



FOREWORD

The past decade has witnessed a great deal of work and effort exerted by governments and non-governmental organizations at both national and regional levels with regards to women's issues. National structures and strategies were developed; several conferences and workshops were held; numerous programs for women and girls' capacity building have been implemented; awareness programs of all types have been conducted and plans for mainstreaming gender perspectives were drawn to ensure the advancement of women and a more gender-equitable society. All these efforts have contributed to improving the status and participation of women at different levels. UNIFEM, UNFPA and CAWTAR have supported initiatives that aim at eliminating all forms of violence against women, increasing women's political participation, and promoting women's human rights.

Today, a new partnership is developing between governmental and non-governmental organizations working towards the achievement of common goals. Civil Society today assumes a new role in this partnership. This report identifies this new role and the efforts exerted by civil society as it assumes them.

We are pleased to present the Beijing +5 and Beijing +10 reports, which provide an insight into the progress achieved throughout the years following the signing of the Beijing Platform for Action. The reports highlight successful experiences and major obstacles faced by NGOs as well

as the relationship between governments and NGOs in improving the conditions of women in the region.

After the successful preparation of the Beijing +5 report, UNIFEM is pleased to expand the scope of participation in preparation of B+10 through inviting UNFPA and CAWTAR to collaborate with UNIFEM on this publication.

This report was commissioned by UNIFEM, UNFPA and CAWTAR as part of their efforts to document progress made since the signing of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Although, much has been achieved so far, more still needs to be done to ameliorate the status of women across the region to a more effective and powerful within their families, communities and societies.

We would like to express our appreciation for the NGOs who responded to the questionnaire and the team members who exerted the efforts in finalizing this report.

We are looking forward to the next decade for women. It is our hope that it will witness greater achievement on all fronts pertaining to women, including the fight against feminized poverty, increased women's political participation, the implementation of CEDAW, and the amendment and implementation of relevant legislation.

It is our hope that the completion of this report heralds a new phase of development in the advancement of women in the region and that it will be a medium through which the rest of the world learns about the climate in which Arab NGOs operate, their achievements to their mission, and their future role.





INTRODUCTION

BEIJING 1995

During preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Commission on the Status of Women, in its capacity as the Preparatory Agency for the Conference, explained in its Decision number 7/37 the important role played by non-governmental organizations (NGO's) regarding the development of women, indicating that it is incumbent upon governments to utilize the extensive commitment and expertise of these organizations. It further encouraged governments to support NGO's and engage them in preliminary national efforts as well as regional and international activities.

Throughout the preparation period for the Fourth World Conference on Women, a number of functions and meetings were held at the international, regional and national levels, foremost of which was the preparation of official national reports and alternative reports for NGO's. In the Arab region, the two reports were discussed in two separate meetings, during which the governments adopted the Arab Regional Report, consecutively ratified and adopted by the NGO's at the NGOs' Forum.

BEIJING+5

Celebrating the five-year anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) pre-

pared a special survey to facilitate the preparation of the Alternative Report for NGO's which was used as a frame of reference in preparing the Report, highlighting successful experiences and major obstacles faced by NGO's in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, in addition to highlighting the relationship between governments and NGO's in improving the conditions of women in the region.

Since NGO's have had a significant and fundamental contribution to implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, UNIFEM has convened the NGO Forum in the year 2000 to discuss the Alternative Report, which highlights the main achievements, obstacles and challenges in light of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The concluding document (B+5) asserts, in paragraph 4A on Country Pledges mentioned in the national reports for the 23rd United Nations National Assembly for Women in the Year 2000, under the title "Gender Equality, Development and Peace in the 21st Century", held in New York in June 2000 on the fifth anniversary of the Beijing Conference, the need to encourage partnerships between governments and NGO's to implement commitments undertaken during the Fourth Women Conference and other summits and conferences organized by the United Nations for the purpose of achieving gender equality, development and peace in the 21st century.

BEIJING+10

On the tenth anniversary of the Beijing conference, the United Nations General Assembly is holding its 49th Session during the period February 28 – March 11 2005 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to review the progress achieved in implementing the Beijing Conference Platform for Action, as reflected in reports to be submitted by governments and NGO's. This process coincides with the first rudimentary five- year review of achievements towards realizing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); The third millennium development goal is dedicated to Promoting Gender Equality and Women Empowerment.

Marking the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Conference (Beijing +10), a number of preliminary meetings have been held at the international, regional and national levels, to evaluate the progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

ESCWA Arab States Regional Office held a Regional Conference under the title "Ten Years After Beijing: An Invitation to Peace".

The Arab Regional Report on Women, and the ten-year evaluation of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action were reviewed by the Arab delegations. Moreover, achievements, challenges, and recommended actions to empower women and improve their status were discussed.

