



Gender Developments of the Current Arab Uprisings

ESCWA 2011 Status of Arab Women Report

Gender inequality is a lingering issue in the Arab world. However, the inequalities vary from one domain to the other, as improvements have been recorded in the education sector, especially among the youth. For example, the gender gap has been narrowing among youth (15-24) literacy rates in the ESCWA region in almost all the countries with the exception of Yemen. On the contrary, in some instances such as in the United Arab Emirates and in Lebanon the youth literacy rate for females exceeds that of males.¹ Albeit, the same improvements cannot be noted for female representation at decision-making levels in the political domain, where men continue to dominate.

The 2011 Status of Arab Women Report of the ESCWA Centre for Women, entitled "*Political Leadership and Participation in Decision Making*" examines women's status in the public sector in decision making and leadership levels. It is presented at a timely manner as the Arab region is witnessing social movements in which women are playing a major role in. The draft report, which will be published mid 2012, was presented at an Expert Group Meeting on December 22, 2011 at ESCWA proceeding the Fifth Session of the Committee on Women which was held on December 19-21, 2011 in Beirut, Lebanon.

The 2011 Status of Arab Women Report examines the traditional indicators of female political representation in the national and local councils (parliaments and municipalities). In addition, the 2011 report looks at women's involvement in political parties and in the ongoing popular social movements in some of the Arab countries, notably in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain. The report also explores the role of women in the conflict-stricken countries (Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan and Somalia). In particular, it explores the role of women in the peace negotiations processes and in implementation of the United Nations Security Resolution 1325.

United Nation Statistics Division (last update June 2011), Statistics and indicators on women and men, Table 4a. Literacy. <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/tab4a.htm>

Notable Gender Developments in the Region: Successes and Challenges



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

19 October 2011, United Nations New York. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (right) meets with Tawakkul Karman, joint winner of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize. Ms. Karman, a national of Yemen, was awarded the prize for her “non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women’s rights to full participation in peace-building work”.

The Arab region witnessed notable change. The ongoing social movements in the region created a domino effect of reforms. Many of these changes have affected women either directly or indirectly. Women played a significant role in the social movements, be it in Yemen or in Egypt. As they took to the streets side by side with men, one would think that their noteworthy participation would mean that they would bear the fruit of their actions through their emancipation. As Asmaa Mahfouz, an Egyptian activist, recalling the protests in Egypt said, “All of us were there, throwing stones, moving dead bodies. We did everything. There was no difference between men and women.”² However, that should not be taken for granted as tradition and gender norms are rigid in the region; thus, the future of women in the region could go either way.

Yemen:

Yemen is one of the countries in which we can see women gaining the benefits of their movement and social struggle. One of the great achievements for Yemeni women, and Arab women as a whole, is Tawakkul Karman’s joint win of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize. Karman’s win proved that women’s place in the social movements is as important as that of men’s. It also reflects the world’s recognition of women’s efforts. Moreover, on December 7, 2011 Yemen’s new unity government was created. The new 35-member cabinet is headed by independent politician Mohammed Basindwa. It includes 3 women: Dr. Amat Al Razzak Ali Hamad; Dr. Houria Mashour and Dr. Jaouhara Hamoud Thabit.³ The former cabinet of Yemen included 2 women; although now having 3 women is not a drastic jump, it is still an improvement.

The Economist, October 15, 2011, Women and the Arab awakening <http://www.economist.com/node/21532256> ?
? ?s???□????P??S □ ??? T□□ ??? ? □?? <http://www.sabanews.net/ar/news255054.htm> ?

Saudi Arabia:

Although not directly linked to an uprising, the women of Saudi Arabia also experienced positive change. The King of Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz granted suffrage rights for Saudi women on September 25, 2011. Although not applicable until 2015, the King granted women the right to vote and participate in elections.⁴ Granting Saudi women suffrage rights can be seen as a monumental achievement. Thus, from 2015 onward women would be permitted to join the advisory Shura Council and vote and participate in municipal elections.⁵

Egypt:

Historically, Egypt has been in the forefront of women's rights. In 1957, Egypt became the first country in the Arab world to elect a woman to the parliament.⁶ However, the female quota system was removed following the January uprising that abolished the government. Currently, a total of 376 women are running for parliament, which equals to about 31% of all candidates.⁷ However, because so many of them are independent they make up only 6% of party and coalition lists. The elections are divided into 3 phases; unfortunately, not one woman won in the first phase. Although, it is important to note that one district (Sahel) will repeat its elections in January and 2 women are running in the re-elections. The final results of the elections as a whole will be in January. Like other Arab countries that are still in the transitional phase, it is still unknown in which direction the new government will rule in terms of gender equality.

