

**STRENGTHENING NATIONAL MECHANISMS FOR GENDER
EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

**National Mechanisms for Gender Equality
in the ESCWA region**

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Note

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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

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GLOSSARY

AHDR Arab Human Development Report

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
DAW	Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
GAD	Gender and development approach
GEMS	The Gender Empowerment Measurements through Statistics Project (Egypt)
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries
IDP	Internally displaced persons
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JNCW	Jordanian National Commission for Women.
MAFFEPA	The Ministry of Women, Family, Children and the Elderly Persons (Tunisia)
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs (Palestine)
NCA	The National Code of Action (Palestine)
NCCM	The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (Egypt)
NCW	The National Council for Women (Egypt)
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
SAP	Structural Adjustment Policy
SCFA	The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs
SEFSAS	The Secretariat of State for the Family, Childhood and Handicapped Persons (Morocco)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme.
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WID	Women in development approach

ABSTRACT

Since the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women and the Beijing Platform of Action, the Arab region has witnessed an increasing commitment by states and non-governmental actors to women's advancement and gender equality. One key visible element of this commitment has been governments' support to the establishment of national mechanisms with a mandate to promote women's empowerment and gender equality. Crucial in the institutionalization of these national mechanisms for gender equality have been the role of their leadership and the funding opportunities through the United Nations (UN) system and donor aid organizations.

National mechanisms demonstrated a strong leadership and political will in achieving the gender equality agenda. The dearth of adequate resources however, has hindered capacity development and limited the mechanisms' efforts to induce support from the people. Perhaps one of the Arab region's key successes was the ability to incorporate national mechanisms into the executive branch of governments. Similarly, there has also been an increased awareness about the importance of developing such mechanisms in legislative and judicial bodies.

While most of the work of national mechanisms targeted legal reform, the need to adopt concrete measures toward implementing strategies for women's advancement, capacity building of the various agents and more rigorous efforts to institutionalise gender equality remains essential.

This report examines the creation and development of leading national mechanisms as well as other mechanisms, which were established to complement and support the efforts of the leading national mechanisms that focus mainly on normative responsibilities such as policy formulation and legislative amendments.

Other national mechanisms operating at the national level face various challenges that hinder their effective work and delivery of outcomes, and their contribution to changing social and cultural perceptions and stereotypes. These include challenges as state institutions, economic challenges as well as existing institutional barriers.

INTRODUCTION

This report covers all countries under the mandate of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA¹), as well as some other Arab countries including: Algeria, Djibouti, Morocco, and Tunisia for comparative purposes. It provides a critical analytical assessment of the political, economic, social, cultural and institutional factors that affect the region and subsequently constitute the context within which the national mechanisms for gender equality function.

The objective of the report is to contribute to the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and Regional Commissions project entitled “Strengthening National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.” The project aims to strengthen the collaboration and synergies between different mechanisms at national levels to facilitate achievement of the goals of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The report relies heavily on national reports submitted by member countries in the framework of the five-, ten-, and fifteen-year review processes of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing +5, Beijing + 10, Beijing + 15), the resulting consolidated regional reports, and to a questionnaire developed by the project particularly for the purposes of this regional report. It also relies on two studies on women’s machineries produced by EUROMED on nine Mediterranean countries (2007) and an ESCWA report, ‘Guiding Principles for Gender Mainstreaming and the Enhancement of the Capacity of National Gender Mechanisms’ (2007). Finally, the report is also based on various other resources including the Arab Human Development Reports and relevant literature.

This report employs the working definition of national mechanisms developed for the project, as follows: the term ‘national mechanisms for gender equality’ is understood to include those bodies and institutions within different branches of the State (legislative, executive and judicial branches) as well as independent, accountability and advisory bodies that, *together*, are recognized as ‘national mechanisms for gender equality’ by all stakeholders. They may include, but not be limited to:

- the national machinery for the advancement of women within Government (e.g. a Ministry, Department, or Office. See paragraph 201 of the Beijing Platform for Action)
- inter-ministerial bodies (e.g. task forces/working groups/commissions or similar arrangements)
- advisory/consultative bodies, with multi-stakeholder participation
- gender equality ombud
- gender equality observatory
- parliamentary committee.

In the Arab region, the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995 has resulted in the establishment and development of different forms of national mechanisms that provided the opportunity to tackle in a more systematic way important issues related to women’s empowerment and gender equality.

¹ ESCWA member countries include: Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen

PART 1: POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF THE ESCWA REGION

Part 1 of this report provides an overview of the political, economic, social, cultural and institutional context which affects the effectiveness and success of national mechanisms and contributes to better understanding of the key challenges and obstacles facing national mechanisms as well as opportunities that will enable these entities to implement their mandate.

1.1 Political reform in the Arab world

Since mid 1990s, Arab governments embarked on a host of reform measures in the areas of freedom and good governance, most of which were overshadowed by other items on their ambitious agendas.

A wave of elections has swept the region in the last ten years. In Iraq, for example, the transitional National Assembly elections in January 2005 and later in March 2010, took place amid a severe security breakdown and campaigns against candidates and voters. Nonetheless, the high participation of almost 70 percent of Iraqi voters during the 2005 elections indicates the need of the Iraqi people to participate in shaping the future of their country.

Saudi Arabia saw municipal council elections held for the first time, a progressive step that was undermined by the exclusion of women and by restrictions on the proportion of council members chosen by election. In Egypt, Article 76 of the Constitution was amended to permit multi-candidate presidential elections. The amendment, however, arrived freighted with restrictions such that it seemed but a formalised codification of the existing referendum system for choosing the president. Some licensed opposition parties boycotted the subsequent presidential election, which produced a landslide victory for the incumbent. Its notable aspect was that, according to official statistics, the participation rate amounted to only one fourth of those entitled to vote. Judges monitoring the subsequent parliamentary elections reported irregularities favouring ruling party candidates in two major districts. Evidently, as the Arab Human Development Report (AHDR 2005) entitled “Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World” noted, electoral reform in the region has some distance to cover before elections become a component of societies of freedom and good governance.

On the other hand, public freedoms in the region, especially those of opinion and expression, came under further pressure. The entire region suffers from a serious restriction on freedom of the press. Only Jordan, Qatar and United Arab Emirates permit freedom of internet use.

Many Arab countries continue to obstruct the work of civic bodies, independent professional associations, labour unions and human rights institutions. Many Arab governments have achieved notoriety for restricting freedom of expression in general and the use of the internet in particular” (AHDR 2005, page 3-4).

These limitations put national machineries in a precarious situation, since it is perceived that advocating for women’s rights through these means, while other political and civic rights are violated, undermines

the integrity of these national machineries and places doubt in their ability to effect genuine change. The fact that most of these national mechanisms are controlled by a member of the ruling elite, as will be detailed later, leaves little opportunity for them to play a critical or influential role *vis-à-vis* other governmental policies and practices.

1.2 Conflict, foreign occupation, and other challenges

War brings conflict-induced movement and trafficking (HDR 2009). Certainly, women have often borne the brunt of the deteriorating humanitarian conditions – especially as conflict and wars have brought devastating impact on their economies, societies and institutions and are considered as one of the important reasons behind migration from the region. The number of people who move as an outcome of conflict is significant. At the beginning of 2008, some 14 million refugees fell under the mandate of either the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), accounting for roughly 7 per cent of all international migration.

Even greater numbers of people who are displaced by violence and conflict relocate within the borders of their own countries – an estimated 26 million worldwide, of which 7.7 million come from Sudan and Iraq alone (Sudan 4.9 million and Iraq 2.8 million) (HDR 2009: 26). The Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006 led to the displacement of one-third of the civilian population and to the destruction of thousands of houses. The same applied in the 2008-2009 war on Gaza, in which 23 per cent of the houses in the Gaza Strip were destroyed or affected partially or fully (UN Human Rights Council, 2009). Wars and conflict seriously challenge national mechanisms as they struggle to meet large-scale devastation with limited human capacity and resources. Wars and conflict make issues related to gender equality appear out of context and irrelevant.

In Iraq, the rising human costs of occupation became clear in a context of growing lawlessness and internal conflict. Material damage inflicted on Iraq under the occupation extends to its assets, including oil resources and a cultural heritage that belongs to humankind (AHDR 2005).

Wars, economic siege and destruction in Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, and Sudan have hampered the work of their national mechanisms, which were left with no resources and a large scale of humanitarian devastation (ESCWA, Arab Report on Beijing +15 2009). Similarly, internal armed conflicts are another theatre of serious human rights abuses, with women being especially vulnerable to rape and murder, not only under military assaults but also during flight and emigration.

The “war on terror” has put national mechanisms in a very difficult situation. To oppose this war puts them against their own governments; to support it amounts to endorsing grave violations of the civic, political and social rights, not only of the suspected terrorists, but also of their women relatives and the rest of their families. Ironically, the war on terror has been accompanied by a call to ‘liberate Muslim women’ which dilutes the genuine efforts made by many indigenous women’s organizations and national mechanisms to advance women’s rights and interests.

1.3 The influence of economic policies

AHDR 2005 showed that the general context by which National Mechanisms operate differs based on the socio-economic context of the various countries that constitute the Arab World. Hence, variance could be observed between oil-rich countries compared to middle-income and least developed countries. For example, in middle-income countries the economic, political, social, cultural and institutional contexts are, in general, more developed when it comes to women's roles and activism compared to other countries.

The institutional reforms required by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) led to a drastic decline in the size of the civil services. This in turn affected outreach to rural areas and led to growing social gaps between urban and rural areas and between middle and lower urban classes. It also led to growing social protest that led and fed many forms of Islamic movements in the region. (AHDR 2009, AHDR, 2005, Jad 2005). In addition, the role and voice of women was negatively influenced in countries that had to go through structural adjustment processes, which have resulted in the dissolution of most state sector enterprises and left deep imprints on the extent and level of social services that affected the population at large and women in particular. Many women's organizations as well as national mechanisms have thus taken up poverty reduction as a strategy, with a focus on micro-credit schemes.

Nonetheless, the two decades of economic liberalization culminated in a more aggressive wave of liberalization including the acceleration of privatization led to increasing social disparities and poverty accompanied by political resentment and contestation. The past few years have brought about growing social movements, and riots protesting the continuous decline in the quality of food, water and medication. This situation has left many national mechanisms with serious challenges and debates about the best ways to deal with the growing and deepening poverty, as well as growing authoritarianism and political repression (AHDR 2009).

1.4 Civil society and opposition movements

In many countries, Arab civil society organisations took on a higher profile, thrusting themselves into the public space with increasing vigour and impact. Adopting firm positions through the independent press, on satellite television, at public rallies, in private meetings and over the internet, they expressed close solidarity with political movements and at times demonstrated the ability to take the lead in spurring political change. Throughout this recent period, civic action in the region was distinguished by a growing pluralism and enlarged internet presence, testifying to a new assertiveness and sense of public mission in civil society. In some Arab countries, national mechanisms managed to develop a relationship of trust with these groups, while in many other countries, relations were limited by the political stand of the government vis-à-vis these groups and organizations, leaving national mechanisms with weak or non-existent popular support. Most of these mainstream movements are witnessing a noticeable growth among their relatively younger generations of an enlightened leadership, at the moment that these younger generations are increasingly appearing at the top of their organizational hierarchies. In addition, there is growing activity from the grass-roots demanding greater internal democracy (AHDR 2005).

The Islamic movements in the region cover a wide spectrum, with much internal variation. The great majority of Islamic movements in Arab countries represent widespread societal forces and have deep popular roots as a result of their practice over many years of social and political action among ordinary people. In general, most of the mainstream Islamic movements hold conservative views regarding women's rights and gender equality and have shown some hostility or criticism to universal mechanisms for women's rights, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or the Beijing Platform for Action. However, many have experienced important developments over the past two decades with regard to their stance on certain societal issues, such as respect for human rights, good governance, and democracy (Hudson 1996). These positive developments, however, do not mean that mainstream Islamic currents have succeeded in eliminating all concerns of other societal forces in Arab countries as to the negative impact they might have on freedom and good governance should they come to power, and this is especially so with regard to the issues of women and minorities.

Since the early 1990s, the liberalisation process, with its neo-liberal tendency, encouraged and financed the mushrooming of 'autonomous' women's and human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These organisations proved somewhat effective in raising people's and politicians' consciousness of gender equality issues, but they showed little ability to form a 'hegemonic bloc' in civil society. Many studies showed the limitation of the NGO structure to mobilise and organise large constituencies of women (Jad 2004, 2007). NGOs for the most part, do not act as catalysts for social and political movements but rather tend to 'own' what they implement. They perceive issues for social and political change as 'projects' with limited life cycles, 'target groups' and measurable achievements. One report of Arab women's movements showed that NGOs have had a negative impact on women's movements, by encouraging more 'professionalisation' of women's movements, instead of voluntarism, and more dependence on proposal writing and foreign funding than reliance on mobilisation of local resources (Jad, 2004, 2007). In the face of the well mobilized and well organised conservative movements, NGO activism has demonstrated little ability to form a counter hegemonic power.

It is worth noting, however, that NGOs activism has helped to popularise and legitimise gender issues and to put them on the agendas of political leaders, parliamentarians and human rights activists. Some human rights and anti-torture NGOs moved towards building social and political movements (for example, the Kefaya movement in Egypt). Some others seek to enlarge their power by establishing regional coalitions (for example, SAWA, and Aman coalitions to fight domestic violence, Family Law coalition).

1.5 The general context of the ESCWA region and its impact on national mechanisms

National mechanisms for gender equality in oil-rich countries operate differently from non-oil-rich Arab countries. In the former countries, the governments provide impressive civil services in health, education and social policy. Still, structures in most of these countries remains weak, embryonic, and intertwined with kinship and tribal relations (Al-Rasheed 2002, Salame 2001). To that extent, the new national mechanisms, born from within such structures that adopt a top-down approach to development, are heavily dependent on the state (Beijing Survey 2009). This dependency sometimes fuels opposition within civil society, which views the state's reform attempts as driven by Western interference and influence.

For example, an ESCWA 2005 report on women's movements in the region showed that women's movements in the newly oil-rich countries are nascent and weak compared to those in countries with well-established national structures. However, the top-down approach followed by the Gulf States and Libya has in fact led to some important improvements in women's conditions. These have occurred in important fields such as health, education, employment, and participation in decision making. The same can be said of older states in which a form of state feminism introduced important political, economic and social changes in women's lives, despite hostility from the state.