The Arab Regional Report for the Ten Year Review, and Evaluation of the Beijing Platform for Action did not adequately discuss the role of NGO's. Recognizing this, and responding to numerous requests by NGO's, UNIFEM, UNFPA¹ and (CAWTAR²), have conducted surveys to assess the role and

contribution of NGO's in the development process in the Arab Region. The surveys revealed the important role played by these organizations over the past ten years in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

THE ARAB REGION

The Arab world, a region stretching from Morocco in the west to Bahrain in the east embraces portions of Africa, Asia, the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, the Mediterranean and Red seas, and the Arab Persian gulf. With its 280 million inhabitants living in 22 countries, the Arab world is a place where diverse cultural, social and political dynamics co-exist, creating an intriguing landscape that encompasses unique differences and cross cutting similarities between the countries.

The Arab Region is faced by a number of challenges directly affecting its peace and development. Military conflicts, globalization, political unrest, and sanctions and embargoes have affected many economies in the region, directly and indirectly affecting the socio-political balance and consequently the progressive move towards liberalization and democratization. There is a substantial lag between Arab countries and other regions in terms of participatory governance³. While de jure acceptance of democracy and equality is accepted by all constitutions, legislations and laws, de facto implementation remains neglected and disregarded. Like other developing countries, the Arab States are attempting to respond to a quickly evolving, fast-paced technological world order that requires political, economic and social modernization, stability and efficiency. However, the Arab countries and the region itself are faced with

¹ United Nations Population Fund

² Arab Women Center for Training and Research

³ Arab Human Development Report, UNDP, 2002

daunting challenges at the political, economic and social levels that require innovative and strategic responses.

The complexities of the regional situation have often been used as a pretext for delaying democratic reforms and imposing “Security Measures” on Arab societies. Paradoxically, the peace process launched between the Arabs and Israel in 1991 provided yet another justification for delaying democratization; the establishment of political and economic stability to attract foreign investment in the period after the peace accord as well as the control of popular reactions against the peace accords which were perceived by many inhabitants of the region as unjust because they were imposed by the existing balance of power.

Like all developing countries, the Arab countries have been called upon to reform their public sectors in a manner that gives more freedom to civil society, allows for greater participation of the private sector, and respects public freedoms. More specifically, Arab States where expected to meet the criteria of good governance; a competent decentralized government that is accountable for its acts, an efficient and transparent public service sector; a reliable judicial system; a corruption intolerant culture, relaxed public freedoms and public debate, freedom of the press and association, and respect for human rights.

THE MAP AND STATUS OF THE NGOS IN THE ARAB REGION

The social phenomenon that has given rise to the concept of Non Governmental Organization “NGO” is by no means new, neither for European nor Arab countries. In France, modern associations can be traced back to the 19th century, while in Arab countries they

appeared in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

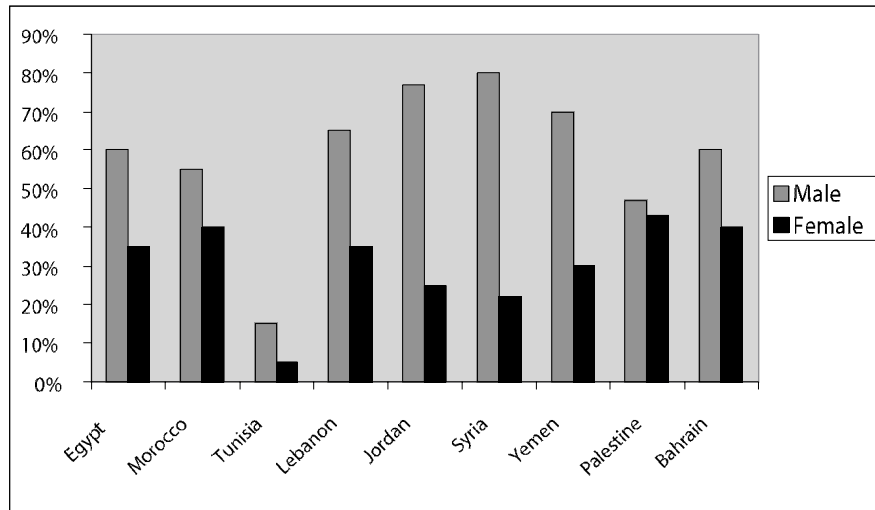
NGO’s are referred to as civil society organizations. These include women associations, trade unions and syndicates, forums, developmental and social societies and others. In many instances they are referred to as the third sector, next to the public and private sectors. These organizations adopt numerous objectives and their work is purely voluntary. Their activities are restricted either in one or a number of fields, and they rely on various funding sources, such as member subscriptions, agencies, donations, government support, or through receiving funding from international or regional organizations.

Generally, civil society includes all NGO’s that are created upon the will of their members, and operate independently from the government, and report to a general assembly. Nevertheless, they function within the framework of laws that guarantee the public freedom to establish societies, and outline the means by which to practice and respect this freedom.

