,000 graduates, females constitute more than 55 per cent. The academic programme was incorporated in universities' curricula so that students' training counted towards the required academic hours. Subsequently, graduates were introduced to the job market through job placement activities and an internship programme.



ENCOURAGED BY SUCCESS, SOULALYATES WOMEN IN MOROCCO MAKE STRIDES IN LAND RIGHTS



Collective lands comprise the largest share of available land in Morocco and have historically belonged to certain ethnic groups. In recent years, many of these lands have been sold to public and private real estate agencies. Gradually, the land that the women of the Soulalyates ethnic group had worked on for generations began to be privatized, threatening their livelihoods. The privatization has hurt hundreds of thousands of women, because compensation (in the form of money or plots of land located elsewhere) has traditionally only benefited men, regardless of age or marital status. This is due to discriminatory laws issued in 1919 to regulate these groups' customary practices, and the women were subsequently deprived of land ownership and benefits.

Khadija Ouldemmou, Project Leader for Soulalyates women in the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM), described the situation: "Tribal representatives...do not recognize the right of women to benefit from these lands and earn revenue on equal terms with men. Furthermore, there are some who do recognize this right but think that only certain women can benefit from it, depending on established criteria—for example, women who are widows, handicapped, older, unmarried or who have no family. There is a huge need for efforts at awareness-raising among men and women."

UN Women supports the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM) and helps the Soulalyates women to make their voices heard and advocate for their rights to their land. Their unprecedented mobilization allowed them to change the course of the debate and take their struggle to the broader public. The Soulalyates women were able to organise campaigns and held press conferences that successfully engaged the media and public opinion and encouraged women across other tribal areas in Morocco to protest against violations of their rights.

Their advocacy, undergirded by the support of UN Women, eventually led to a directive by the Ministry of Interior in 2010 that urged the provincial authorities to ensure gender equality principles were observed in communal land transfers and several rulings in recent years supporting land access and inheritance by Soulalyates women. This has contributed to the recognition by the government and the community at large of women's rights to inherit communal land. The Soulalyates women have now successfully applied for compensation and earned money from the use of their land. Their advocacy efforts have also reverberated much further: a second directive was issued a few weeks later by the Ministry of Interior to promote the use of gender equality principles by local authorities in communal land transfers throughout Morocco.

However, these developments are limited to the extent that the rulings remain ministerial guidelines with a relatively limited legal status and, according to Ms. Ouldemmou, advocacy and awareness-raising are still much needed. Therefore, ADFM, with the support of UN Women, continues to help Soulalyates women to claim their rights. The Ministry of Interior set up a website (www.terrescollectives.ma) to inform people about their rights and how to claim them. "We believe that it was this campaign that spurred the Ministry of Interior into setting up the

website," says Ms. Ouldemmou. "Today, it's become a matter of public debate. It's being discussed in the newspapers, on television, on the Internet. It's a subject of interest to the media." Since March 2012, Soulalyates women in the urban district of Mahdia have enjoyed the same land rights as men, and in March 2013, 867 of them have been granted plots of land that are of the same size as those of the men.

The latest 2012 ruling is the next step in the advancement of women's rights in Morocco, allowing women not only to inherit or sell land but also to benefit from income derived from the land. The next strategic phase of UN Women's support to the Soulalyates movement will be to identify and train a group of 20 to 25 Soulalyates women leaders from across the entire region to advocate for a law that will secure the provisions of the three existing ministerial rulings (see box).

"We cannot strengthen the capacities of all Soulalyates women throughout Morocco," says Ms. Ouldemmou. "However, our added value and our expertise in the ADFM lie in training these people to become leaders and spokespersons for this movement. They will be able to engage in advocacy and in demanding their rights. I have personally witnessed this since we started supporting them. Soulalyates women have an incredible internal strength."

Training Soulalyates women

UN Women supports the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM) providing training on leadership skills, communication engagement and public speaking to rural women of the Soulalyates ethnic group in Morocco to enhance their advocacy for property and land ownership rights cemented in several ministerial rulings supporting land access, inheritance and income derived from the land by Soulalyates women. Since March 2013, 867 Soulalyates women have been granted plots of land of the same size as

men's in the urban district of Mahdia. A special group of 20 to 25 Soulalyates women leaders will be identified to advocate for a law that will secure the provisions of the three existing ministerial rulings. These women will receive intensive training, especially in communications, public speaking and the development of new initiatives to improve their communications and leadership skills. The aim is to prepare them to take part in the national discussion and debate on these issues.



“Morocco is one of the leading countries in the field of gender-responsive budgeting,” said the UN Women Regional Director of the Arab States, Sameera al-Tuwaijiri, hailing the country’s efforts to bridge the gender gap.