Despite the differences among the countries of the region, there do exist some important underlying commonalities affecting the human rights environment. These include the region-wide embrace of economic liberalisation, high level of consumerism with low level of productivity, authoritarianism, and lack of the rule of law. Each of these also negatively affects basic civil, political and human rights (Hudson 1996, AHDR 2005). In the coming years, stagnant economies and the staying power of Islamic political opposition movements might well lead to deepening states of emergency in many Arab countries and increasing restriction of freedom of speech and organization.

In the majority of the countries in the region, accommodation of social and political protest became a priority and resulted in a continuous increase in 'security' budgets (AHDR 2005). This left few resources for other development sectors, including national mechanisms, to implement their plans and programmes.

1.6 Progress towards overcoming challenges in human development

Over the past decade, some positive steps were taken to broaden the margins of freedom in the region. Egypt's National Council for Human Rights issued its first annual report (2004-2005) which highlighted some of the most serious human rights violations in the country and called for an end to the state of emergency. Jordan's National Centre for Human Rights also published its first annual report. Bahrain issued a decree requiring that democracy and human rights be taught in the country's schools; and in the United Arab Emirates, a human rights association was formed. In Libya the government calls the opposition to return back to their country with a promise of political grace. Morocco's efforts to purge a long history of oppression moved forward when its Justice and Reconciliation Commission submitted its final report proposing legal, institutional and cultural reforms. The President of Algeria announced a similar initiative promoting national reconciliation in his country. When the Palestinian Authority, under American and Israeli pressure, postponed the discussion of the United Nations fact-finding mission (known as the Goldstone Report), which documented the war crimes, possibly amounting to crimes against humanity, committed against Gaza by the Israeli army in December 2008-January 2009, the Arab Commission for Human Rights managed, for the first time in the history of human rights organizations in the region, to mount strong popular pressure on the Palestinian Authority to reverse its decision and to submit the report to a public hearing and a vote in the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in Sept. 2009 (UN News Centre Sep. 2009). The growing movements of human rights organizations and popular movements help in creating a more supportive environment for women's rights and gender equality.

All these examples illustrate the major role played by context in the degree to which national machineries operate. Examination of context must include factors such as political will, national resources, human capacity, organization and strength of women's movements, in addition to the general status of women

(education, health, legislation, work and political participation). Whether the state is involved in some form of conflict is another vital factor influencing whether or not it will be able to pursue gender equality and women's rights. Countries involved in wars and other conflicts are typically characterised by low or stagnant economic growth, political instability, and the regression of almost all achieved gains for women (in health, education, employment, legal and political) (AHDRs 2003, 2004, 2006). The mechanisms for the advancement of women in war zones show continual shifts in policy focus and weak ability to effect sustainable change. Palestine is an example of this: whenever there is some political stability, national mechanisms promoting gender equality come to the fore, but when violence and conflict resume, filling basic or emergency needs takes precedent.

Conclusions

It is important to evaluate realistically the abilities of each Arab state to implement development plans and to achieve lasting social change. A state is not a monolithic entity, and its internal conflicts and contestation might open up some spaces for feminists to manoeuvre and effectuate some change. But many aspects of a state, such as its degree of legitimacy and political will, must be kept in mind as one examines the structures to which national mechanisms for gender equality are subordinated.

Nor can the nature and internal workings of a state be separated from the fact that most Arab civil societies seem more 'conservative' than their governments (AHDR 2004). Civil societies in the Arab region are arenas for contestation and/or consolidation of state power. Struggles for women's rights and attempts at legal reform in the region mirror this government/society dynamic. An attempt to reform the family law in Morocco unleashed hundreds of thousands of demonstrators into the streets. Conservative movements in the region have proved to be efficient in mobilizing impressive numbers of people to obstruct law reform. Political, social and cultural resistance from conservative groups which have managed to mobilize large numbers of women represent serious challenges to national mechanisms for gender equality and put in doubt their ability to meet common needs and map out strategies for their constituencies. Gender equality measures are met with strong resistance from civil society and in some cases from within the parliament. This well-organised opposition is met by weak and fragmented women's movements. Two decades of 'state feminism' in some of the Arab countries contributed to this weakening. Interventionist and developmentalist states showed hostilities *vis-à-vis* women's autonomous organisations, and even banned some of them. Some others 'incorporated' women's organisations into the state structure or in their ruling parties.

Important contextual features affecting the national mechanisms for gender equality in the Arab region can be summarized as follows:

1. Low productivity and slow economic growth in highly populated countries;
2. Unrealized development led by developmentalist, interventionist states through state feminism;
3. Declining public employment opportunities, increasing social gaps and social rioting following the application of liberalisation and structural adjustment policies;
4. Devastation of some countries in the region due to wars and other conflicts;
5. De-legitimation of the development efforts undertaken by some Arab governments due to international aid accompanied by political conditions;

6. Strong conservative movements empowered by state authoritarianism and lack of liberties;
7. Either empowerment or disempowerment of national mechanisms for gender equality, depending on the nature of the Arab state; and
8. The weakness of social movements which have gender equality as a strategic goal.

PART 2: EVOLUTION/TRENDS IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL MECHANISMS IN ESCWA REGION

This part focuses on the trajectories and contemporary trends of national mechanisms. National mechanisms in the region differ in their 'raison d'être,' political support, sustainability and level of resistance to their presence in each of ESCWA's member countries. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that national mechanisms as a term involves both official mechanisms established with a particular mandate to advance the women's agenda at the national level, or those other mechanisms, which are established for a particular setting or to deliver a particular task.

The developmentalist states adopted national mechanisms in the post-colonial era in what has been coined as 'state feminism'. These early mechanisms took the form of a directorate, a division, or unions under the control of specific ministries (family, childhood, and social affairs). For example, a woman-headed Ministry for Social Affairs was established by Egypt 1956, by Iraq in 1950, and by Algeria in 1962 (AHDR 2005). In the 1970s, Egypt established a Women's Affairs Directorate inside the Ministry of Social Affairs. In Syria, the General Union of Women was established in 1967 as part of the executive and legislative authority under the Ba'ath Party. In the nascent states of the Gulf, women's issues were of late interest to the governments. The first women's union was founded in the United Arab Emirates in 1976.

'State feminism' effectively emphasized the traditional view toward women as mothers who care for the children, the elderly and the destitute. Developmentalist states were commonly hostile towards autonomous women's organizations and movements. This was a stance that weakened many of the women's movements that emerged, beginning in the first half of the 20th century, in support of national independence movements. The co-optation of women's movements by these states left national mechanisms that emerged later receive only weak support from civil society at international women's conferences. State feminism did, however, achieve important gains for women in education, health, civil services and social entitlements and in the labour market. A great number of women concerned with these issues were brought into the public space in economic and political life.

The second wave of national mechanisms emerged in response to international women's conferences, beginning with the UN-sponsored First World Conference on Women in 1975 held in Mexico. Countries such as Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon are a case in point. In 1977 the Jordanian Ministry of Labour established a Women's Department as a demonstration of the Women in Development (WID) approach. In Morocco, a central unit in the ministerial department in charge of social affairs served to advance the interests of women. In 1989 Libya established the Department of Women's Affairs as part of the secretariat of the General People's Congress, the national legislative body. In the same year, the Libyan government has also established the General Union of Women's Associations as a network of non-governmental organizations that address women's employment needs. In 1996, in Algeria, the government established the Agency for Social Development which implemented programmes to help vulnerable groups, including women and girls without income and families with limited resources which were caring for handicapped members.

By the mid 1990s, a third wave of national mechanisms emerged as the WID approach evolved into gender mainstreaming that led to the diversification and multiplicity of national mechanisms. Such a diversification spelled the objective of mainstreaming gender perspectives in development plans and to empower women in all spheres of life.

In preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, Jordan established the Jordanian National Commission for Women in 1993. In the same year, a National Committee for Women was established in Egypt within the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood. This committee in turn became a more focused mechanism known as the National Council for Women in 2000. In Syria, a national committee was established in 1994 by the Cabinet of Ministers but was abolished one year later to re-emerge in a different form in 2004 as the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs. In Yemen, a national committee was formed in 1996, followed by Qatar that formed a council for family affairs in 1998 to add to it other mechanisms in different ministries in the government and in civil society. The same trend was found in other Gulf countries such as in Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman (ESCWA Survey on National Mechanisms 2009).

The mainstreaming approach pushed some national mechanisms to change their priorities without having developed a solid ground in their previous structures and priorities. Hence, in many national experiences there are attempts to entrust national committees or networks with the task of gender mainstreaming. In Palestine for example, a trend of developing a gender mainstreaming agenda in its public institutions can be seen, whereby an Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Advancement of Women's Status (referred to as IMCAW) was established in 1994 and acted as a network for Palestinian women in the task of gender mainstreaming. IMCAW managed to establish gender units in many ministries culminating in the establishment in 2003 of the Ministry of Women's Affairs. By 2009, the Palestinian national mechanisms increased to 18 gender units in different ministries in addition to the Ministry of Women's Affairs as a leading body. A similar trend can be seen in Jordan, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Egypt. (See table 1 on the number of national mechanisms in the region).

Furthermore, there has been a growing trend in the region toward forming special commissions or networks to deal with a particular issue that needs more popular and political power. The formation of commissions enabled national machineries in the region to deal with some sensitive issues including sexual and domestic violence such as 'honour killing', female circumcision, trafficking in women, and prostitution.

In Palestine, a national commission with the representation of different ministries, women's NGOs and the General Union for Palestinian Women was formed in 2008 to address violence against women. The national commission concretely implemented its principles by producing a strategic national plan to fight violence against women (Beijing +15 questionnaire). The same trend was found in almost all the countries in the region such as in Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, Jordan, Yemen, Morocco, and Algeria, among others. In Jordan, for example, a national network was established to deal with issues such as United Nations Security Resolution 1325 (to protect women in war areas and enhance women's participation in conflict resolution and peace building). Gulf oil countries on the other hand responded to the issue of domestic violence against women and children through designating a special section in hospitals, police stations, and shelters to host battered women and children.

Broadening the mandate of national mechanisms in the region has been an important developing trend. For instance, some national machineries not only managed to extend their mandate within the central governmental bodies, but they also used the same government structures to extend their mandate to the local level of governorates, provinces, and departments. Sudan's Ministry of Social Care, Women and Child Affairs, which is the national machinery, established gender directorates in many provinces in the country. The same trend occurred in Egypt, Syria, Yemen and Palestine.

Ratifying international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women constituted another trend among Arab national mechanisms. These Conventions constituted a solid legal reference for these mechanisms to claim equal rights for women in all spheres of life. Many Arab national mechanisms achieved some important legal reforms in issues dealing with women's nationality, equal rights to work, political participation, and fighting domestic violence, among many others, as will be detailed in the part on the achievements of these national mechanisms.

Despite having made significant strides in incorporating women's and gender issues into all facets of life, the Arab judicial system is still lagging behind. Although in many Arab countries there is an increase in the role of women in the judiciary, very limited efforts were made to sensitise the judicial structures to gender issues. Similarly, women's caucuses in the parliaments barely exist – albeit there are two committees on women and children, in the Consultative Council of Bahrain and the Lebanese Parliament.

The near-total absence of gender units in the few National Human Rights Institutions and/ or Ombudsman offices (with the exception of Tunisia) that exist in the region (in Tunisia, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco and Palestine), minimized the impact of these institutions on women's equal rights (Beijing +15 questionnaire, 2009, ESCWA Survey on National Mechanisms, 2009).

Despite the diversity and multiplicity of national mechanisms, the traditional linkages to motherhood and childhood prevail. Women are first and foremost individuals in their own right but are perceived as family members whose protection and guidance is accorded to male relatives. This has meant a compromise on both sides in order to move forward. The Women's Committee in Egypt, until 1999, was put under the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood to show that women were more valued as mothers and caretakers of families. This view has not changed much today: the National Council for Women and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood are two institutions that are reminders of the childbearing role accorded to women.

Other Arab countries echo Egypt's national plans toward women. In Syria, the main national mechanism for Women is the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs (SCFA). In Morocco, the women's leading mechanism is called the Secretariat of State on Family, Childhood and Handicapped Persons (MCF). It is noteworthy to mention that the Maghreb countries installed mechanisms that deal not only with women's and gender issues, but also with children and disabled people. Following Morocco's last legislative elections, the Secretariat of State for the Family, Childhood and Handicapped Persons (SEFSAS) replaced the MCF. This new secretariat of State is under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Development, Family and Solidarity. In Tunisia, the mission of the Ministry of Women's and Family Affairs (MAFF)

was to promote the status and the situation of women and the family. MAFF was also allocated responsibility for children and elderly persons and in 2004 became the Ministry of the Affairs of Women, Family, Children and Elderly Persons (MAFFEPA). In Algeria, the Ministry is in charge of the family and women's status. The government approved the establishment of the National Consultative Council of the Family and Women in November 2006. The consultative council will support the work of the Minister Delegate charged with the Family and Women's Status (MDCFCF) by developing a database and documentation on the family and women's issues, carrying out studies and research and strengthening partnerships and co-ordination with civil society, and initiating relationships with international institutions working on the promotion of women. In Sudan, the Ministry for Social Care, Women and Children's Affairs was established in 2005.

The situation is similar in the Gulf countries, whereby Qatar formed the Higher Council for Family Affairs in 1998. The United Arab Emirates followed suit by establishing the Family and Development Society in 2006. Kuwait also established a Women's Affairs Commission in 2003. In the Gulf region, most of the national mechanisms were created to represent women in the regional and international conferences. In the United Arab Emirates, for example, a gender desk is located in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to help the Ministry in drafting the needed reports for international organizations on gender issues. (Further information on the type of Arab national mechanisms is available in table 1 of this report.)

One key feature of national mechanisms in the Arab world is the involvement of first ladies or the ruling elite in chairing these entities (see table 2). In many cases, this has provided the national mechanisms with strong political support on issues raised on the advancement of women. On other occasions, this leadership criticised on various grounds including claims of patronizing attitudes and the need of the governments to improve the external political image of their regimes and to retain funding allocated to projects for the promotion of women rather than a serious concern for women's advancement. Having placed women's and gender equality mechanisms under the tutelage of the first ladies brought the nascent women's activism and organizations in civil society under their control. In fact, first ladies preside 8 out of 15 national mechanisms in the region, representing more than 53 per cent of all national mechanisms in the region (see table 2).

