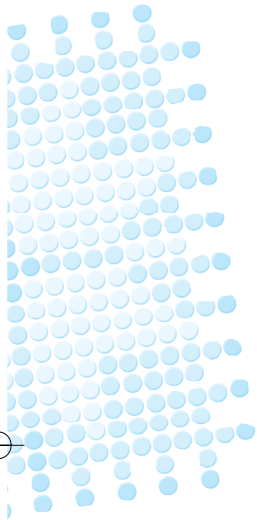
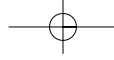


Chapter one: Gender Equality: Achievements and Challenges



1. Policy Responses

This chapter describes the achievements of Arab women as enacted by governments, civil society and other stakeholders working for the equitable advancement of women. The chapter will also analyze the dissonance and distances between policies, their operationalization and their outcomes.

This section probes the two levels of policy responses, commitments and actions made by Arab states so as to both appreciate their efforts and to understand the challenges faced by women and the changes that are needed to overcome them.

1.1 Country Reservations: Violations or Variations

CEDAW and the BPFA are the foundational international commitments and resolutions to achieve women's empowerment. CEDAW is described as "the definitive international legal instrument requiring respect for and observance of the human rights of women; it is universal in reach, comprehensive in scope and legally binding in character" (United Nations 1995: 3).

The Beijing Conference sparked a renewed global commitment to the empowerment of women everywhere and drew unprecedented international attention worldwide. The BPFA embodied the agreement by every nation attending the conference "to adopt and implement most, if not all, of the Platform, which calls for global action to achieve equality, development and peace" (United Nations 1995: 1).

Among the 22 members of the League of Arab States, 16 countries ratified or acceded to CEDAW¹ and Palestine² adhered to it. This ratification took place over a period of 23 years (from 1981 to 2003). The first country to ratify the agreement was Egypt, followed by Yemen, Tunisia, Iraq, and Libya. These ratifications preceded 1990. The last countries to ratify or accede to the agreement include Mauritania, Bahrain, and Syria (post-2000). Nineteen countries attended the Beijing Conference; Palestine was an observer. The absentees were Saudi Arabia and Somalia. Many countries have expressed reservations on specific articles of CEDAW and BPFA. For CEDAW, 13 countries tabled reservations on a number of articles as summarized in Table 1.1.³

¹ There are some inconsistencies in the literature on the countries ratifying CEDAW. Eleven countries are reported as ratifying CEDAW. They include Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Yemen. The other five countries—Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, and the Syrian Arab Republic—are reported as either ratifying or acceding. Countries which neither acceded nor ratified CEDAW include: Oman, Qatar, Sudan, UAE, and Somalia.

² UNIFEM (2002: 12) notes, "The Palestinian National Authority does not have state status and therefore has not ratified CEDAW. Accordingly, it is not obliged to report on its progress, but both governmental and non-governmental organizations took the initiative to report on CEDAW in Palestine. Moreover, the Palestinian National Authority has established the Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Advancement of Women (IMCAW).

³ The committee is responsible for coordinating efforts among the Palestinian Authority Institutions but is not a national committee as such.

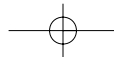
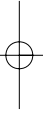


Table 1.1: Arab states that have signed and/or ratified the CEDAW convention as of June 2004

State	Date of signature	Date of Ratification/ Accession	RESERVATIONS						Total
			Art 2	Art 7	Art 9	Art 15	Art 16	Art 29	
Mauritania*		10/5/01	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Jordan	3/12/80	1/7/92 Ratify	-	-	9/2	15/4	16/1 (c),(d),(g)	-	3
Algeria	-	22/5/96 Accession	2	-	9/2	15/4	16	29/1	5
Comoros Islands	-	31/10/94 Accession	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Iraq	-	13/8/86 Accession	2 (f),(G)	-	9/1 9/2	-	16	29/1	4
Kuwait	-	2/9/94 Accession	-	7 (a)	9/2	-	16/1 (f)	29/1	4
Morocco	-	21/6/93 Accession	2	-	9/2	15/4	16	29/1	5
Tunisia	24/6/80	20/9/85 Ratify	-	-	9/2	15/4	16/1 (c),(d),(f),(g) ,(h)	29/1	4
Lebanon	-	21/4/97 Accession	-	-	9/2	-	16/1 (c),(d),(f),(g)	29/1	3
Libya	-	16/5/89 Accession	2	-	-	-	16/1 (c),(d)	-	2
Egypt	16/7/80	18/9/81 Ratify	2	-	9/2	-	16	29/1	4
Yemen	-	30/5/84 Accession	-	-	-	-	-	29/1	1
Djibouti	-	2/12/98 Accession	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Saudi Arabia*	7/9/2000	7/9/2000 Ratify	-	-	9/2	-	-	29/1	2
Bahrain	18/6/2002	18/7/2002 Accession	2	-	9/2	15/4	16	29/1	5
Syria	-	25/9/2002 Accession	2	-	9/2	15/4	16/1 (c), (d), (f), (g) 16/2	29/1	4
Total			7	1	10	6	11	11	46