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) determines how public funds are raised, how they are used and who benefits from them. It takes into account the different needs and contributions of women and men, and girls and boys, within existing revenues, expenditures and allocations. It calls for adjusting budget policies to benefit all groups, ensuring that the collection and allocation of public resources is carried out in ways that contribute to advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment.

UN Women’s action in the field of GRB focuses on the adoption of collective approaches, mainly on the part of finance ministries and civil society. In this role, UN Women provides best practices and lessons learned to ensure the continuity and success of such initiatives.

Demonstrating its commitment to GRB, a gender budget statement or gender report has been drafted annually in Morocco and presented as an annex to

the Finance Bill since 2006. Through analysis of the gender equality impact of public policies and budgets, the report reinforces accountability to meet the Government’s commitments regarding gender equality. Since 2011 it has included an inter-sectoral analysis based on human rights. This approach is based on the analysis of progress made by Morocco in the different sectors to respond to international human rights standards.

The report was the result of a partnership between UNIFEM (now UN Women) and the Government aimed at incorporating a gender perspective into the national budget reform process. Ongoing efforts have resulted in Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) being progressively anchored in the process, with five pilot line ministries applying GRB programming and 27 ministries taking part in the preparation of the gender report.

Some pilot departments have adopted a results-based and gender-responsive planning and budgeting. For instance, the Department of Vocational Training (Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training) has developed budget classifications and performance indicators that take into account a gender perspective. Similarly, the Literacy department currently conducts budget planning of its programmes based on targets (women, youth etc.) rather than operators (public departments, private sector, NGOs, bilateral cooperation etc.).

UN Women supported a high-level conference (see box) that was held in Morocco a year after the adoption of the new constitution in July 2011, which includes provisions in favour of gender equality, expands the role of Parliament and civil society in public policy processes and enshrines the supremacy of international human rights instruments over national legislation.

The conference led to rich sharing of experiences and best practices among participating countries, mainly from the Arab States, on promoting gender equality and equity through budgeting. Specific sessions were held to explore and discuss how best the state, representative institutions or local

communities can promote gender mainstreaming in public policies and local governance. Morocco's decade-long experimentation with GRB has drawn from other GRB experiences worldwide. The varying degrees of maturity achieved by these experiments currently provide a genuine opportunity to build on this evidence base from different regions, contexts and countries. Other countries in the Arab States could also learn from Morocco's experience.

The conference also provided an opportunity to announce the creation in Morocco of a Centre of Excellence in the field of GRB. The Ministry of Economy and Finance and UN Women signed a partnership agreement for the establishment and the development of the Gender Responsive Budgeting Center of Excellence (GRB-CE) for the period 2013-2016 on June 6, 2013 in Rabat. Aimed at bolstering partnerships between various stakeholders in this field, the Centre will focus on GRB learning and innovation through peer learning and South-South knowledge sharing. It will focus on identifying existing and emerging global standards and best practices in order to devise adequate and innovative country-level approaches.

High-level Conference on Gender-Responsive Budgeting

A high-level conference on gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) took place in Marrakech on 9–10 November 2012. The two-day conference was the result of collaboration between UN Women and the Ministry of Economy and Finance. It brought together nearly 250 participants from over 30 countries including decision makers, economic and public finance analysts, GRB practitioners, GRB and human rights advocates and scholars, women's rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as development partners from international and regional agencies. UN Resident Coordinator in Morocco, Bruno Pouezat, described the conference as an opportunity to highlight the success of the Moroccan experience in GRB, which has been given greater impetus within the new constitution. He also

underlined the UN's support for countries' efforts to integrate the gender approach in their budgets, considering this to be an essential mechanism to foster the principles of transparency in public policies.

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WOMEN-RUN SCHOOL CANTEENS IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

Iqbal and her family are celebrating. Today, her daughter graduated from high school, and Iqbal has every reason to believe in a bright future for her daughter and her family. “My work at the Women-Run School Canteen gave me the opportunity to get a monthly salary to cover my family’s expenses,” she says, “and it will also allow me to pay for my daughter’s university education.”

The future did not always look so hopeful for Iqbal. Living in a small village near Nablus, she used to work at home to take care of her children. However, when her husband started to suffer from health issues that only allowed him to work part time, Iqbal had to look for a job to support her family and her six children. As is the case for many Palestinian women, when she looked for employment, opportunities were scarce.

In the occupied Palestinian territory, years of conflict and occupation have severely affected the social and economic conditions of the population, with unemployment and poverty being critical problems. As households have been losing income due to access restrictions, killing, injury or imprisonment, women have been put under increased economic pressure and responsibility. Social exclusion, undeveloped capacities and limited access to and/or control over

productive assets, especially in rural areas, have created additional challenges in finding employment opportunities.