At the international level, the Beijing Conference was a crucial turning point that gradually led to the broadening of the mandates of existing national mechanisms and their scope of work. Another important evolution was the growing regional coordination among the national machineries. For instance, the General Secretaries of the Arab League have been playing an important role in the last few years in empowering Arab national mechanisms by issuing the Encyclopaedia of women's status in Arab legislation as a legal reference document for legal reform. It also issued the Arab strategy on family, a regional plan to develop education and declaring 2008-2018 as the Arab decade for education. The organization has recently been working on an Arab strategy for female literacy, an Arab strategy to fight violence against women and a regional strategy for the protection of Arab women 'Security and Peace' (ESCWA Arab Report for Beijing +15, 2009).

Arab Woman's Organization is another regional entity for managing resources and coordination of work in the fields of: revision of Arab laws and legal reform, media strategy for Arab women, protection of

women from violence, and in developing tools such as an electronic data base, the Arab women electronic library, an Arab women's guide, a data base on migrant Arab women, as well as the development of qualitative and quantitative measures for the implementation of CEDAW (ESCWA Arab Report for Beijing +15, 2009).

The overall trend in some countries focused on establishing a leading national mechanism in the form of a national council (Egypt), or commission (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon) but which derives its legitimacy and power from the President's/King's power through a presidential decree and/or the role of the 'first lady' (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Qatar, United Arab Emirate, Bahrain).

Conclusions

Even though the WID approach created some form of women's representation in units, departments, commissions, and national committees, it also represented a setback for women's rights and gender issues. In contrast to this, the era of state feminism looked at women as an integral part for the success of the development plans and the achievements of its modernization projects. The general trend for the development and evolution of national mechanisms in the Arab region is towards an increase in their numbers, broadening of their mandates, more cooperation and coordination with civil society organizations and more regional coordination and collaboration. However, national mechanisms for gender issues in the region mostly reside in the executive level of their states and to a much lesser extent in the legislative and judicial levels.

The second part of this report can be summarized in the following points:

1. The first generation of national machineries emerged with the developmentalist state in the region that was characterized by hostility towards autonomous women's organizations and movements.
2. The international conferences were a driving force behind the creation of national mechanisms in the Arab world.
3. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, there has been an increase in the number of national mechanisms and in broadening the mandate of those which already existed in the Arab world.
4. Increased coordination between governmental national mechanisms and civil society organizations.
5. Strong presence of national mechanisms in the Arab world at the executive level and weak presence in Parliaments and Ombudsman offices.
6. Growing coordination and sharing of experiences between national mechanisms at the regional level.

PART 3: STATUS OF NATIONAL MECHANISMS

This part assesses the current status of national mechanisms, through a review of the types of their structures, location, formal and actual mandates, roles and functions, resources and political support.

The Beijing Platform for Action of 1995 stressed the importance of national mechanisms for the advancement of women as the central policy-coordinating unit inside government with the main task of supporting the mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective in all policy areas. It also stated the need for strong national mechanisms at the highest level of government, political will and adequate resources with specific mandates to initiate or recommend legislation and policies and monitor their implementation; promote gender mainstreaming in programmes and policies and undertake advocacy for equality; ensure the advancement of women, their capacity-building and their equal access to all areas and sectors. Arab women's presence in these conferences and the support of UN entities and international aid organisations was an important factor behind the creation of national mechanisms in all countries.

Overall, the region covered in this report has suffered the weak presence of gender units or caucus in the Parliaments and in the Judiciary and the Ombudsman offices. Only three Parliaments in the region have women and child committees. Ombudsman offices exist inside national mechanisms (Egypt) but not in the national Ombudsman offices (Egypt, Palestine, Morocco). Tunisia is the only case in the region where women have presence in the national advisory councils, were women represent 25 per cent of the Constitutional Council, 11.8 per cent of the Higher Judiciary Council. However, there is a growing move in the region to establish national human rights councils and Ombudsman offices.

3.1 Types of National Mechanisms in the Arab region

National mechanisms in the Arab world are diverse in types and locations. Four main types of national mechanisms can be observed in the region: autonomous ministry, part of a ministry, national or higher council, national commission or a committee for the advancement of women. Nonetheless, the type and number of national mechanisms in the Arab world should not be seen as indicative of power or influence. Types and structures of mechanisms are affected by location, mandate, human resources, leadership and political support. For the purpose of this report the distinction between "leading national mechanism" and "other national mechanism" will be based on the mandate of such organisations, the status, i.e. governmental, non-governmental or semi-governmental and the structure and linkages to other decision-making circles in the society.

3.1.1 Leading National Mechanisms

Some of the leading mechanisms are set apart from the others for their mandate, responsibility for promoting and proposing public policies and strategies intended to advance gender equality and equity and gender mainstreaming. Most importantly, the leading national mechanisms are considered, by their mandate, as the reference point for other national mechanisms. Other national mechanisms are noted because they complement and support efforts presented by the leading mechanism or because they have been there before the creation of the leading mechanism (see table 4).

Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, and Algeria had already had in place some mechanism prior to the establishment of the leading national mechanism. Egypt, for example, considers the National Council for Women as the leading mechanism which is led by the First Lady and has the main responsibility for the promotion of women's equality and for proposing and monitoring public policies. Another example is the general directorate for women in the Ministry of Social Security which was established in 1977 and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood which was founded in 1989. In the same year, the Women and Child Unit in the national Statistics Office was founded. This step was followed by the establishment, in 1992, of a unit for policy and coordination to advance women's status in the Ministry of Agriculture. More mechanisms were added gradually to reach almost ten by 2009. The change in the type of the mechanism and its locality could be explained by two possible reasons. The first reason had to do with the ease with which women leaders established a new entity outside the existing bureaucratic structure, and secondly with the push from the international women's conferences to have national mechanisms. Oman for instance developed an informal mechanism without a legal status in 2006 to follow-up on the implementation and the reporting on CEDAW.

It is important to point that almost all Arab national mechanisms were established by Executive decree and none of them was established by law or is foreseen in a constitution. Syria is the only exception where the national mechanism was established by a Parliamentary decree where the ruling party has always the majority.

The national mechanisms in some states are located within government, as ministries (e.g. Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Palestine), others are located under a ministry (e.g. Oman, the Sudan and Saudi Arabia²) while others are semi-governmental organisations reporting to the government (e.g. Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain). Libya is the only case where the national mechanism is located in the General People's Congress, the national legislative body. In general, although not having a ministry or a department status, these national mechanisms have direct access to top-level decision-making level such as the President, Prince, the King's office or the Prime Minister's office. This location allows them to implement gender mainstreaming in the various areas of governance.

The United Arab Emirates is the only country where its national mechanism is indicated as civil society organization (the Women's Union) (Beijing + 15 questionnaire). Nonetheless, in this case, working as a civil society organization does not translate into autonomous work from the government. Therefore, the Women's Union in the United Arab Emirates has close relations with the government in all fields of activities that cover legal reform, training, and women's representation at the national and regional level among other activities.

Most of the leading national mechanisms for the advancement of women in the Arab region enjoy a higher degree of independence, written mandate and more access to resources. Few of them work from within the government structure (Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Sudan and Palestine), while the majority work from outside the government but as a governmental or semi-governmental body (Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and Yemen).

² Saudi Arabia is the only country where a semi women's committee in the Ministry of Social Affairs was present but not clear if it is considered a national mechanism or not.

Many national mechanisms in the Arab region witnessed a continuous change in their status, structure and mandate, usually an expansion and broader mandate (Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, Algeria, Qatar, Yemen, Lebanon, Jordan, Oman, Bahrain, Sudan). In Tunisia, for example, the leading national mechanism started in 1992 by having a mandate on family and women's affairs. By 2002, child affairs were added and by 2004, elderly affairs came under the mandate of the Ministry which became the Ministry of Family, Women, Children and Aged.

In Yemen, the national mechanism witnessed three changes in its status and mandate. Firstly, it was established in 1996 as a national committee for women's affairs. In 2000, its structure was changed by transforming it into the Higher Council for Women, adding seven deputy ministers dealing with women's issues. In 2003, a republican decree was issued to add seven ministers and one deputy minister to the council, in addition to representatives from the different provinces, civil society representatives, and heads of women's section in political parties. Such changes marginally impacted the role of these mechanisms. Instead, they were used to the loyalty from the different groups of women. The Jordanian national mechanism, represented as the Jordanian Commission for Women (JCW) was established in 1993 by a Prime Minister's decree and headed by a member from the royal family. In 2008, the Prime Minister issued a new decree, to reform the Commission and expand its board members to 22 representing different relevant ministries, other national councils and institutions along with civil society representatives.

3.1.2 Other national mechanisms

In addition to the main national mechanisms, there exists a myriad of other mechanisms for the advancement of women in the Arab world. They are mostly located throughout the Executive branch with the exception of Lebanon and Bahrain as was mentioned before. Tunisia is the only case in the Arab region where a research centre that is active in the civil society is regarded as part of the national mechanism. Sudan was the only country that has a decentralized mechanism in the state-owned financial institutions. In some countries, women's unions were referred to as part of the national governmental mechanisms (Syria). Usually in these countries independent women's associations are not encouraged or recognized and these unions belong to the ruling party. Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out, that these mechanisms complement the work of the leading mechanisms rather than act as an alternative.

The types of structures of mechanisms in the region are elaborated hereunder.

a. Gender units, gender equity units, directorates, sections in the Executive branch

Gender units exist in some countries where there is a ministry, an effective women's commission or a national council. Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon and Yemen have gender units in some ministries considered as important for the leading national mechanism. Gender units are to support the mainstreaming approach followed by some national mechanisms in the region. In some countries they exist in select ministries and in some others the leading national mechanism works to have them in all ministries. In Sudan, for example they exist in the ministries of health, justice, foreign affairs, labour, education, agriculture, finance, industry and the central statistic agency, while in Egypt they exist in 32 ministries, and in Palestine in 18. The expansion of gender units depends on the availability of

qualified people or on the importance to the ministry of gender mainstreaming. The general trend in the region is to have more of these units in the government agencies.

b. Committees in Parliaments

The weak presence of Arab national mechanisms in the Parliaments due to the persisting authoritarianism in the region was noted earlier. This reality reflected itself on the majority of the Parliaments in the region where their representational power is weak. Only three countries in the region, Lebanon, Libya and Bahrain, mentioned the existence of a women's committee in their Parliaments. In Lebanon, the women and child Parliamentarian committee managed to propose reforms to some discriminatory laws. In Bahrain, the women and child committee is in the 'shura' Council (the Consultative Council) which is a nominated council. The weak presence of women's caucuses or committees in Parliaments might reflect the weak presence of women in these Parliaments. Women represent less than 8 per cent in the Parliaments or Lower House and less than 10 per cent in the Upper House (UNDP, POGAR 2009). However, some important developments in the region are emerging to increase women's presence in these Parliaments. In Kuwait, four women were elected to the Parliament for the first time in the history of Kuwait in 2009. In Lebanon, women are asking for a 30 per cent quota. In Palestine, women's participation in the Parliament increased from less than 6 per cent in 1996 to almost 13 per cent in 2006 and in local councils to 18 per cent in 2005.

c. National advisory and consultative teams

The most common structure of these advisory teams includes representatives from civil society organisations as part of the activities of the leading national mechanisms. This form of organization is usually of an ad-hoc and a consultative character with an enlarged participation of government representatives, civil society organisations, academics and experts. They are usually formed to achieve the formulation of a strategic national plan, a national plan of action, or intra-sectorial national plans. Palestine, for example, formed a national advisory and expert team for its intra-sectorial strategic national plan for 2009-2011. In Lebanon, a national commission served as the nucleus for the formation of the leading national mechanism. The Lebanese National Commission was established in preparation and for participation in the Beijing Conference. Lebanon also sent people representatives and institutions of civil society and the government to the conference. The National Commission, which later became the National Committee for Lebanese Women, was formed by a governmental decree to participate in the Beijing Conference, and then in 1998 it became the National Commission for Lebanese Women's Affairs.

National advisory and consultative teams are spreading in the region. They are seen as a tool to strengthen the national mechanisms and gender equality and the fact that they usually work on a voluntary basis proved to be of low cost to the government beside their benefit in providing support and legitimacy to the work of the national mechanisms.

d. Single-issue coalition/networks

Some emerging issues on the agenda of women's movements and national mechanisms were the basis for coalition or network formation. Quota for women, domestic violence and legal reform were issues that led to vibrant activities. Usually these coalitions and networks include government agencies, civil society

organizations, academics, journalists and public figures. In Jordan, the formation of many single-issue networks or coalitions has been noticed. The leading national mechanism was behind the formation of the network for the coordination with government bodies, the committee for the coordination with NGOs, the network for fighting domestic violence 'Sham'a' (means candle), the information network for women in local councils 'nashmeyyat' (honourable), legal work team, media team, academic and professional women's forum.

The 'Modawana' in Morocco is another form of single-issue coalition where an impressive coalition of political parties supporting women's rights, the national mechanisms, public figures, media, and academics all joined forces to support legal reform on the 'shari'a law', i.e. the Islamic family law, and which resulted in some important changes and reforms of the law. In Yemen, another network was formed to fight domestic violence, by the name of 'shayma' (pride), which included the national mechanisms and some civil society organizations. In Palestine, a national coalition was formed to introduce quota for women in the election law. Single-issue networks and coalitions were also noted in Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Tunisia and Syria.

Single-issue coalitions and networks proved effective and efficient in introducing the issue they put on their agenda to the public attention and debate, thus helping in changing the dominant culture and beliefs. They also proved influential in bringing some legal reforms or new policies, as in Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan, among other countries. These forms of networks and coalitions are usually welcomed by the national mechanisms because they bring needed resources and expertise from civil society organizations.

e. Decentralized mechanisms (provinces and governorates)

The past few years marked a move toward decentralizing women's units, particularly in Sudan, Yemen, Morocco, Syria, Egypt and Palestine, where some women's units exist in state's provinces and governorates. This move has been necessitated by the need to reach for women in rural and marginalized areas. In Sudan, some women's units exist in the state financial institutions to facilitate financial credits and grants for women in the centre and provinces. Syria established a women's committee in the chamber of commerce as part of the national mechanisms. Other countries set up mechanisms to include the media and communication centres to be working closely with the national mechanisms (Morocco, Syria, Algeria, and Tunisia).

f. Mainstreaming coordination committees

Some of the national mechanisms indicated the presence of mainstreaming coordination committees as for example in Morocco, Tunis, Jordan, and Qatar. Such mainstreaming coordination committees could be seen as a progressive sign in the evolution of the national mechanisms. They help in developing a common language between the different mechanisms and help in mainstreaming gender perspectives on the horizontal and vertical levels.

Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant increase and diversity of national mechanisms in the region, all working to put women's interests and needs on the agenda of the Executive branch or, to some extent, Parliaments. Most importantly, the trend to de-centralise national mechanisms might be a good

sign to extend the gender mainstreaming strategy from urban centres to rural and remote areas through the different governorates and provinces.

3.1.3 Similarities and differences between the leading and other national mechanism

National mechanisms in the Arab region have a diverse and rather evolving mandates (see table 3). This evolution of mandates is the result of changes in their structure, strength or their leaders. The wish to be part of the global community through the presence of Arab women in international women's conferences is another factor that affects the mandate of national mechanisms in the region. At present, most of the mechanisms in the region have diversified mandates, roles and functions that vary between a 'women in development' approach and gender mainstreaming.

Some mechanisms, especially in the Gulf, have a visible clause in their mandate and role to represent their nations in the regional and international arenas. Generally speaking, national mechanisms in the region have under their mandates, roles and functions to propose, plan and implement public policy for society and its constitutional institutions concerning the development and empowerment of women, to enable them to fulfil their economic and social role, and integrate their efforts into comprehensive development programmes. They also aim to develop strategic national plans and action plans for the achievement of the goals of national development plans. They are also assigned to prepare national reports on the progress on the implementation of CEDAW, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and similar international forums. Some are assigned in their mandates to monitor the compliance of their government with conventions, and the implementation of strategic and action plans. Advocacy, capacity building, training, providing special services for certain groups are also included in mandates, roles and functions. (See table 3.)

In general, the leading national mechanisms have the role to promote gender equality and mainstream gender perspectives on vertical and horizontal levels, guide legal reform and policy formulation of gender sensitive strategies and support the mainstreaming of women's issues in the country's national plans. Secondary mechanisms such as gender units, consultative councils, networks, forums, intra-ministerial coordinating committees and others are usually entrusted with the responsibility to support the leading mechanisms and provide additional advice to government on specific issues or problems such as quota for women, domestic violence, legal reform or any chosen concern.

a. Mandates of leading as well as other national mechanisms

The general trend in the Arab region is to have the mandates for national mechanisms determined by decree. The mandates of the national mechanisms and their roles and governance are thus diverse and deal with different tasks and functions. In the Gulf, for example, their mandates focus on awareness raising (for politicians and society) and representation of their countries in the regional and international arenas. They have some consultative tasks to develop and review policy documents and programmes, others are in the state's council to represent women. Some are also responsible for producing national reports on CEDAW and other global reporting requirements.

However, there are some commonalities in their mandates in that they are working for the promotion of the status of women, realizing gender equality in legislation, increasing women's participation in society especially in decision making positions and in politics and representing women in international conferences and forums. Usually, the objectives are wide and ambitious with no prioritization. In several cases, national mechanisms shied away from addressing important strategic needs of women such as full citizenship rights, violence against women, sexual rights, and the condition of female migrant workers (especially in the Gulf countries). The declared mandates of the national mechanisms focused on policies, legislation, education and capacity building.

National mechanisms became involved in implementing projects themselves or with a few closely cooperating NGOs with whom they had developed partnerships (Egypt and Jordan for example). In some other countries they are assigned to implement some or all of the following tasks: influence policy formulation, poverty alleviation and the development of rural women, monitoring of policy and programmes, research and data collection, training on gender mainstreaming, lobbying, law reform, capacity building, raising awareness, fighting domestic violence, and representation of women in local, regional and international arenas. Lately some new mandates have been added such as gender-responsive budgeting, gender auditing and monitoring. Most of the mechanisms have a written mandate whether as part of the government structure or in coordination with the office of the head of state when they work from outside the government. Executive orders and decrees can be quickly implemented and are respected, thus having greater flexibility but providing less stability for the mechanism. The fact that many first ladies were behind the development of the national mechanisms in the region might put their mandates at risk once there is a regime or government change.

With the support of some international and UN organizations, there is a trend to introduce new tasks in the mandate of the national mechanisms in the region, such as auditing and monitoring when it was perceived that some of the existing policies and plans were not fully followed (Syria, Qatar, Egypt, Palestine, Bahrain, Tunisia, among others). Many experienced mechanisms mentioned their participation in the discussion of national plans, from a gender perspective, and the formulation of gender action plans for the implantation of the national development plans (Egypt, Tunisia, Palestine, Morocco, Jordan).

It was observed that the mechanisms presided by the First Ladies, especially in the Gulf area, tend to evolve in a more flexible way in their mandates, when the need arises. For example, Qatar's leading mechanism started as a women's council, the work of the council was supported by many other mechanisms such as a documentation and research centre, social societies for the protection of children, against trafficking of women, and social development and educational institutions. The same trend was observed in other countries (Tunisia, Syria, and Egypt). This means that the trend is to increase the number of national mechanisms and diversify their tasks and mandates to magnify their impact and outputs.

Most of the mandates in the national mechanisms are enveloped in a language that uses national development and advancing (modernizing) women and society. Thus combinations of many gender and development approaches are used. The Women in Development approach that targets women with certain programs and projects is noticed in the Gulf area where sex segregation is common social practice. The same could be applied in countries with large and poor population such as Egypt, Morocco, Yemen, and

Sudan. National mechanisms in these countries implement extensive projects using governmental and nongovernmental donor aid.

Some of the national mechanisms in the region are following the gender mainstreaming approach with a process of institutionalizing gender mainstreaming by starting from a small number of government institutions, then expanding to others (Tunisia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt). In these countries the perceived general trend is to move gradually to the arena of policy formulation and implementation within each government agency to establish a secondary mechanism such as a gender unit or gender focal point. This was manifested by the intentional efforts to institutionalize gender issues in different sectors such as social affairs, education, labour, poverty alleviation, and to extend the mandate of the national mechanisms in a decentralized manner to cover local governments, governorates, provinces and directorates (Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Morocco). This trend was also manifested in the production of elaborate gender action plans in each line ministry to feed the strategic gender plans and complement the national development plans. In Syria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Sudan, there exist some sectorial plans targeting women in rural areas. The challenge here is the allocation of resources to implement these ambitious plans.

Some secondary mechanisms have moved progressively toward utilizing disaggregated data collection and dissemination in their work. A growing number of national mechanisms in the region aim at influencing policies and planning through the sound collection of disaggregated data. Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, Qatar and Bahrain reported having and developing government agencies established by legal provisions to collect disaggregated data in general or on specific issues such as domestic violence, education, reproductive health, poverty, and female-headed households. Tunisia and Palestine have autonomous or semi-autonomous statistics centres that are assigned by agreements with the national mechanisms to collect disaggregated data for them.

Leading National mechanisms, especially in the Gulf area, are using extensively specific protocols or agreements to influence and coordinate efforts with ministries which do not have gender units or equal opportunity units. Bahrain is a case in point where its leading national mechanism signed 29 protocols with agencies such as: the economic development council, Bahrain Chamber of Commerce, the National Commission for Gas and Oil, and the ministry of interior, education, finance, foreign affairs, labour, industry, among other ministries, and national commissions.

b. Roles and functions of national mechanisms

Roles and functions of national mechanisms vary from country to country. The ability to play an effective role and function depends on the level of their development, support, resources and the receptivity of the society to their roles. In the Gulf area, for example, most of the national mechanisms emphasize the importance of women's role in the society. They prepare reports on CEDAW and other needed reports for international organizations besides representing their nations in regional and international conferences. In countries such as Egypt, Syria, Morocco, Sudan, Yemen, Libya, Algeria and Tunisia, there is a tendency to provide direct services for economic empowerment, protection and capacity building.

In general, the main function of the leading mechanisms deals with preparing gender policy documents, action plans, reporting to international organizations, representation of their countries, suggesting legal reform, monitoring government policies, coordination between the different mechanisms, service provision and advocating for gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming is a function assigned to secondary national mechanisms, in direct coordination with the leading mechanisms. Gender units work to influence policy and planning within their respective ministries. Leading mechanisms play an important role in coordinating these efforts, they also work to build the capacity of the gender units to enable them to mainstream gender within their government agencies.

Many national mechanisms play an important role in monitoring their governments' compliance with international conventions on women's rights and development goals. Sharing the development of policy documents and legal reform at the regional level is a growing role and function for many national mechanisms in the region. For example, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine are involved in a regional campaign to develop a new draft family law. Developing databases at the regional level on domestic violence is another developing role for national mechanisms in the region.

Leading national mechanisms play an important role in fostering collaboration and coordination with domestic aid agencies in order to solicit more resources. They foster this cooperation through the adoption of formal protocols and agreements between different branches in the government and civil society. Most national mechanisms also develop, suggest and lobby for legal reform. This has allowed them to achieve some important legal reform on vital issues for women's rights.

Social and community education, mobilization and capacity building are functions delegated mostly to the leading mechanisms. Capacity building is implemented throughout committees and working groups where there is wide representation from civil society and academics.

Development of strategic plans and national action plans to advance women's conditions are also delegated mostly to the leading national mechanism. Specific commissions, fora, and networks are assigned to develop and implement action plans on specific issues such as domestic violence, quota, women's condition in rural areas, women prisoners, trafficking, and women with special needs.

Service provision to targeted group of women is another function assigned to many national mechanisms in the region. These mechanisms are involved in micro-credit programmes, running shelters for women victims of domestic violence, establishing incubators for business women, providing affordable health services, literacy programmes, training and capacity building.

Monitoring and auditing are functions that are less commonly undertaken by national mechanisms in the region. Working as an observatory body is another developing role that started to exist in some national mechanisms such as in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco, Qatar.

c. Political support and resources

National mechanisms have received the political support of Executive bodies and decrees. First ladies' engagement in national mechanisms is another indicator of strong political commitment to national mechanisms in the region. The establishment by some governments, as in Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, and Sudan, of gender units and intra-ministerial coordination committees in their bureaucracies could be seen as a sign of political support for gender equality. Decentralizing gender issues to provinces, directorates and governorates is another significant indicator of political support. Decentralization has also enabled national mechanisms to review, comment, suggest and amend national development plans.

Examples of Arab countries' commitment to gender equality abound. Tunisia, for example, established the Taher Haddad National Prize for the best media work that portrays positive images of women starting in 1999. Beginning in 2001, Tunisia's President has offered a gold medal and a sum of \$8,000 to a person, an institution, a practice or a project that promotes the role of rural women. And beginning from 2008, the President has offered the same prize to any scientific research written by a woman. In some of the Gulf countries, the First Ladies grant their own prizes to individuals or institutions that support women's advancement.

Creating national development plans, action plans, and strategic gender plans for national mechanisms have also been signs of political support and commitment to gender equality. Many national mechanisms have developed such documents and have been successful in obtaining partial government funding for them (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia). All plans in the Gulf area have enough financial support from their governments. There has also been increased public funding for strategic gender and action plans in the region. Jordan's budget allocation for the leading national mechanism increased by 250 per cent between 2005 and 2009. However, this increase cannot be compared to the resources coming from donor aid which increased by 1532 per cent between 2005 and 2008. In Lebanon, the formal decree that established the mechanism also notes its funding from the state budget.

Legal reforms have also had their share of support and commitment to gender issues. National mechanisms in many Arab countries have been supported in matters of granting some citizenship rights for women, establishing quota laws, incriminating domestic violence and sexual harassment, and drafting clauses on equal civil rights.

Another major sign of political support to gender equality has been the significant increase in the number of women in public offices whether in the Executive, Parliament, or Judiciary. Reforming election laws to include quotas for women, nominating women to parliaments when they are not elected, are all steps toward increased political support. The only negative development is marked in the uneven political will, when international pressure is put; political will manifests itself by establishing national mechanisms but without providing the needed resources and support which hinder the capacity of these mechanisms to achieve sustainable and lasting social change.

Conclusions

It can be summarized that the main functions and roles assigned to the national mechanisms in the region vary between the WID and the GAD approaches. Targeting women with specific policies and

programmes is a common function and role for national mechanisms in the region. Mainstreaming gender and institutionalizing it is another approach followed particularly in more established mechanisms such as Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, and Jordan. The main findings of this part are:

1. Most of the leading national mechanisms in the Arab region have direct access to the highest centre of power.
2. Leading national mechanisms are primarily responsible for the promotion of public policies and strategies to advance gender equality, advance women and mainstream and institutionalize gender perspectives.
3. Other existing mechanisms are mostly sectorial with mandates to facilitate compliance with gender equality and related policies.
4. Protocols or cooperation agreements are tools used by national mechanisms in some Gulf countries to bypass the lack of gender units or focal points in the line ministries.
5. Influencing, monitoring, advocacy, training, education and accountability functions are principal functions of the leading national mechanisms, but are shared with other secondary mechanisms. Monitoring and auditing activities as a whole are very limited.
6. Political will and resources go hand in hand and are essential to the national mechanisms' capacity to fulfil their mandates and functions. Those countries with larger resources have been able to impact significantly the community and this has increased their political base of support.

PART 4: MAIN AREAS OF FOCUS

In the last decade, national mechanisms in the Arab region have multiplied and diversified as noted in Part 3. Different mechanisms followed different processes and used different instruments to achieve their goals in gender equality and the promotion of women's rights. Even though each country set up its own local priorities, countries in the region share overarching commonalities among them. The following part will discuss the processes and instruments used by national mechanisms in the region; as well as national mechanisms' priority issues in the different countries.

4.1 Process and Instruments

The processes that are mostly followed by national mechanisms could depend on the level of development of its structure and the skills of its leadership. Well established and developed mechanisms used gender mainstreaming as a strategy that led to the creation of secondary mechanisms to mainstream gender perspectives vertically and horizontally, produce policy documents, action plans, legal reform, gender training, sectorial or intra-sectorial plans, disaggregated data, observations, and finally, research (Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Sudan).

In the nascent national mechanisms prevalent in most of the Gulf countries, processes focused on such topics as gender training, special measures, advocacy, education and consultation. This can be understandable in a context where these national mechanisms are working to gain more societal legitimacy. However, these differences among the national mechanisms in the region are gradual, and the same instruments could be used by more developed mechanisms or vice versa.