The number of NGO’s working in the field of development in the Arab World has increased from 175,000 in 1995 to 225,000 in 2003. According to the Arab Network of civil society Organizations database, the ratio of women in decision-making positions (management of civil society organizations) varies from one country to the other. In Lebanon, for example, this ratio approaches 45%, and reaches 42% in Palestine, while it falls short of 18% in Egypt⁴.

The recent adoption of the concepts of good governance, disseminated through the doctrine of globalization, has been a primary reason behind the increased reliance on NGOs as important actors in development as opposed to their historical role as alternative or complimentary

⁴ Arab Women Progress Report 2004 - UNIFEM, Arab Countries Regional Office.



The figure shows the percentage of women's membership in NGOs in some countries of the Arab World.⁵

contributors to development. NGOs have become a conduit for development implementation, especially in sectors that are not covered by government services. Their influence has increased in the decision-making process, and they have played a lobbying role with governments, in addition to contributing to articulating many agendas for social, economic, political and cultural issues. They have also served as a channel for citizen participation and achieving democracy on the local and popular levels. Some NGOs have also succeeded in tackling social issues such as poverty and unemployment.

It is fairly difficult to address these organizations in collective terms, as there are major differences among them, related mainly to their areas of operation and effectiveness. It could be claimed, however, that these organizations represent the fulcrum of the civil society, and that they have come to play a supportive role in economic, social

and political development in society. Today, NGOs are playing an active role in virtually all domains of development; agricultural projects, employment, enterprise creation, professional training, support of basic urban services, reproductive health and Family Planning, Women empowerment, and the fight against HIV/AIDS. Additionally, they are strong advocates of social and humanitarian causes such as human rights, women's rights, and the rights of ethnic and religious minorities.

Historically, citizens of Arab countries have formed NGOs out of a desire to help needy and disadvantaged social strata. The findings of a Civic US study carried out at the beginning of the nineties throughout the Arab world, with valid extrapolation to date, reveal that the percentage of charitable, philanthropic and social NGOs ranges from 9.7% in Tunisia to 68% in Kuwait with most other countries varying from 30% to 50% (Kandil A (ed)).

⁵ Network of Arab NGOs Database: UNIFEM 2004 Progress of Arab Women.

The situation of NGOs varies greatly from one Arab country to another. Some countries continue to supervise and even control NGOs, while others allow considerable leeway for NGOs to perform. While considering the diverse political climate in the region, Arab NGOs can rarely be regarded as powerful players capable of influencing the development and future of their societies.

Most Arab NGOs under exploit their potential and lag in meeting the new developmental challenges by concentrating their efforts on charity, philanthropy, and social work. Nevertheless, and in lieu of reduced state funding and dwindling revenues, Arab NGOs have assumed the increasingly important role of providing vulnerable population groups with social, economic, health, and community networking services.

TEN YEARS AFTER BEIJING

In the past few years, Arab States have endorsed new perspectives in developmental planning for women; they have signed and ratified a number of important international conventions, declarations, and platforms of Action that have created a new standard for developmental objectives, and set time – bound targets for nations to meet. Arab policy makers have formulated and adopted development strategies that invite the civil society to join governments in assuming the responsibility for implementing regional, national, and local developmental initiatives. Women and gender issues have been addressed, and the global consensus on the need to achieve gender equity and empowered women was shared by most Arab countries through adopting the Convention to eliminate all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Cairo Plan of Action, the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, the Millennium

Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, among others.

The involvement of civil society organizations is considered part of the solution adopted by countries and international organizations to materialize policies and strategies that cater for the interests and rights of all citizens. An increasing number of these organizations are contributing to the progress made on the Beijing Platform for Action, through implementing initiatives in areas like political, legal and economic empowerment of women.

Over the past ten years, the work culture of many NGO's shifted from mere observation and limited participation, to active involvement through providing guidance on women-related priorities. Their scope of work expanded to encompass "Gender Mainstreaming", especially after most governments in the Arab region announced their commitment to incorporate gender equality in their institutions, policies and plans. Remarkably, the number of NGOs that target women and gender issues has nearly doubled in Arab states.

This report aims to highlight the involvement of Arab civil society and NGOs in development, with particular emphasis on their contribution to the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action since its adoption in 1995 to date (+5 and +10). It attempts to explain the various forms of association and cooperation NGOs have with the different governments of the region, and with the international and regional society.

The report will also discuss constraints and challenges facing the region and civil society, as well as strengths, weaknesses and opportunities available for development, and expectation from NGOs during the next few years. Taking into account the perspective of Arab



Iraqi Women Calling for Peace Equality and Dignity.

NGOs on their role and impact, this report focuses on the following areas of concern that directly affect the status and well being of women, and Arab society as a whole:

- Women Status: Gender issues and Legal Rights,
- Gender Based Violence,
- Women's Health and Reproductive Health,
- Women's political participation,
- Economic Security.

Priorities and challenges as well as the role and contribution of the civil society will be raised, in addition to the responsibilities of the governments, regional and international institutions and organizations.