Tunisia:

Tunisia is not only the first country to spark the social movements in the region, it is also the first country in the region to withdraw all reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW). In addition to a general declaration, Tunisia initially made reservations with respect to the following provisions of the convention: Article 9 concerning equal nationality rights; article 15 concerning equality before the law and freedom of movement and residence; article 16 concerning rights in marriage and family life, and article 29 concerning arbitration by International Court of Justice (ICJ) in case of disputes about interpretation or application of the convention.⁸ However, the official spokesperson of the interim Tunisian government Al Tayyeb Bakouche declared on 16 August, 2011 that the transitional Tunisian council of ministers has approved the withdrawal of all reservations placed by Tunisia on CEDAW.⁹

Reuters, September 25, 2011, Saudi king gives women right to vote <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/09/25/us-king-women-idUSTRE78O10Y20110925>

Ibid.?

<http://womennewsnetwork.net/2011/11/28/egypt-women-voters-voice-election> Egypt Women Voters add strong voice to post Revolutionary Elections

The Guardian, December 2, 2011, The Long Road from Tahrir

Declarations, Reservations and Objections to CEDAW, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations-country.htm>

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/09/06/tunisia-government-lifts-restrictions-women-s-rights-treaty> Government lifts restriction on women's rights Treaty, Human Rights Watch, September 6, 2011

Highlights of the Latest Gender Developments in the Region

- [Saudis to Let Women Compete in Olympics](#), November 27, 2011

After a long period of resistance, Saudi Arabia has agreed to let female athletes join their all-male delegation to the 2012 Olympics.

For more information see:

http://www.themedialine.org/news/news_detail.asp?NewsID=33816

- [United Arab Emirates gives women right to pass nationality to children](#), November 30, 2011

The United Arab Emirates announced Wednesday that children of Emirati women married to foreigners could apply for citizenship once they turned 18, moving closer to giving women the same nationality rights as men.

For more information see:

http://en.news.maktoob.com/20090001279256/UAE_gives_women_right_to_pass_nationality_to_children/Article.htm#smbcfbsh

Quotes on Women's Issues

"Because we refuse to marginalize women in society in all roles that comply with *sharia*, we have decided, after deliberation with our senior *ulama* (clerics) and others... to involve women in the *Shura* Council as members, starting from the next term,". (**King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia- September 2011, on Granting women voting rights**)

"The revolution liberated women from their customs, traditions and militant fanaticism, and put women side by side with men ," (**Tawakkul Karman, winner of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize**)

"As Arab women, you have shown to your countries and to the world that you are prepared and determined to fight for democracy by and for the people. You came out to protest, together with men, for better living conditions, equality, and political systems that genuinely represent the will of the people ." **Michelle Bachelet, at the Young Women & Men in the Arab Uprisings: Agents of Democratic Change UN Women -ESCWA -OHCHR Forum 16 October 2011 Cairo, Egypt**

About ECW...

The ESCWA Centre for Women (ECW) was established on the 1st of October 2003, following the adoption by the Commission of ESCWA resolution 240 (XXII) of 17 April 2003. Recognizing that a fundamental part of development is the empowerment of women, the resolution called for the creation of a Committee on Women and the establishment of a centre for women consisting of specialists in women's issues.

ECW assists in the process of empowering women in the Western Asia region economically, socially and politically; and in mainstreaming a gender perspective in national policies, plans and programmes. In order to realize its mission, the Centre provides technical assistance and training services in sectoral gender mainstreaming. It also provides policymakers and machineries for women with tools that aim to eliminate gender discrimination and empower women.

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