Mainstreaming gender through gender units or focal points or other instruments are still considered an efficient process. The general trend in the region is towards the increase in these units in government agencies or in civil society organizations. 13 countries indicated the existence of such supportive mechanisms (with the exception of Iraq). However, the role of these units and their effectiveness to mainstream gender is yet to be evaluated.

Many of the gender units are relegated to sub-divisions in the administrative field yet are asked to perform demanding tasks. These tasks are as varied as analyzing policies from a gender perspective, analyzing disaggregated data, identifying gender gaps, suggesting remedies to bridge the gaps, and identifying capacity building needs. Because of their lower administrative level, focal point responsibilities are assigned to new cadres, usually new university graduates with little knowledge and training on gender mainstreaming. However, there is a growing trend in the region to formalize and define the role and mandate of these secondary mechanisms (Tunisia, Palestine, Jordan).

It is yet early to assess the outcome of gender mainstreaming as a process since many national mechanisms are in the phase of capacity building. Few mechanisms indicated their ability to monitor or audit government policies at all levels (Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco). And few mechanisms managed to develop indicators measuring the impact of the mainstreaming strategy (Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco).

In the Gulf countries where most of the national mechanisms work from outside the government body, they rather follow a process that is based on the WID approach. This approach targets women through raising awareness and fulfilling women's needs. They do this through advocacy, lobbying, alliance building, collaborative agreements and national reports.

a. Special Measures

Many wide gender gaps in the region necessitated a targeted approach. Many national mechanisms followed the successful strategy of bridging the gender gap at decision-making levels. As a result, many women were nominated in the Executive branch of government, in fields that were open only to men such as the police, military forces, and judges in civil courts and religious courts and as ambassadors.

Assigning quotas for women to increase their numbers in the parliaments, municipalities and local councils has been a hallmark of some national mechanisms (Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, and Iraq). Amending election laws was one major development that occurred to enable women to vote and be candidates. Morocco for example increased the percentage of women participating in general elections to 12 per cent in 2009.

Yet, despite this increase in the number of women in decision-making levels, there has been a negligent impact on democratization and transparency in the Arab region. Affirmative and special measures that cater to women could gloss over a structural and persistent lack of sustainable democracy in the region. This is especially true when the women who are nominated for decision-making levels belong to the ruling party or are loyal to the leadership in power, thus limiting their capacity to represent the different needs and concerns of women.

Special measures are also used by many national mechanisms to address some specific needs for women. The gender gap in labour markets in the region is unfavourable to women. Tunisia, for example, introduced the National Fund for Social Solidarity to offer in 2008 more than 151.000 financial incubators for working women with low income. Egypt established a centre specialized in offering administrative, research, marketing and accounting support to women seeking to start small businesses. Small business, income generating projects and micro-credits are some of the programmes directed to women. The same instrument is used in the Gulf area where women are encouraged to form their own business projects with the support of the national mechanisms and their governments. Other countries created advantageous measures for working mothers by reducing their daily work load to enable them to breast feed their children or reduce the work load by half, while keeping two-thirds of their salaries.

Many other special measures were taken to protect women from domestic violence and sexual harassment, whether by drafting national strategies, action plans or providing services (shelters, police units, social workers, family courts). Alimony and child support funds are major positive additions that the national mechanisms introduced to target divorced women and protect their children (Egypt, Morocco, Palestine, Jordan among others).

b. Legal Reform and New Legislation

The call for legal reform and equal rights for women has been advocated by women's movements in the region starting from the turn of the 20th century. To this day, legal reform continues to be one of the main instruments used by many national mechanisms in the region. Advocating for legal reform is one of the most efficient instruments used by many national mechanisms in the region. This widely used instrument aims at introducing reform on existing laws or to mobilize women and raise consciousness on different forms of discrimination against women.

Accordingly, important reform was introduced in the national law in most of the countries in the region. For the first time, Arab women have the right to grant their children from a foreign husband their nationality (Tunisia, Sudan, Egypt, Yemen, Morocco, Algeria, Bahrain and Palestine). Important reforms were introduced to the family law in many Arab countries. Such reforms include increasing the age of marriage to 18 years, establishing family courts, alimony funds, raising the age of custody for children who are with their mothers, and the right of the custodian mother to keep the family house. Qatar equalized the compensation paid for men and women in the case of unintentional death and Oman granted equal rights for women and men on granted land for construction. Important amendments were also introduced in the penal code, labour law and civil rights dealing with insurance, retirement, income tax, among others in Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Tunisia, Morocco, Sudan and Palestine.

c. National Reports

National reports have been prepared to comply with international recommendations. This instrument is used by all national mechanisms in the region (except Iraq and Saudi Arabia). In some of the cases, the process that was followed led to the establishment of a leading national mechanism in the country (Lebanon) where the group of women who were involved in preparing the report came to ask the government to establish a national mechanism on a permanent basis.

All countries in the region reported having assistance to prepare their national reports on Beijing +5, 10 and 15 (with the exception of Iraq and Algeria). All reports were presented and discussed at the local, regional and international levels. These reports are useful in following and monitoring women's equality in each country. However, it is worth noting that these reports are rarely discussed in Parliaments or with the decision makers in the governments. It is also rare that their findings are disseminated to the public at large or the media. Thus, even though national reports are important instruments, they are still used for the international organizations that require them without sharing their findings publicly. The need to share these reports with the Arab public and decision makers is important to effectuate social changes.

d. National Plans and Plans of Action

Creating a national plan is another important instrument used by many countries in the region. Almost all countries developed their national plans (with the exception of Iraq and Saudi Arabia). National plans are important yardsticks by which national mechanisms achieve the set of goals in the region. The review

shows that some countries developed sectorial plans (for rural women, elderly, children, women with special needs, adolescents) and action plans to implement their national plans (Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan among others). However, few indicated having plans to monitor and measure the achievement of their plans. Egypt and Tunisia are distinguished in developing monitoring plans and adequate measures to review the progress or the constraints facing the implementation of their national plans.

The development of national plans or plans of action is a time consuming process and usually needs some external experts to support national mechanisms in developing them. It was noticed that these plans change when the government cabinets change. Continuous change might void the purpose of these plans, which is a systematic planning for the desired results.

e. Gender Training

Gender training is an important instrument that helped in developing a common language among the different stakeholders working to mainstream gender or gender awareness. In the region, many national mechanisms indicated their technical ability to conduct gender training for their staff in the government or in the society. Gender training is usually used by the leading national mechanisms. Lately, some of these mechanisms' gender training targeted some important sectors and groups such as police personnel, judges, lawyers, and journalists, among others.

However, after many years of gender training, this instrument still faces some legitimacy problem whether from conservative movements in civil society or internal resistance from the government around the ambiguity of the term 'gender'. Some others complain about 'gender training fatigue' and question the suitability of this instrument to effectuate a real change since it is based on the belief that changing ideas and attitudes will lead to gender equality. This belief ignores structural economic, social and political constraints to achieve gender equality.

f. Research

Research is an important instrument to direct decision and intervention by decision makers and development workers. In the region, comparative reports and UN reports provide an important source of information on women in the region. Many national mechanisms lack the capacity to produce their own research and report; they would prefer to rely on research centres, academics or private agencies. Few mechanisms indicated having research centres or units as integral part of their national mechanisms with the exception of Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt. Qatar adopted a state policy to encourage research by providing 2.8 per cent of its local income to this end; it also established in 2006 the Qatar Fund for Scientific Research.

In general, research institutions in the region are weak and lack financial support from the governments. Most of the research centres and institutions in the region rely on foreign funding. It is noticed also that research outcomes do not influence to a great deal decision making. Research findings are rarely discussed or presented in Parliaments or with the media and the concerned groups.

g. Disaggregated Data and Statistics

Data disaggregated by sex and statistical information are one of the important instruments used by almost all national mechanisms in the region. Some national mechanisms have their own statistics units while others developed agreements with their national statistical offices to collect data on their behalf.

The realization that sound gender-sensitive planning should be based on accurate and reliable data is common in the region. Many countries produced statistical 'men and women' reports to shed light on the gender gaps that still exist between men and women (Egypt, Tunisia, Palestine, Jordan, Qatar, and Bahrain). A few countries produced 'time use' reports in which time allocation by men and women is examined (Morocco and Palestine). These reports are important to understand the different roles women play in the household and the time allocated to these roles. This will be important in understanding the care role played by women in the region, which is not counted or remunerated on the national level. Some other countries produced detailed statistical reports on certain groups of women or on certain issues such as reports on rural women (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt), on violence against women or women's education, health, reproductive health among others. Most countries in the region have databases on economic, social and population aspects. However, some countries indicated the lack of reliable data on their population (Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq). Egypt still lacks reliable data on economic aspects, health and education among others.

h. Monitoring and evaluation

Though monitoring and evaluation are noted as one of the roles/functions of national mechanisms, weakness in developing this instrument has been highlighted by many national mechanisms. For example, Yemen, Morocco, Sudan, Algeria, Egypt, Palestine among others refers to the lack of indicators to carry out the monitoring and accountability mandates. Qatar recently incorporated a monitoring and evaluation method into the mandate of its national mechanism.

Even though monitoring and evaluation methods are important in having a systematic follow up on national plans and actions, these methods are not used often and are still in an embryonic phase. Few national mechanisms indicated using these instruments (Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt). Evaluation reports are mostly developed for donors and are usually written in English. Thus, evaluation and monitoring are not yet used as instrument to develop the accountability of the national mechanisms to their constituencies or the accountability of the governments to their national mechanisms. This issue is further discussed under part 6 below, challenges and constraints.

i. Other instruments

Many other instruments are used by national mechanisms in the region. Protocols and cooperation agreements between national mechanisms and other stakeholders serve as an efficient instrument in raising awareness about public institutions. Protocols and agreements have moral power over the signing parties and can be used to hold them accountable to their commitment. Organizing public forums, campaigns and festivals all are used as efficient instruments in the promotion of gender equality.

One of the most noticeable and growing instruments is the use of the Internet. Electronic forums, on the national and regional levels, are increasing in the region. Most of the Arab national mechanisms developed their own web sites. Some mechanisms established E-forums on specific issues. AMAN in Jordan is a forum to combat violence against women. The Ombudsman Office in Egypt has its own web site to receive women's complaints, and national statistics offices have an abundance of disaggregated data on their web sites.

E-forums are also mushrooming in the region. The Gender Empowerment Measurements through Statistics Project (GEMS), which includes Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, is a project aiming to mainstream gender issues into the operational organizational structures of national statistical institutions, with the aim of obtaining gender-sensitive statistical data, and to use statistical data as a tool for development planning and policy-making. ICTDAR is forum on women's legal rights, which involves Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia. This project aims to provide answers to women's queries on personal status problems. Jordan's leading national mechanism established an electronic network on Arab women in local councils and another E-international network on women in local government.

Using electronic resources is important for disseminating data and information, exchanging knowledge and coordinating efforts at a low cost. However, this medium is not usually accessible to women in remote and marginalized areas especially with the persistence of high levels of illiteracy in many countries in the region (Yemen, Morocco, Egypt, and Sudan among others).

4.2 Priority Issues

All mechanisms focused on the issues of combating poverty, education, health, violence, decision-making, economy, media and communication, environment and female children. Even though the issues in this report are based on the work of the Arab national mechanisms and their achievements, some national mechanisms indicated that they set their priority following the Beijing format.

The following section looks at priority issues among the varying national mechanisms according to the size of the population, available resources, and general conditions. This following section looks at the countries with the largest population in the region.

Issues of priority vary among the national mechanisms in the region. In the most populous countries such as Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Sudan, and Yemen, poverty alleviation and the development of rural women are high on the list of priority issues. These issues can be summarised as follows:

- Poverty alleviation through income generating projects and lending.
- Develop rural women by providing small credits and training.
- Increase women's participation in the labour market.
- Literacy programmes for poor and rural women.
- Social protection schemes and services (particularly for poor women and female-headed households).

- Vocational education and training.
- Women's health and reproductive health.
- Legal reform.
- Women in the decision making process.
- Combat violence against women.
- Institutionalization of gender mainstreaming.
- Advocating for CEDAW and the MDGs.
- Lift country reservations on CEDAW.

Egypt raised the issue of combating pollution from lead dust, and supporting poor and rural women to have national identification cards to enable them to have access to vital services in health, education and social protection.

4.2.1 Priority Issues in Oil-Rich Countries

In the oil-rich countries of the Gulf and Libya, national mechanisms put rather different priorities that included:

- Integrating women in the professional life and the labour market.
- Vocational training.
- Disaggregated data collection and building statistical institutions.
- Raising awareness on women's roles in the family and society.
- Legal reform.
- Capacity building.
- Women at decision-making levels.
- Institution building.
- Good service provision for women and children.
- Advocate for and abide by CEDAW recommendations.

4.2.2 Priority Issues in Conflict-Zone areas

In conflict-zone countries, national mechanisms advocate for implementing Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000 to protect women and children in war and conflict areas (Lebanon, Sudan, and Palestine). These countries also focused on protection of women and children as a result of the destructions that happened to their homes and to their livelihoods.

4.2.3 Priority Issues in other countries

Gender mainstreaming, poverty reduction with a focus on gender dimensions of poverty, equal participation of women in the judiciary and gender-responsive budgeting were other priorities.

Conclusions

Having analyzed the individual differences among the national mechanisms' priority issues according to their resources, size of population, and other conditions, there still exist important common denominators among them. They all suffer the low rates of women's participation in the labour market, which is considered to be the lowest rate compared to the rest of the world. They also share the issue of

implementing legal reform, and achieving the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action, the MDGs and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

PART 5: COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

National mechanisms in the Arab region are engaged in different forms and levels of coordination and collaboration. This part discusses those issues. The first section deals with the cooperation and collaboration among national mechanisms at the national level, the second focuses on coordination and collaboration with other stakeholders, at regional level and international level.

5.1 Coordination and Collaboration: National Mechanisms

The mandates of most national mechanisms in the region stipulated the objective of coordinating efforts at the national level to achieve the set goals of women's advancement. Such coordination efforts would also entail a reference point for the rest of national mechanisms, at the governmental and civil society levels. These mandates also stipulated that the national mechanisms are the ones to mainstream gender perspectives on the vertical and horizontal levels.