In response to this increased need, UN Women has supported the establishment of the Women-Run School Canteen project, which supports Palestinian women who wish to work. “I married early and I did not finish my studies. I used to be in the house, taking care of my family” explains Iqbal. For her, as for the other 416 women who joined the programme, the Women-Run School Canteens initiative offered a unique opportunity to work and receive a monthly salary to cover family expenses.

UN Women launched the programme three years ago, and today 81,994 school children are being offered healthy and affordable snacks made by the women, and “anaemia rates have dropped from one quarter of the children to just a handful,” according

“Now, my family encourages me and I am working to establish a small project next to my home,”

— Siniora

to Zain Hamad, a dietician at the Palestinian Ministry of Education. At least 23 women have managed to secure a permanent income from the activity, ensuring the sustainability of the project that also provides services — which include legal aid, psychosocial help, educational services and vocational trainings — to more than 28,000 women. The 416 women workers, including Iqbal, have the opportunity to earn a monthly salary of US\$250–300, which helps them to support their family. “The project helps us to overcome our problems and it is useful for the village and its women,” she says.

In addition, the programme has fundamentally helped to increase community acceptance of women’s involvement in non-domestic activities. “With my job at the canteen, I defied my community, which regards widows negatively,” remembers Siniora. “They believed that I was leaving the house because

I was looking to remarry, but I showed them that I can get out of the house and have a job.” After her husband’s death, Siniora fought against depression and struggled to support her six children. She now works as a saleswoman in the canteen of the Azmut Secondary School for Girls in Nablus, which allows her to pay for her family’s expenses. “Now, my family encourages me and I am working to establish a small project next to my home,” she proudly added.

Through the Women-Run School Canteens programme, Siniora and Iqbal have gained confidence in their ability to succeed as well as to enhance not only their own lives and livelihoods but also those of their family and community. “I would be prepared to spend all of my salary on her tuition fees,” says Iqbal, referring to her daughter, “because I would prefer for her to learn and have decent employment rather than to feel the pressure of not having a good job.”

Women-Run School Canteens Programme

Implemented by UN Women since 2009, with the funding of the Government of Norway, the Women-Run School Canteens programme was expressly designed to respond to the needs of women and households in this particular context. It has offered an innovative approach aiming to empower marginalized women in rural areas by

addressing their needs as well as those of their community. Targeting 32 women’s centres and 208 schools, the goal was to generate, from the production and sale of healthy snacks in school canteens, an income for the centres and their women workers, while contributing to improve the health of the school’s children.

Fatima stands before a UN Women wall mural in Zaatari, a Syrian refugee camp in Jordan.

UN Women/Yara Sharif

OFFERING HOPE TO SYRIAN WOMEN REFUGEES



In the Syrian refugee camp of Zaatari, there is a container marked “Women and Girls Oasis.” The container door leads to a space where women sit behind sewing machines working on colourful fabrics. Fatima and Hajar welcome visitors and are openly sharing their stories and showing their work. “My husband deserted from the military and is injured,” says Fatima. “He cannot work so I took it upon myself to help provide for him and my three kids. By mere chance, a woman told me about the so-called UN Women’s Oasis and the tailoring workshop so here I am. It’s the best thing that has happened to me since we fled Syria three months ago.” Hajar nods her head in agreement.

The number of Syrians seeking refuge in neighbouring countries continues to grow at a rapid pace and is estimated to be at 2 million as of the end of 2013. Earlier this year, the Government of Jordan estimated that approximately 1.2 million refugees will be in Jordan alone by the end of 2013. Displaced women and children—especially if they are unaccompanied—face distinct vulnerabilities including higher risks of domestic violence, sexual harassment and abuse, exploitation and early/ forced marriage. Most Syrian refugees have no source of income, exposing them to many further risks.

UN Women recently released the findings of a new report on gender-based violence among Syrian refugees in Jordan. The report finds that rates of early marriage are strikingly high (one-third are married as children) and that restrictions on the mobility of women and girls limit their access to work and aid supplies. (<http://tinyurl.com/lmg7lg>).

Hajar has a calm exterior, yet when approached, she speaks at length and movingly: “I have been through a lot and did not expect my life to turn out the way it did. I fled Syria with my five children because I received threats on my son’s life. I left everything behind, my house, my husband and all my belongings,

and embarked on a journey into the unknown. I reached the camp depressed and not in the mood to speak with anyone. I was numbed by sadness. I could no longer smile. Tears became something of a permanent companion of mine.”

However, Hajar’s grief gradually started to dissipate on learning about the tailoring workshop. As a tailor, she and 900 other women and teenage girls are involved in the workshop. Activities in the Oasis include not only tailoring and hairdressing but also drawing, English classes, mosaic and handcrafts as well as gymnastics.