Article 2: Condemn discrimination in all forms and agree to pursue all appropriate means to eliminate it (particularly incorporating principle of equality in laws and actions)

Article 7: Political and public life (voting and participation in public office and NGO)

Article 9: Nationality of mothers to be passed to children

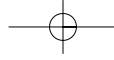
Article 15: Women's equality with men before the law

Article 16: Equality of rights in marriage and family relations

Article 29: Settling of disputes by arbitration or International Court of Justice

* Mauritania has a general reservation against CEDAW convention in case it contradicts with Islamic law.

* Saudi Arabia has made a general reservation against the CEDAW convention as follows: "In case of contradiction between any term of the Convention and the norms of Islamic law, the Kingdom is not under obligation to observe the contradictory terms of the Convention"



In addition to the reservations on specific articles, some Arab countries (such as Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Mauritania) have also maintained a declaration whose essence is that the state is not committed to the provision of any of CEDAW's articles if any of these provisions do not comply with the provisions of Islamic sharia. A small though sizeable number of countries have entered reservations with Articles 2 and 15 and almost all Arab countries have entered reservations with Articles 9, 16, and 29. It is important to note that many countries have not recognized a women's right to vote and stand for election. These include: Qatar, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Oman.⁴ Of these, only Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia have signed on to CEDAW. There continues to be pressure on these countries from within the region to recognize women's political rights, and efforts to encourage more Arab states to ratify CEDAW. Reservations to Articles 2 and 15 are generally viewed as serious violations to the spirit of the convention. The concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women drew the attention of Arab states' parties to the Committee's statement on reservations in the report on its nineteenth session, and, in particular, its view that Articles 2 and 16 are central to the object and purpose of the Convention and that, in accordance with Article 28, paragraph 2, these reservations should be withdrawn. Article 28, paragraph 2 states that: "a reservation incompatible with the object and purpose of the present Convention shall not be permitted" (United Nations Treaty Series [CEDAW] 1981: 13).

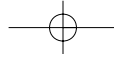
Careful assessment of the reservations to CEDAW suggests that they are based on equity considerations but not reflecting intrinsic violations to the equality principle.

Actually, careful assessment of the reservations pushes to the forefront that Arab countries are not against core CEDAW principles, but are instead quite reluctant to commit themselves to changing specific articles in their laws. In particular Article 16 captures substantial resistance in Arab countries as it relates to the rights of men and women within the family. The other reservations entered provide a 'shield' against these states having to adopt and/or implement any of the articles that the country interprets to be against Islamic sharia.

The evidence supporting this assessment of the nature of Arab country reservations is the fact that in most Arab countries the constitution guarantees equality of men and women. The different stipulations in the law for men and women can therefore be interpreted as related to different positions of men and women in society. In line with this view, the constitution and laws of the state call for women and men to be treated differently though not unequally. In other words, the different articles of law for men and women may be a reflection of equity considerations rather than biases against women.

There have been recent movements by some Arab states to withdraw reser-

⁴ UNDP, Human Development Report 2003, p. 327-330.



vations on Article 2. For example, in Egypt the National Council for Women (NCW) has requested that the government undertake the needed steps for such withdrawal. Also, nationality laws restricting matrilineal transference of nationality is being changed or revisited in a number of Arab countries. Furthermore, family law is undergoing a large number of changes and there is an ambitious attempt by the Council of Arab Ministers of Justice to adopt a unified Arab Family Law (the Kuwait Document) as a minimum base for securing the rights of men and women in the family.