Coordination and collaboration efforts are often left in the hands of the leading national mechanisms - i.e., those considered as the reference point and often headed by the First Ladies, to find, through practice and experience, the best ways for collaboration. Such efforts take place depending on the status of the leading mechanism, the level of its progress, the power of its leadership, the clarity of its mandate, and the level of acceptance or resistance of other government agencies to its roles and functions. The level of progress in effect describes the long history, knowledge of the national mechanisms' leaders, their coordination with other mechanisms and the support they get from the higher echelons of government.

In the part on the status of national mechanisms in the region, it was shown that most of Arab leading national mechanisms are under the mandate of the higher echelon of power, the President or the Prime Minister. The power the national mechanisms have from this positioning is not necessarily clear *vis a vis* the rest of national mechanisms at a lower level. In a few cases, the relationship between the leading national mechanisms and the rest of gender, or focal points was regulated by formal mandate (Palestine, Tunisia), while the rest tend to work on tasks to be achieved.

The leading national mechanisms led by the First Ladies who work independently from government agencies coordinate and collaborate with the rest of national mechanisms through signing agreements, protocols, ad-hoc committees, campaigns, national celebration (Women's Day), and conferences. The shortcoming of this form of relationship could be found in its inability to be institutionalised in the body of the government agencies and its reliance on the power of the leadership and the available funds to implement these tasks.

However, the ambiguity in the mandate leaves sometimes a space for the leading national mechanisms, especially if headed by the First Lady, to expand their mandate to monitor and observe the implementation of the strategic national plans and the action plans. The leading national mechanisms in Qatar, for example, received a Prince's Decree in 2009 that added to its mandate the power to monitor the implementation of the national plan's activities, to monitor its progress and to publish an annual report documenting this progress. While this trend is important in expanding the mandate of the leading national

mechanisms, however, it could reinforce the top-down relationship between the leading mechanisms and the rest of mechanisms thus, hindering a smooth mainstreaming of gender perspectives in the different ministries.

Leading and national mechanisms in the body of the government coordinate and collaborate on a plethora of challenging topics in a relatively new field. They coordinate such topics as the development of national plans, actions plans, and CEDAW reports. They also coordinate training and capacity building for the gender units in the different ministries. This form of cooperation while important in building the capacity of these mechanisms, leaves these mechanisms sunk in the technicalities of how to mainstream gender issues without paying enough attention to the ability of these units to enforce their decisions, or how to overcome their marginalization. The fact that these units are called to participate in other activities such as the development of national plans, action plans, reporting on CEDAW or others, make gender mainstreaming one of the tasks they are required to do. Such tasks add a lot of pressure to mostly nascent mechanisms which runs the risk of diluting the entire process of gender mainstreaming.

Tunisia offers a case report of an organic relationship among the leading national mechanisms and the rest of the mechanisms in the country. For instance, the Ministry of Family, Women, Children and the Elderly participates in the decision-making process in restricted ministerial councils. The government adopts its programmes. Three important structures whose responsibilities are combined help the Ministry's programmes: the National Council for Women and Family which serves as the advisory body, the Centre for Research, Education, Documentation and Information on Women (CREDIF), which serves as the scientific and technical body, and finally, the National Commission for Women and Development which serves as the advisory body on planning and evaluation within the framework of national planning. Such a division of tasks helped to forge an organic relationship that assigns to the leading national mechanism the task of overseeing the general progress of the coordination process and of guaranteeing an easy process of communication and coordination among all mechanisms. Furthermore, this organic relationship is due to having a clear mandate, a status, progress of the leading mechanism and its development, and the skilled leadership of the leading mechanism.

Having a large number of national mechanisms has had a negative impact on the coordination and collaboration efforts as the case of Yemen illustrates. The country's leading national mechanism comprise in its structure 21 representatives from the different provinces, 80 members representing the gender units and civil society organizations in addition to another 50 personnel working in different locations in the government. Thus, it was reported that the mushrooming of mechanisms in the government and the ambiguity of their mandates diluted the role and function of the leading national mechanisms and the rest of mechanisms.

Finally, it is worth noting that the bulk of cooperation and collaboration takes place between national mechanisms in the Executive branch with weak coordination and cooperation with legislative, judicial or ombudsman branches.

5.2 Cooperation and Collaboration with other Stakeholders

National mechanisms in the region not only collaborate with other actors in the civil society and national level, but they also cooperate with regional and international organizations. Such a network of cooperation proved to be vital for the impact on policies and legislation, and to gain more legitimacy and more resources and benefits to these mechanisms.

5.2.1 Cooperation and Collaboration with Civil Society Organisations

National mechanisms in the region established mandates to cooperate with civil society organizations that deal with women's issues. Some countries' mandates emphasize coordination (Syria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon among others). Others emphasize oversight and guidance of these organizations (United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Kuwait). Some of the leading national mechanisms in the Gulf region and Libya also create their own civil society organisations to complement their role and function. The same pattern is noticed in countries with a hegemonic ruling party.

The most ubiquitous form of coordination and collaboration occurs among the national mechanisms, women's organisations, human rights organisations, women's studies centres, media and communication institutions and academics. Due to the weakness of political pluralism and free association in the region, such collaboration and coordination occur to a lesser extent with political parties, in a few countries (Palestine, Morocco). There is almost a non-existing cooperation among the national mechanisms and social movements and unions of peasants, workers, and teachers. Coordination and collaboration also occur where women's movements are relatively strong (Morocco, Algeria, Palestine, Jordan).

The robust forms of cooperation and coordination among the national mechanisms and civil society organizations led to important gains in organizing campaigns for legal reform, combat violence against women, establishing quotas for women, and providing protection for women and children. National mechanisms also collaborate with civil society organizations in preparing national plans, action plans, CEDAW reports, and reports pertaining to the MDGs and the Beijing Platform for Action.

Providing services to women has been the hallmark of the collaboration among the national mechanisms and civil society organizations. Such services as establishing shelters for battered women, legal literacy programmes, creating income generating projects, collecting disaggregated statistics, disseminating advocacy material and other publications are among the collaborative projects.

Despite the commendable steps in providing services to women, the relationship among the national mechanisms and civil society organizations is not always collaborative and oftentimes differs from one country to another. Some civil society organisations believed that the national institutional mechanism wanted to promote equality with the sole aim of improving the external image of the country and also for the benefit of the existing male bureaucracy (EU 2007). There is the issue that the relationship between civil society organisations and national mechanisms, especially if led by First Ladies, is short lived and not sustained. Sometimes the national mechanisms are the ones to choose which NGO to collaborate with, oftentimes at the expense of vocal and powerful NGOs. In this regard, Tunisia's leading national mechanism's links with the mechanisms for the advancement of women and civil society, and more particularly the autonomous women's movement, are weak. Independent feminist associations such as the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women and the Association of Tunisian Women for Research and

Development have been critical of the fact that they have been disregarded both in the policy process and identifying priorities and programmes for the advancement of women.

There is also a conflict of interest between the national mechanisms and women's NGOs in competing for international funding. Normally, donors prefer to grant funds to the national mechanisms, and this has created much tension and mistrust between these two constituencies in several countries (EU 2007). In some countries the relationship with NGOs fluctuates depending on the Minister or the person in charge of the national mechanisms. Therefore, it is important to have clear, agreed on procedures and lines of communication between the national mechanisms and women's NGOs.

In some other countries, some positive instances took place when national mechanisms and women's NGOs embarked on the principle of a 'partnership' instead of 'sharing' or collaborating on some activities. In an attempt to consolidate co-operation between the different actors, including the Islamists, a former women's minister in Palestine proposed a 'National Code of Action' to be discussed by all women's organizations and activists. The purpose of this document is to 'clarify the roles, responsibilities and authority of each actor'. However, these attempts in formalizing the relationship between national mechanisms and civil society organizations are mostly short lived and depend on the leading figure in the national mechanisms.

5.2.2 Cooperation and Collaboration at the Regional Level

The Arab Women's Organization is a living proof of the regional cooperation among the Arab national mechanisms. It was successfully established in accordance with the recommendations of the November 2000 Arab Women's Summit led by the First Ladies in the region. It operates under the umbrella of the League of Arab States but also maintains its financial and administrative independence. The League of Arab States' Social and Economic Council agreed on the formation of the Arab Women's Organization on February 14, 2002. The organization came into being after the legal formalities were concluded and seven Arab nations ratified the agreement after which it began operating on March 1, 2003. The organisation drafted a comprehensive strategy for the advancement of Arab women in collaboration with ESCWA and UNIFEM and produced a holistic work plan and attempts to coordinate and exchange different countries' experiences with issues related to quota, family law, and women's studies programmes in Arab universities.

The organization played an active role in reviewing different discriminatory laws against women, and recommended some reforms that have been endorsed by its higher council that is representing the First Ladies. It also developed a pan-Arab media and communication strategy, a strategy on the role of Arab youth in supporting women's rights, and is currently in the process of producing a pan – Arab strategy to combat violence against women in the region. The organization worked with other UN organizations to develop an electronic library, as well as an electronic database on women cadres, experts, publications, research centres, and women's studies programmes. It also developed some qualitative and quantitative measures to monitor the implementation of CEDAW by the different states in the region.

The Arab Women's Organization proved to be an important reference point to many national mechanisms in the region since it derives its legitimacy from the League of Arab States and the First Ladies. Yet,

many women's NGOs in the region see it as representing the Arab states' formal policies, which makes it accountable to these states and not to women constituencies.

Another arena for regional cooperative mechanism is illustrated by the Women's Committee in the General Secretariat of the Arab League. This Committee is comprised of women experts and activists who developed many important documents and strategies aiming at fighting illiteracy, domestic violence, protection of women in conflict areas, and creating an encyclopaedia on women's status in Arab legislation, in addition to recommending reforms for this legislation. Even though the Committee managed to forge good working relations with academics, activists, and representatives of states, there arose some competition among the two regional entities over power, resources, and legitimacy.

Regional cooperation among the national mechanisms in the region has also been encouraged by donor funding. One such collaborative project is the Gender Empowerment Measurements through Statistics Project (GEMS), which includes Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, previously mentioned.

These regional initiatives are increasingly offering support to many national mechanisms in the region, enabling them to share experiences, hold their governments accountable and initiate many common projects and campaigns. Since many of these regional collaborations depend on external funding or funding from host national mechanisms in oil-rich countries, such regional cooperation lacks formalized and sustainable channels of cooperation.

5.2.3 Cooperation and Collaboration on the International Level:

International cooperation is becoming vital for national mechanisms to build their capacity, to share experiences, to develop new strategies and to gain new knowledge and experiences. Many UN and international organizations are active in cooperating and collaborating with many national mechanisms in the region. International organizations have supported studies, research, institutional capacity building, provided experts in different fields on gender mainstreaming, gender-responsive budgeting, gender statistics, and information technologies. They also supported activities, initiatives, conferences, E-forums, web sites, preparation of national and regional reports, among many other initiatives.

Conclusions

Some main points can be summarised in the following concerning cooperation and collaboration:

1. Cooperation and collaboration among the leading national mechanism and other national mechanisms exists and is growing in the region but with an ambiguous, haphazard formal mandate;
2. Cooperation and collaboration among governmental and civil society organisations occurs in response to a certain demand or to achieve a certain task, thus lacking institutionalization and sustainability;
3. Regional coordination and collaboration is a growing trend but with weak accountability to women's constituencies; and
4. Coordination and collaboration with international organizations is important.

PART 6: CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES

Notwithstanding the achievements discussed in the previous part, national mechanisms still face continuing constraints and challenges that are different in kinds and importance across the region. In addition to shedding light on these challenges, this part discusses first the internal and external constraints in the region. Secondly, it further explores the remaining major challenges facing national mechanisms.

Certain challenges threaten the sustainability and the effectiveness of national mechanisms in the region. For instance, the limited resources available to national mechanisms in relation to the size of the population poses a serious challenge to some national mechanisms (Egypt, Yemen, Sudan, and Morocco). Countries rich in resources but with small populations have a different set of constraints and challenges. Conflict zone countries and war-torn areas pose yet different kinds of challenges for national mechanisms. The overarching challenges across the region are the lack of resources, cultural and societal resistance, weak institutionalization and stability of national mechanism and, finally, scarce data. The following section analyzes these challenges further.

6.1 General Context: Constraints and Challenges

In response to the Beijing +15 survey, national mechanisms in countries with large populations and limited resources faced similar constraints and challenges. Most countries face the constraints of poverty, high illiteracy rates, limited resources, and poor services in health, education and social protection. Combating illiteracy and poverty top the list of priorities of national mechanisms' agendas as they see them as the most important challenges.

Despite the Gulf countries' rich resources, and good services provision in education, health and social protection, their national mechanisms still face their own constraints and challenges. These countries suffer weak or non-existing women's grass-roots organizations, strong resistance on the part of the government bodies and civil society and the scarcity of qualified cadres regarding gender mainstreaming.

National mechanisms in war-torn and conflict zone countries (Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, and Sudan) have their own constraints, including unstable state institutions, set-backs in service provision in the health sector, education and social protection, high numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and, finally, lack of resources.

6.2 Internal Constraints and Challenges

National mechanisms in the region identified several needs to their own internal constraints and challenges. Some suggested working more on issues related to rural women (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia among others), others pointed to the need to give more attention to poor women or women with special needs (Palestine and Kuwait). Despite these efforts at finding a solution, the lack of resources, staff and budget, cultural and societal resistance, weak institutionalisation of national mechanisms and lack of data pose more pressing challenges.

6.2.1 Limited human and financial resources

Almost all national mechanisms in the region, with the exception of Tunisia, Qatar and Kuwait, indicated having funding constraints. Low income countries and conflict zone and war-torn countries reported their dire funding resources. Many national mechanisms put enormous efforts and time to produce their gender strategic plans and action plans but lack of funding impeded, partially or fully, the implementation of these plans (Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, Yemen, Sudan, Algeria, Palestine and Lebanon). The national mechanisms in some Gulf countries however, suffer from slow budget transfers (United Arab Emirates, Oman and Bahrain). Countries with low incomes and large populations rely heavily on donor funding. External funding was vital in enabling national mechanisms in these countries to produce their strategic national plans, national reports, to provide training and capacity building, funding awareness raising campaigns or paying salaries for the cadres involved in implementing projects.