With growing bonds of trust between the beneficiaries and the Oasis’ staff, the women are

encouraged to speak out about taboo subjects such as gender-based violence. Within the protective walls of the workshops, they reveal their stories and no longer shy away from sharing their experiences, which for some includes psychological and emotional violence faced both inside and outside their homes.

The Oasis has allowed refugee women to take advantage of this safe haven and play a different and unexpected role in the camp’s social life and within their own families. It has brought back a smile to Fatima’s and Hajar’s faces. “We have hope now!” they say.

Women and Girls Oasis

In the Zaatari Camp, located in the Jordanian Governorate of Mafraq, close to the Syrian border, UN Women supports Syrian women refugees through an empowerment project by establishing a ‘safe space’ named ‘Women and Girls Oasis’. A cash-for-work programme enables the women refugees who are professional tailors and hairdressers to work six hours a day in

the workshop and earn a living. The tailors sew outfits for newborn baby girls and boys that are given to new mothers by hospitals within the camp. The “Women and Girls Oasis” has involved more than three hundred women and teenage girls each month in tailoring, hairdressing, drawing, English classes, mosaic and handcraft workshops as well as gymnastics.

UN Women/Yara Sharif



Hajar sewing clothes at the tailoring workshop in Zaatari Camp.

Woman walks by wall with election posters, near Kabash government square.

Amre Hoel / World Bank

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF SINGLE MOTHERS IN TUNISIA



Mongia is a young woman from Jendouba in north-west Tunisia, a region known for its poverty and unemployment. She was forced to stop her education and leave her hometown to work as domestic help and hand her salary over to her father. Completely uprooted from her origins and away from her family, she suffered emotional deprivation reinforced by ignorance and abuse.

At the age of 17, she met a young man from the region who she hoped would provide the protection and love she needed. Unfortunately, he abandoned her as soon as he became aware of her pregnancy and denied they had been in a relationship. Mongia found herself once again rejected and alone, but this time with a baby.

In Tunisia, as in many Arab societies, procreation outside the framework of marriage is in many cases a criminal offence. In the eyes of society, single mothers have transgressed social laws and stained the family honour. They often face social marginalization, violence and economic exclusion.

UN Women in Tunisia supports Amal (Hope), a non-profit organization that strives for the social and economic integration of single mothers and helps

them become self-reliant and claim their rights and those of their children. Most of the women the organization supports are illiterate and have no professional qualifications. They are often victims of domestic violence and suffer psychological distress and economic hardship, which also affects the children.

Given the complexity of these issues and the lack of institutional frameworks, Amal adopts a multidimensional agenda. It builds the individual capacity of mothers and raises public awareness to facilitate socio-economic integration.

Thus, the process of empowerment is holistic and involves different stages including accommodation in a temporary shelter, psychosocial support, legal and administrative support, capacity development and

“All I know is household work. I have to do it to support my daughter. I have to assume responsibility. I have to save my daughter from the hardship I experienced.”

— Mongia



Mongia bought a tabouna, a traditional oven, for bread which helped her to become self-reliant.

career training, as well as family mediation, reconciliation with the partner where possible/desirable and monitoring the process of socio-professional reintegration and the progress of children in school.

Recognizing that economic empowerment is a key factor in social integration and self-realization, Amal supports mothers who wish to improve their employability and income. Many women report that they abandoned their children because of a lack of resources and social hostility.

Mongia fled to Amal, where she received emergency aid, psychological help and administrative and legal support, enabling her to receive alimony and have her child get an officially recognized surname. She could resume her work as a maid to meet her family's basic needs. She says, “All I know is household work. I have to do it to support my daughter. I have to assume responsibility. I have to save my daughter from the hardship I experienced.”

Convinced of the capacities of Mongia, her motivation and her ambition, the management team was encouraged to help her improve her income by giving her the resources to start a micro project. Reassured by permanent support and assistance, she eventually decided to use her knowledge of traditional bread making. Despite her small income, she was able to save some money to buy a tabouna, a traditional oven for baking bread.

After some months, having mastered the management of her business, Mongia's income improved remarkably. She increased the number of customers and started supplying small retailers. Now, she provides bread to local grocers as well as neighbours and is called ‘the little baker of the neighbourhood’. Due to the growing demand and increase in Mongia's workload, Amal, with the support of UN Women, has financed the purchase of a dough mixer.

Amal (Hope)

UN Women supports Amal (Hope), a NGO that strives for the social and economic integration of single mothers and helps them become self-reliant and claim their rights and those of their children. The project that UN Women supports

helps an average of 75 single mothers, often with their children. In addition, it follows up with over 200 single mothers at different stages of the support process while the total number of beneficiaries exceeds 800 women.

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