It is also relevant to note that the reservations to CEDAW are not confined to Arab or Muslim countries. For example, Articles 1, 4, 5, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, and 16 have been subject to reservation by some countries in Europe, as in Arab countries. Articles 15 and 16 have received the most attention. Switzerland, U.K., Belgium, and Malta have registered reservations to Article 15, and the same countries (in addition to France and except Belgium) also registered reservations to Article 16. Most of the European countries having reservations to Articles 15 and 16 have stated that the provisions of these articles do not comply with the provisions of the Civil Code in these countries and were careful to state the specific articles in their Civil Code and Family Code that do not conform with the Convention. The difference between the nature of reservations of countries is detailed in Annex 1.a.

Regarding the BPFA, several dozen countries, including seven Arab countries, entered reservations, which they requested the Secretariat of the Conference to place on record. These reservations are summarized in Table 1.2. and Annex 1d provides details on the text of paragraphs, reasons for reservations made by Arab states, and other countries with similar reservations as Arab countries.⁵

⁵ Annex 1d and 1a are available on the web: www.unifem.org/jo

Table 1.2: Reservations of Arab Countries to Provisions (Paragraphs) of the Beijing Platform for Action

	Paragraph No.							
	94	95	96	106(j)	106(k)	223	232(f)	274(d)
Country								
1. Egypt								3
2. Iraq			3				3	3
3. Kuwait	3	3	3		3		3	
4. Libya		3	3	3		3	3	3
5. Mauritania			3	3			3	3
6. Morocco			3	3	3		3	3
7. Tunisia			3				3	3

Para. 94: Reproductive health (including sexual health)

Para. 95: Reproductive rights

Para. 96: Sexual relations and rights

Para. 106(j): Health impact of unsafe abortions

Para. 106(k): Abortion rights and care

Para. 223: Reproductive rights

Para. 232(f): Actions to ensure the rights referred to in paragraphs 94, 96

Para. 274(d): Inheritance

Investigating the reservations of Arab countries to the BPFA, it is notable that only one generic reservation was expressed by a large number of Arab countries which covered sexual relations and rights (Article 96). Other generic articles (94, 95 and 223) were subject to very few reservations. Furthermore, and in marked contrast to CEDAW reservations, the emphasis in Beijing was much more on cultural specificity vis-à-vis sexual rights and relations. Other non-Arab countries that expressed similar reservations with the same emphasis include Malaysia, Iran, and the Holy See.⁶

⁶ Among the non-Arab and non-Muslim countries, the only reservation in common with Arab countries is the one related to abortion. This was expressed by Japan, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Malta, Peru, and Venezuela.

1.2 Country Plans of Actions: The Successes and Failures

In the course of the implementation of Resolution 37/7, on the preparation for the Beijing Conference on women which was adopted by the United Nations Committee on the status of women, and in implementation of resolutions adopted by ESCWA and the League of Arab States (LAS), a preparatory meeting of Arab states was held in Amman from 6 to 10 November 1994. One of the main objectives of the meeting was to formulate the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005 and to unify Arab visions and positions for the Beijing Conference (ESCWA, 1994: 1).

The Arab Plan of Action was based on the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies and on the international covenants and conferences relating to women and children. The assessment of changes that occurred in the status and role of women since the Nairobi Conference in 1985 necessitated the preparation of a document reviewing and appraising the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies as well as the formulation of the present Arab Plan for the medium term (ESCWA, 1994: 1, 2).

The Arab Plan of Action aimed at addressing regional priorities in the light of the issues included in the first draft of the Platform for Action adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its thirty-eighth session. The priorities identified reflect an endorsement of the twelve areas of concern spelled out in the BPFA. However, it is important to probe country national plans to assess how the common vision of Arab countries is translated into country level priorities.

Table 1.3 compares the areas of concern in the national plans with Beijing areas of concern. It shows that education and training as well as economic structures and policies are highlighted by almost all of the Arab countries. Also health, power, and decision-making mechanisms promoting the advancement of women, as well as human rights appear in a large number of national action plans.

Clearly, Arab plans of action cover a wide spectrum of concerns and capture adequate components of the strategic orientation of the Gender Approach. The national plans of most Arab countries however, do not seem to adequately address three key strategic areas of concerns. These relate to violence against women, media stereotyping, and the rights of the girl child. Recently, there have been some efforts, however, toward addressing these neglected areas.