However, reliance on donor funding creates its own problems in the war-torn and conflict zone countries. It was noticed that donor aid goes directly to the affected population without dealing necessarily with the national mechanisms in place. This is a disadvantage for the national mechanisms by disconnecting them from their constituencies and eroding their legitimacy. Furthermore, relying heavily on donor funding makes the national mechanisms vulnerable to the changing agendas of donors; for example, there is evidence that some donors insist on funding capacity building activities for national mechanisms while they are in need to fund their programmes and projects.

Reliance on donor funding has its own limitations. Highly populated and low income countries that depend on donor funding in combating illiteracy, poverty and health service provision (Yemen, Egypt, Sudan and Morocco), these services may be at risk once funding stops. Service provision should be distributed evenly at the national level a task most of the donor funding cannot assume on a sustainable basis.

Another constraint and challenge expressed by all national mechanisms in the region (with the exception of Tunisia) are the lack or scarcity of skilled staff. The weak technical skills in mainstreaming gender, gender-responsive budgeting, monitoring and evaluation are important constraints that affect the institutionalization and sustainability of these mechanisms. Lack of expertise encourages some national mechanisms to hire experts from outside the government body, usually with much higher salaries, which creates resentment and resistance to their work. In the cases where the national mechanisms are from outside the government body, such as commissions and national councils, they tend to hire qualified professionals but at much higher salaries than those of government employees, which does not help in building a relation of trust and collaboration with the people in the government who usually show resistance to gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming is a new field of work; local experts in the field are mostly graduates of Western institutions who might not cope with the usually low salaries of governments. However, building the capacity of local cadres is a vital step towards the institutionalization and sustainability of national mechanisms in the region.

6.2.2 Cultural and Societal Resistance

All national mechanisms in the region reported facing cultural and societal resistances to their work. Change in the stereotypical image of women in the society is slow. They also reported facing resistance from the government bureaucracy, which hinders their efforts in gender mainstreaming on a sustainable basis.

Resistance to gender mainstreaming could be attributed to poverty, unemployment, and war conditions. In countries where poverty and unemployment are dominant, women's rights and gender equality lose their priority and relevance to the immediate conditions of the country. The same irrelevance is voiced in war-torn and conflict-zone areas. Countries that suffer high unemployment rates, where jobs opportunities are limited, especially for youth, find that having more women in the labour market competing with them could be seen as a threat that should be resisted.

The powerful and popular political Islamic movements in the region are another factor that explains this resistance. Most of these movements do not accept the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as a reference point for women's rights in the region and some attacked it publicly. In Syria for example, the Grand Mufti (Religious Supreme Judge) had to prepare a report, from a religious point of view, in which he saw no contradiction between the Convention and the principles of Shari'a.

Some Parliamentarians showed resistance to many attempts at legal reforms in Arab Parliaments. Kuwaiti women have been denied their political rights for many years because of the objection of the majority in the Parliament. In Yemen, many legal reforms are pending the approval of the Parliament. However, political openness and integrated development growth proved to be helpful in changing attitudes and cultural resistance usually aggravated by high level of unemployment and poverty.

6.2.3 Weak Institutionalisation of National Mechanisms

All national mechanisms in the region pointed to one or more constraints related to the weak institutionalisation of national mechanisms, lack of coordination across government bodies and the dispersal and marginalisation of some of these mechanisms. Only Oman put under constraints the non existence of a national mechanism.

In Palestine, for example, it was stated that the Cabinet decision in 2005 to establish women's units was not mandatory, as it stated 'we urge ministries, especially the big ones, to establish women's units when it is possible and needed.' This ambiguity took three years of efforts from the leading mechanism towards the issuance of another decision in 2008 according to which 'gender units' have to be established with a clearer mandate and platform.

The dispersal of mechanisms over a big number of ministries and government bodies is another source of constraint. Many mechanisms suffer from marginalisation and isolation compounded by the lack of human and financial resources. Lack of coordination across mechanisms and between mechanisms and government bodies were mentioned as constraints by many national mechanisms in the region (Morocco, Algeria, Yemen, Egypt, Lebanon, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, and Palestine).

The absence of monitoring and evaluation systems is another constraint and challenge mentioned by some national mechanisms that affect their sustainable institutionalization (Algeria, and Jordan). Monitoring and evaluation are important instruments to examine the synergies among the different mechanisms and across the government bodies. Monitoring and evaluations allow knowing how their work complements other agencies' and consider areas of competition and resistance.

Another internal constraint is the regular reshuffling of national mechanisms resulting in instability in their structure, location, priorities and functions. In the Palestinian case for example, between 2003 and 2009, five women were at the head of the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The same trend was found in Yemen too. The reshuffling of the national mechanisms might result in changing the focus of their work according to the vision and beliefs of the new leader.

Many national mechanisms in the region pointed to the weak coordination with civil society organisations as one of the constraints they face and hamper the efforts of institutionalising their tasks and activities (Jordan, Egypt, Yemen, Lebanon, Algeria and United Arab Emirates). Some mentioned the almost non-existence of active civil society organisations that can support the work and activities of national mechanisms (Qatar and Bahrain). While some others put under challenges the need to enhance the capacity and support to civil society organisations to shoulder part of their activities (Oman, Syria and Bahrain).

Coordination between national mechanisms and civil society organisations could help in dividing tasks and activities. Civil society organisations could bring more skills and resources to the working of national mechanisms. However, some instances of competition over funding, space and ownership of achievements remain, as does some scepticism and lack of trust.

6.2.4. Lack of Data

The lack of data gender disaggregated by sex persists in the region (Syria, Algeria, Oman, Yemen, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain and United Arab Emirates). Data disaggregated by sex is an important tool that provides information for identifying and analyzing issues of priorities. Such data help to assess progress, develop indicators to measure impacts and highlight issues of public concerns. The complaint of the lack of data is another indicator of the lack of funding and resources for national mechanisms.

Data scarcity affects the ability of national mechanisms and government bodies to establish a reliable system for monitoring and evaluation and poses an obstacle to having a sound process for planning. However, many mechanisms indicated a considerable growth in data collection, especially in the Gulf, and the complaint of the lack of data could be attributed to the lack of indigenous capacity to collect such data. Some basic data on illiteracy, infant mortality, violence against women, women trafficking are collected through donor funding projects (Egypt and Yemen, for example). The reliance on foreign funding for data collection could be problematic especially if they touch upon some culturally sensitive issues such as honour crimes, prostitution, abortion, and violence against women. The data generated through donor funding can be contested and ignored if it does not suit formal government policies or some opposition groups' principles.

Contradictory data or unreliable data also remain a challenge (Sudan, Yemen and Lebanon) due to conflict and wars that hinder the efforts to collect data from all areas and regions. National mechanisms' data on rural, refugees (Yemen, Morocco and Sudan) or Bedouin women (Jordan) also remain weak or unreliable. The lack of studies in some national mechanisms raises the question of the efforts at coordination and collaboration among the national mechanisms and the growing number of women's studies centres in civil society and in academia.

Other challenges and constraints include technology illiteracy, lack of real commitment on the part of the leadership of national mechanisms, lack of concern about women's issues on the part of civil society organizations, weak concern of the private sector, and of the media with women's issues.

Conclusions

In sum, poverty, debts, illiteracy, weak economic participation, wars and conflicts are constraints facing a large number of national mechanisms in the region. Lack of material and human resources, cultural resistance, lack of data and reliable information is another set of the most challenging constraints facing national mechanisms in the region.

PART 7: KEY AREAS OF SUCCESS

This part will focus on the recent successes of national mechanisms in achieving gender equality and in creating a solid foundation for gender equality in the Arab region. This part also distinguishes between the success of national mechanisms and concrete achievements. Achievements could be sporadic, temporary with no structural ability to be sustained. Success will be analysed and measured in light of the ability to sustain and build on the achievements. In this light, factors that contribute to the success of national mechanisms and sustain their gains will be important.

The Beijing + 15 survey shows that all national mechanisms in the region had concrete achievements, in a range of fields, including awareness raising, gender mainstreaming and institutionalization, development of national plans, strategic gender plans, ratification of CEDAW, reporting on CEDAW, gender disaggregated data, legal reform, political participation for women in public life, combating violence against women, establish institutions to combat violence against women, bridging gender gaps in certain fields, minimize cultural and societal resistance to gender equality, equality before the law in the constitutions, research and studies, vibrant civil society, active Parliaments, supportive media, autonomous judiciary, access to stable budgets and resources, and supportive political will. Scrutinizing these achievements will help to distinguish between one-off achievements and those that are building blocks in the long process of realizing gender equality. Achievements will be discussed based on the frequency in which they were mentioned, followed by an analysis of their sustainability and durability.

7.1 Equality before the Law and Legal Reforms

All national mechanisms indicated the existence of the principle of equality before the law in their constitutions (with the exception of Saudi Arabia). All indicated that some legal reforms took place. Many of the machineries have been able to influence legal reforms in favour of gender equality. For example, the national women's machinery in Lebanon is invited to all sessions of the parliamentary committees that address women's issues. It lobbied parliamentarians to introduce amendments to Article 568 of the Penal Code relating to honour crimes. The national machinery in Egypt lobbied parliament successfully to change the nationality law, the pension law, the tax exemption law, the alimony fund law, the 'Khul' law and the family court law. Tunisia introduced 14 legal reforms between 1999 and 2009 that raised the age of marriage to 18 years for males and females, the same in Jordan, Egypt. Qatar raised the age of marriage to 16 years, and Algeria to 19 years. Reforms to support breastfeeding mothers and lengthen maternity leave also took place (UAE, Qatar, Tunisia, Algeria, and Sudan, among others). Paternity leave for fathers (Tunisia), criminalization of sexual harassment (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan), reform of discriminatory laws against women and on human trafficking (Oman, Jordan, Syria), alimony fund law for divorced women (Palestine, Egypt, Bahrain) also form part of such reforms. Women no longer need their guardian consent to obtain passports (Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Qatar), and are entitled to equal compensation for accidental death (Qatar), and to equal pay and grades in military service (Tunisia, Kuwait, Palestine, and United Arab Emirates)

While these reforms are important to pave the way towards more gender equality before the law, however, many mechanisms indicated weakness in implementing and enforcing the new reforms

(Palestine, Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon, Egypt, and Yemen among others). Some other mechanisms showed that some reforms were issued by Executive decrees and are still awaiting Parliamentary ratification (Palestine and Yemen). Countries in conflict areas find difficulty to convene their Parliaments (Palestine and Iraq). Thus, equality before the law and legal reform without applying and enforcing the rule of law and the related reforms, could be seen as important achievements, but not necessarily lead to sustained and durable success.

7.2 Women in the Decision-Making Levels

All national mechanisms indicated a visible increase in the level and number of women in decision-making. Many professions that used to be restricted to men are now open to women. Women joined military service and police in Palestine, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Tunisia. In Tunisia, for example, women's representation is systematic including in the different bodies of the state. This is not the case in other countries, where women's representation is rather sporadic, uneven and symbolic to some extent, with some variations from one country to the other. Women's political representation could reflect political will to empower women in the political sphere, without being necessarily empowered in a vital field for women's autonomy, i.e. the economic sector.

7.3 Quotas for Increasing Women's Political Representation

Quotas for increasing women's political representation are another visible achievement for some national mechanisms in the region, including in Palestine, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan. In the Gulf countries which in general do not use quotas, the tendency is to nominate women to overcome the weak representation in the different elected or nominated councils. Quotas are important achievements but need to be complemented with other factors such as societal acceptance for women's representation and structural change in the political system towards more public participation and accountability.

7.4 National Development Plans, Strategic Gender Plans and Action Plans

Increasing numbers of national mechanisms in the region produce national plans for development, action plans to implement the national plans, strategic gender plans and action plans (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Palestine, Yemen, Sudan, Qatar, Jordan, Bahrain, and United Arab Emirates). Development plans, strategic gender plans and action plans are important achievements. They help identifying the general development trend in the country and the gaps that affect gender equality and gender mainstreaming. However, national plans and strategic gender plans per se are not enough to measure success if they are not accompanied by sufficient and sustainable budgets to implement them. Few mechanisms can avail themselves of the needed funding for the implementation of their plans in a sustainable and systematic way. Tunisia recently produced its fourth strategic gender plan for 2007-2011, to bridge the gaps that emerged after the implementation of the first three plans. The Tunisian national mechanisms implement their plans in harmony with the national development plan and in coordination with its activities.

7.4 Awareness Raising and Political Visibility

National mechanisms stepped up efforts to raise awareness and make the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment more visible on the national arena. Many national mechanisms also emphasized the need to change the culture and attitude about equality and rights for women. Raising awareness through the coordination with other efforts would show tangible long-term results in changing discriminatory culture and attitudes toward women.

7.5 Ratification of CEDAW, withdrawal of Reservations

The ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by almost all Arab governments is an important achievement in the region, with United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar being the most recent ones to ratify the Convention. Some others lifted fully or partially their reservations (Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan, Algeria and Syria). Two Arab countries are also party to its Optional Protocol (Libya and Tunisia). Reporting on the progress in the implementation of the Convention is also an important achievement.

7.6 Gender Mainstreaming and Capacity Building

An impressive number of national mechanisms in the region considered gender mainstreaming as one of their noticeable achievements. Some national mechanisms are following a process of deepening and sustaining their achievements in this endeavour (Tunisia, and to some extent Morocco, Sudan, Syria, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan) by institutionalizing gender mainstreaming in more government bodies at all levels. Other mechanisms included gender perspectives in their national plans and strategic national plans without being able to establish the needed structures or permeating the existing bureaucracy. Important efforts are being deployed in capacity building of new skilled cadres. Gender training, gender diagnosis and analysis, gender disaggregated data and lately gender budgeting and auditing are all instruments used to enhance the capacity to mainstream gender in the region. At the same time, gender mainstreaming efforts also remained uncertain, uncoordinated and sporadic, with limited tangible results, with significant obstacles and challenges discussed earlier in the report.

Conclusions

All national mechanisms mentioned one or more achievements in their effort to mainstream gender or achieve gender equality. Accounting for the local context of each country's national mechanisms elucidates different factors for a durable and long-term success. These factors can be summarized as: political stability, good or decent standard of living, low level of poverty, high level of literacy, decent and affordable access to basic services in health, education and social protection, political will, accountable legislators, autonomous judiciary, developed national mechanisms, orchestrated development efforts with integrated gender vision, synergy between national mechanisms, creating a gradual approach toward gender mainstreaming, access to sustainable budgets and resources, disaggregated data with available skills to use them in policy and planning, knowledgeable and skilled leadership to leading

national mechanisms, coordination and harmony among national mechanisms and civil society organizations, supportive culture, and cooperation and collaboration on the regional and international levels.

PART 8: POTENTIAL/OPPORTUNITIES

Many potential opportunities can be found on the national, regional and international level.

8.1. Potential / Opportunities at the National Level

Many national mechanisms achieved some important gains that paved the ground to open more opportunities in the future. In all Arab countries some important legal reforms have been introduced by many national mechanisms, but these laws need to be effectively implemented, with less resistance. However, the trend is towards more reforms to narrow the gap between universal women's rights conventions and national laws. In the Human Development Report of 2005, it was perceived that much work still needs to be done at the institutional and cultural level. Law institutions such as the courts, the police and Ombudsman offices are some of the potential arenas to support gender equality. Court systems demonstrated some important changes in the effort to make them more gender-sensitive. Nominating female judges is one example that can be replicated in countries in the region.

Parliaments also can strengthen their contribution to the promotion of gender equality, supported by regular meetings among national mechanisms and women parliamentarians. There has been an overall trend in the region to raise the number of elected or nominated women, and this provides opportunities for influencing these parliaments and putting women's issues on their agendas. Furthermore, initiatives have been made by national mechanisms or civil society organizations to create more opportunities for women's political participation whether as voters or candidates at the national and local levels.

In spite of the many challenges and constraints facing national mechanisms in the region, their existence and expansion is a visible fact. The trend in the region is toward multiplication, diversification and institutionalization of national mechanisms. Gender mainstreaming is gaining legitimacy and visibility, not without difficulties, but it is progressing. There remains a need for deepening and institutionalizing the work on gender equality, including by developing more tools and instruments. National plans, strategic gender plans and action plans are in place in many countries, and some albeit often inadequate resources are available for their implementation. The trend is to hold governments accountable to their political commitment to the promotion of gender equality. This provides an opportunity for further work.

There is a growing trend to generate disaggregated data to ameliorate planning, monitoring and evaluation of policies and plans. Equally important is the effort put by many national mechanisms and their government to enhance human capacity, provide training and cadre formation. A growing process towards more decentralisation of national mechanisms is taking place in many countries. The realization that women's needs and concerns are different and diversified according to class, ethnicity, religion, age, and life cycle is behind the trend towards more diversification and decentralization of national mechanisms' agendas and concerns. This provides an opportunity for more targeted work.

Some of the promising potential/opportunity can be seen in the coalition building between national mechanisms and other civil society organizations. In some cases, coalition building to target specific issues proved to be an important medium to effectuate change. Such efforts can help in organizing and

pooling important resources and power to push for reform. In countries where civil society organizations are weak, national mechanisms realize the importance of their development and can contribute to strengthen civil society organizations.

Coalition building, cooperation and collaboration among national mechanisms and civil society organizations opened important opportunities to tackle some sensitive issues which were considered as taboos only a few years ago. An increasing number of issues can be tackled successfully with coordinated campaigns, forums, and coalitions. It is important to build alliances with different social groups, such as social movements, worker's unions, peasants unions. This will enrich the national mechanisms' agenda and build strong constituencies for these mechanisms and the cause for gender equality among the poor, the rural and the marginalized. Strengthening cooperation and collaboration among the national mechanisms and civil society organizations in the region is thus critical.

8.2. Potential Opportunities at the Regional Level

Networking and pooling efforts at the regional level have been an important aspect of coordination among all the national mechanisms. Initiatives have been taken to unify regional efforts around law reform, addressing violence against women, curriculum development, and creating databases. Different actors are behind these initiatives, some from civil society organizations and some others from donor and international organizations. Some of the regional organizations, such as the Arab League and its Women's Committee and its Arab Women's Organisation should do more to coordinate regional efforts. Consolidating the Arab League by introducing fresh participation from civil society organizations might be an effective tool to support the work of the national mechanisms at the regional level. Coordinating efforts and collaboration among regional mechanisms is important to open more opportunities for national mechanisms in the region to exchange experiences, knowledge and pooling for more resources at the human and financial levels.

8.3. Potential Opportunities at the International Level

International cooperation based on partnership and equality is one of the most important arenas for promoting gender equality. International organizations proved to be vital in the capacity building of national mechanisms. It is important to go beyond providing technical training and providing long term academic education on gender issues.

Many national mechanisms in the region put on their agendas for the future the consolidation of the state's role in providing universal services in education, health, employment, poverty alleviation, combating violence, and developing the national media and communication systems. The realization of the important role of the state is an important opportunity that might open more space for cooperation and collaboration. The global crisis might be helpful for national mechanisms, especially in poor countries, to preserve the services provided to women and work to improve their quality.

International solidarity movements proved to be effective in drawing the attention to many atrocities in the region and have the potential for strengthening exchange with national mechanisms in the region.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

The report has shown the importance of having strong national mechanisms that address an agenda for women's empowerment and gender equality. Regardless of the reasons why these mechanisms were initially established, they play and have played an important role in advancing women's rights and gender equality in the region. There are a number of essential conditions that need to be fulfilled in order to guarantee that such mechanisms can achieve their mandates and create a mindset favourable to gender equality.

National mechanisms can function better if good governance is guaranteed through their composition and operation. They should recruit staff that are committed and have the skills to influence others within the government structures to become gender-sensitive and implement their programmes in a way that guarantees both women and men have equal opportunities in all walks of life.

Taking small steps that lead to gradual, bigger steps could be a possible strategy for national mechanisms in the region to overcome isolation and marginalization in the government bodies. Coordinated vision, policies and activities among the national mechanisms and national development efforts are vital to the promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in a harmonious and sustainable way.

Resources and adequate funding should be available to the national mechanisms to carry out their daily operations. Transparency and less dependency on donor funds are also necessary. Data collection and knowledge accumulation is another important arena that needs more efforts and dedication. Data is needed for better planning, monitoring and evaluation.

It is of vital importance that national mechanisms co-operate with civil society organizations in particular social movements, professional unions, worker unions and NGOs in order to set a national agenda for gender equality and to build consensus around this agenda. Other mechanisms should be in place for national mechanisms to function effectively, i.e. legislative frameworks and other supporting bodies such as: Ombudsperson for gender equality, gender equality commissions, and gender focal points in the legislative and judiciary bodies. Engaging political religious movements from the opposition could be one of the strategies to minimize resistance to women's rights and gender equality.

Regional cooperation and coordination is of vital importance. It helps in minimizing internal resistance as it helps in the exchange of important knowledge and experiences.

International cooperation, based on respect and partnership, is important in advocating national and regional issues on the international arena, in capacity building and exchange of experiences.

SOME PROMISING CASES

Facing cultural resistance effectively (Tunisia)

Cultural and societal resistances are some of the challenges and constraints facing national mechanisms in the region in their effort to advocate women's rights and gender equality. In the face of this challenge, the leading national mechanism in Tunisia is following a gender mainstreaming approach and a women's rights approach towards more gender justice. The mechanism is the oldest in the region; it was established in 1992 as a sign of a strong political commitment of the President of the Republic to follow the steps of the first post-independence national leader Al-Habib Bourgiba. Since that date, the leading national mechanism developed its fourth national strategic gender plan 2007-2011 in partnership with other national mechanisms that emerged gradually since 1991.

The Tunisian national mechanisms have the conviction that laws, policies and measures are not enough in themselves to achieve gender justice if they are not supported by a comprehensive societal awareness and culture that involved men and women in support of the taken measures. Thus, the national mechanisms put a plan to disseminate and enforce a culture based on the belief in equality, equity, and the importance of women's inclusion in all walks of life.

The plan targeted key ministries that reach for wider constituencies in the country. It involved the Ministry of Family, Women, Children and Aged, the leading national mechanism in partnership (not coordination) with the Ministry of Public Health, Higher Education, Scientific Research and Technology, Ministry of Education and Formation, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Religious Affairs and many civil society organisations. To achieve the plan at all levels and to reach for all ages, an older block was mobilized that was built in 1997. The Child Parliament was based on principles of equality, partnership, the right to difference, and mutual respect. Half of the members are females and the other half are males. The plans and the Parliament reach out for young youth in schools, dorms, sports clubs, health clinics and all other similar places. By 2007, the Parliament reached out for more than 450.000 young men and women, 60 per cent of them are females. The national plan was built on the same values and beliefs that the Child Parliament was disseminating since two decades ago.

Enhancing collaboration and partnership with civil society organizations: The National Code of Action (Palestine)

National Code of Action (NCA) is a policy making initiative taken by the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2006. The aim was to enable a gender sensitive, women empowering development environment, by producing and implementing NCA to enhance complementary cooperative work, among governmental and nongovernmental organizations and to ensure harmony and coordination among the different partners.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs considered launching NCA as an opportunity to initiate a dialogue at a time when it needed it. The followings are the major actions taken:

- Initiating the dialogue with the different organizations toward the goals and objectives of this very important initiative, by laying a basis for producing of NCA through workshops and meeting all over Palestine, with the participation of around 40 organizations' representatives in each workshop, active discussions about the need for a NCA, the areas of intersection between MOWA and participated organizations, challenges and recommendations, what NCA is needed and proposed mechanisms for creating the common working environment
- Developing three concept papers out of a research report of target/partner organizations, the concept papers focused on three main aspects to be included in the NCA mechanisms for: priority identification and ranking, coordination and monitoring and evaluation
- A Consultative and a media committees were formed, media campaign was planned with a media coverage to all activities of the NCA

So far the achievements are rewarding and promising, and tells that whatever the challenges are, there is a way to an agreement, with discussions and meetings organizations are realizing more and more that this document will be benefiting for them on the long term.

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TABLES

Table 1: Types, number, status and legal affiliation of national mechanisms

Country	Main Mechanism	Other Mechanisms	Number and Status	Legal Affiliation
Egypt	National Council for Women	9	10 Government	The President's Office
Syria	Women's Commission on Family Affairs	8	9 Government	The Prime Minister
Jordan	Jordanian National Commission for Women	8	9 Non government	The Prime Minister
Lebanon	National Commission for Women's Affairs	2	3 Government	The Cabinet's Office
Sudan	Ministry of Social Care, Women and Child Affairs	5	6 Government	The Prime Minister
Yemen	Higher Council for Women	9	10 Government	The Cabinet's Office
Bahrain	Higher Council for Women	2	3 Government	The King's Office
Oman	CEDAW Committee	15	16 Government	The Prince's Office
Qatar	Higher Council for Family Affairs	4	5 Government	The Prince's Office
Kuwait	Women's Affairs Committee	0	1 Government	The Cabinet's Office
United Arab Emirates	Women's Union	0	1 Government	The Prince's Office
Saudi Arabia	Ministry of Social Affairs	0	1 Government	Not defined
Morocco	Ministry for Social Development, Family and Solidarity	4	5 Government	The Cabinet's Office
Algeria	Ministry of Family and Women's Issues	6	7 Government	The President's Office
Tunisia	Ministry of Family, Women, Children and Aged	3	4 Government	The Cabinet's Office

Source: ESCWA Survey for Beijing +15, 2009

Table 2: Headship of Main Institutional Mechanism

Country	Headship of Leading Institutional Mechanism
Egypt	First Lady
Jordan	First Lady
United Arab Emirates	First Lady
Qatar	First Lady
Syria	First Lady (Honorary)
Kuwait	First Lady
Bahrain	First Lady
Oman	No national Machinery
Lebanon	First Lady
Algeria	Minister
Palestine	Minister
Iraq	Minister
Yemen	Minister
Morocco	Minister
Tunisia	Minister
Sudan	Minister
Total First Ladies and Percentage	8 (53%)
Total Ministries and Percentage	7 (46%)

Source: ESCWA Survey for Beijing + 15, 2009

Table 3: Basic Information on National Mechanisms in the Arab Region

Country	Egypt	Syria	Jordan	Palestine	Lebanon	Tunisia	Algeria	Morocco
Date of Establishment	2000 NCW	2003 SCFA	1992 JNCW	2003 Ministry	1998 NCCW	1992 Ministry	2003 MDCFCF	2007
Form	National Council for Women	Commission	Commission	Ministry	Commission	Ministry	Ministry	Ministry
Women's Question *	NCW and NCCM	Women's Federation and Commission on Family Affairs	National Commission for Women	Ministry of Women	National Commission for Women	Ministry of Family, Women, Children and Aged	Ministry of Family Affairs and Status of Women	Ministry for Social Development, Family and Cooperation
Legal Status	Presidential Decree	Decree	Decree	Decree	Decree	Decree	No legal status	Cabinet Decree
Human Resources	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Stable and Good	Limited	Limited
Funding	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Good	Limited	v

Gulf States

	Saudi Arabia	Qatar	Oman	Bahrain	Arab Emirates	Kuwait	Sudan	Yemen
Date of Establishment	Not provided	1998	2006	2001	2006	2003	2005	1996, 2000, 2003
Form	Not provided	Council	CEDAW Committee	Higher Council	Women's Union	Committee	Ministry of Social Care, Women and Child	Higher Council for Women

Women's Question *	Not provided	Family Affairs	Not defined	Women's affairs	Family development	International and regional representation and raising awareness on women's issues	
Legal Status	Not provided	Sheikh's Decree	No legal Status	Prince Decree	No legal Status	Cabinet Decree	Republican Decree Republican Decree
Human Resources	?	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited
Funding	?	Stable and Good	Limited	Slow Transfer	Slow Transfer	Not clear	Limited

Source: EUROMED 2007, ESCWA Survey for Beijing + 15 2009, ESCWA National Mechanisms survey 2007

Table 4: Nature of Main Leading Mechanism

Structure	Countries	Number	Year of Establishment
Ministry	Palestine, Iraq	2	2003, 2004
Part of a ministry (women, family and children, Social Affairs, Health and Population)	Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Oman and Saudi Arabia (dates are not indicated).	5	1992, 1998, 2002
National or Higher Council for Women	Qatar, Egypt, Bahrain	3	1998, 2000, 2001
National Commission for Women or for the Family	Jordan, Yemen, Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria	5	1992, 1996, 1998, 2002, 2003
General Women's Union	United Arab Emirates	1	1975

Source: ESCWA Survey for Beijing + 15, 2009