It is important to probe country national plans to assess how the common vision of Arab countries is translated into country level priorities.

Box 1.1: Country Plans of Actions

The unified Arab Plan of Action articulated in 1994, identified the following priorities:

- 1) Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels
- 2) Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women
- 3) Lack of awareness of, and commitment to, internationally and nationally recognized women's human rights
- 4) The persistent and growing burden on women
- 5) Inequality in women's access to and participation in the definition of economic structures and policies and the productive process itself
- 6) Inequality in access to education, health and related services and means of maximizing the use of women's capacities
- 7) Violence against women
- 8) Effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women
- 9) Insufficient use of mass media to promote women's positive contributions to society
- 10) Lack of adequate recognition and support for women's contribution to managing natural resources and safeguarding the environment (ESCWA 1994: 1–2).

Table 1.3: Classification of Areas of Concern in the National Action Plans and Strategies* by Beijing Critical Areas of Concern and Countries

Critical Areas of Concern												
Country	Poverty	Education and Training	Health care and Related Services	Violence against Women	Armed Conflict and Women	Economic Structures and Policies	Power and Decision-making	Mechanisms Promoting the Advancement of Women	Human Rights	Media Stereotyping	Environment Safeguarding	The Rights of the Girl Child
Algeria	3	3	3			3	3	3				
Bahrain	3	3	3			3	3	3	3			
Egypt		3	3			3	3	3	3			
Iraq		3	3	3		3	3	3	3	3		
Jordan		3	3	3		3	3	3	3			
Kuwait	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Lebanon		3	3		3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Morocco	3	3	3					3				
Oman	3	3	3			3	3				3	
Sudan	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	
Syria	3	3	3	3		3	3	3	3	3	3	
Tunisia	3	3				3	3	3	3			3
UAE		3	3			3		3				

Source: Based on an analysis of an informal background document prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) on national action plans and strategies for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, as they were submitted to the UN on 22 December 1997, available on website address: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing/national/asiatum.htm>. The document summarizes the Synthesized Report on National Action Plans and Strategies for Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action submitted in the 42nd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (March 1998).

Arab plans of action capture adequate components of the strategic orientation of the gender approach, and the pace and magnitude of changes in implemented actions are quite impressive in a number of Arab countries.

Moving from national plans to implementation, Table 1.4 summarizes how Arab countries perceive their achievements in the 12 areas of concern. The adoption of mechanisms for promoting the advancement of women is clearly the most common achievement in Arab countries. These mechanisms range from the establishment of high-level bodies to plan, monitor, and evaluate gender policies and mainstreaming activities, to effecting far-reaching changes in legal provisions as well as increasing the representations of women in decision making positions.

The pace and magnitude of changes are quite impressive in a number of Arab countries. For example, in Jordan, the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) was established by a Cabinet decision in 1992—one of the first semi-governmental commissions established in the Arab world to promote women’s issues. The JNCW’s mission is to support mainstreaming of gender equality perspective in all policy areas and to narrow the gap between formal acknowledgment of women’s rights as detailed by legislation and actual societal attitudes toward women. The JNCW led a large effort composed of Jordanian public and private institutions and individuals involved with women’s issues to formulate a national strategy for women in Jordan. The JNCW’s responsibilities broadened in 1996 with the Cabinet’s decision to charge it with defining policies and legislation related to women and identifying priorities, plans, and programs in both governmental and non-governmental sectors in order to effectively carry them out. The JNCW is now the authority on women’s issues and activities for Jordan’s public sector, and it represents the Kingdom in all dealings pertaining to women’s affairs at national, regional, and international levels.

Similar examples can be found in Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine. In Egypt, the establishment of the National Council for Women (NCW) in 2000 was a major step in ensuring that gender is firmly placed on the development agenda. The council’s political leverage was assured through its direct reporting to the president and the leadership of the first lady. The council in Egypt pioneered the mainstreaming of gender in the national plans. It has adopted steps to introduce gender-based analysis of budgets and to engender statistics. It also introduced an ombuds unit to follow up on gender complaints and encouraged the institution of affirmative action in government ministries. Furthermore, the council has been instrumental in the appointment of the first woman judge in Egypt, addressing the glass ceilings in a number of professions, allowing women to pass their nationality to their children, establishing the family court to facilitate resolution of familial complaints, and securing women’s access to alimony and their ability to claim divorce rights.

In Lebanon, in compliance with the Beijing Conference decisions, the Lebanese government established the National Commission for Lebanese

Women (NCLW) in 1996, while the NGO Committee was restructured to ensure follow-up on women's issues. The Commission is entrusted with an important role in the formulation of plans of action for women and coordination with appropriate public institutions and departments, NGOs, and local and international organizations involved in women's issues to mainstream gender in governmental and non-governmental organizations.

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, upon the endorsement of the action plan of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, efforts were made in the governmental and non-governmental levels to mainstream gender in the line ministries. Several ministries, such as Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs have developed their models of gender mainstreaming and action plans. It is note worthy that the Occupied Palestinian Territories is one of few areas in the region besides Egypt that have started to work on gender budgets to hold ministries accountable for their commitments toward the advancement of women.

The vibrant women's movement is not confined to the examples cited, but is shared by a significant number of Arab countries. Indeed, the launching of the Arab Women's Organization as a governmental organization with financial and administrative independence under the umbrella of the Arab League during 2002 is a reflection of the commitment of Arab countries to women's empowerment.

Box 1.2: The Arab Women's Organization Plan of Action

As detailed in the League of Arab States (2002: 2) agreement, the Arab Women's Organization proceeded from "The Cairo Declaration issued by the First Arab Women's Summit held in November 2000 in response to the invitation extended by H.E. Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, First Lady of Egypt; and co-organized by the National Council for women in Egypt, The Harriri Foundation in Lebanon and the League of Arab States, and with the participation of nineteen Arab States."

According to Article 5 of the agreement, "the Organization aims to strengthen cooperation and enhance the coordination of joint Arab action, with the aim of developing the statutes of women and supporting their role in the community, in particular:

1. Achieving solidarity among Arab women as a cornerstone of Arab solidarity.
2. Coordinating Arab positions concerning Arab and international issues, and when dealing with women issues in regional and international fora.
3. Raising awareness of Arab women's issues, whether economic, social, cultural, legal or media-related.
4. Furthering cooperation and exchange of experiences relevant to the empowerment of women.
5. Integrating women's issues as a priority in the comprehensive development plans and policies.
6. Developing women's potential and building their capabilities as individuals and citizens to enable them to contribute effectively to community institutions, in the workplace and in all enterprises, and to participate in decision-making.
7. Promoting the necessary health and educational services for women."

Table 1.4: Summary of Arab Countries' Responses to Achievements of Implementation of the BPFA 1995, 2003.

Country	Poverty	Education and training	Healthcare and related services	Violence against women	Armed conflict and women	Economic structures and women	Power and decision-making	Mechanisms promoting the advancement of women	Human rights	Media Stereotyping	Environment safeguarding	The rights of the girl child
Algeria								✓ CEDAW ratification, institutional mechanisms				
Bahrain								✓ Institutional measures				
Egypt		✓										
Iraq	✓	✓	✓ (family planning)			✓ (employment)	✓	✓ Institutional mechanisms				
Jordan							✓ (political)	✓ (legislation, gender mainstreaming), & CEDAW ratification				
Lebanon		✓		✓				✓ CEDAW ratification, institutional mechanisms, legislation (labor law)				
Morocco							✓ political participation	✓ Institutional measures & legislation (Personal Status Law of 2003)				
Qatar	✓	✓						✓ Legislation (equality between male and female employees) & membership in ESCWA's Gender Statistics Program		✓		
Saudi								✓ Institutional mechanisms & legislation (acceptance of Personal Status Law and improving status of divorced women)				
Sudan		✓	✓				✓ political participation and decision-making	✓ Institutional measures				
Syria	✓		✓			✓ (employment)	✓	✓ (institutional) (accession to CEDAW)				
Tunisia		✓	✓				✓ political and public life participation	✓ Institutional & ratification of international conventions (CEDAW)	✓			
UAE								✓ Participation in Beijing				
Yemen						✓	✓	✓ Institutional mechanisms, national strategy for gender				

Table 1.4 is based on an analysis of a report conducted by United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) titled "The Summary of Countries' Responses to Achievements, Obstacles, and Future Measures for Implementing Beijing Platform For Action" (1995), submitted to the First Session of the Committee on Women, Beirut, 4-5 December, 2003 (ESCWA 2003a).

Gender gaps are sex differentials that cannot be attributed to biological differences, but come about due to socially constructed expectations and definitions of roles that are different for women and men.

Girls who are born into poor and uneducated families are the first to suffer when choices have to be made about how to budget limited household resources.



2. Progress in Meeting Goals

2.1 Dimensions and Key Aspects

This section investigates whether the adopted policies and actions have translated into improved gender conditions. It is also an important exercise to allow us to compare the present with where we want to be. Such a comparison allows for a revisit of actions and policies and promotes effective planning for the future.

The first step in judging progress involves a decision on the key dimensions to be investigated. The following discussion is intended to guide such a decision. There is growing international and regional evidence that demonstrates the existence of gender gaps across all dimensions of life. Gender gaps are sex differentials that cannot be attributed to biological differences, but come about due to socially constructed expectations and definitions of roles that are different for women and men. These expectations and definitions are translated into different socialization practices, different rights and resources, different life opportunities, and different outcomes.

In many societies, women do not enjoy equal opportunities for physical, social, and intellectual development, and as a result suffer health problems, low educational achievements, and an inability to reach their potential and fulfill their aspirations. Gender values permeate all aspects of life and affect all social groups. However, these values are often more pervasive for girls and women living in poverty. Women who do not have opportunities to further develop their skills and pursue educational opportunities often face limited options for their futures. When women's access to basic services is denied, women often become locked into the cumulative circle of deprivation, powerlessness, insecurity, and misery.

The deprivation of basic critical needs is not the story of all Arab women. On the brighter side, many Arab countries and social groups have managed to eliminate the gender gaps across a number of physical and educational dimensions. In these more advantageous groups, women have enjoyed better access to graduate and post-graduate education.

Adequate investments in women's capabilities have empowered them and opened up the doors of their future. Yet, challenges still remain. Even when there are increasing number of women in public spheres, more women taking a fair share of resources, and greater public recognition of women's rights, gender values continue to play a complex role, undermining fairness and equal treatment for women. The burden of gender stereotypes is not confined to the less advantaged groups of the population or less affluent countries. These burdens express themselves in different ways and in different cultures and societies.

In Arab countries, highly educated women competing for the job market, employed women deserving career advancements, entrepreneurs seeking credit and skill development, citizens wanting to exercise their civil and political choices, women searching for a way out of an unhappy marriage, and widows and female custodians raising their children can all face gender injustices. The more than four-fold higher unemployment rate for women; the closed gates of certain specializations; the glass ceilings in many professions; the differentiated legal provisions for tax exemption, social security, and credit; the laws curtailing women's ability to work, travel, pass her nationality to her children, and participate in political life; the higher legal, financial, and social turmoil faced by divorced women as well as the inability of women to exercise the guardianship of her children, are all every day systematic gender discriminations.

Often, these discriminations are attributed to cultural directives and religious specificity the Arab region that are justified as protective of the family, society, and even women themselves. Furthermore, attempts to address the gender imbalances are seen as infringing on men's rights that have gained historical legitimacy. Many examples of these gender imbalances can be observed in family status law. Attempts to address them usually involve a financial burden on already overstretched resources. For example, the areas of social insurance and tax exemption laws, as well as gender-sensitive strategies that recognize the need to go beyond equal provision of public services, all demand additional budgetary allocations.

The movement for women's emancipation and empowerment in the developed world has often been perceived as opening the gates to permissive sexual freedoms, and as coinciding with the declining centrality of traditional family values. This perception has increased doubts and fears concerning possibilities for reconciling gender justice with traditional religious and cultural values that both women and men endorse. Furthermore, the current international consensus on the need for moving toward gender equality has not adequately identified the pathway to follow. As UNIFEM (2000: 5) notes: "Countries of the world have agreed to a path but have neglected to create sufficient road signs that let us know how far we have come in our journey and how far we have to go."

As a result of the connection between gender relations and established power dynamics, competition over limited resources as nations try to progress, and the complex and deep questions that gender justice raises for cultural and religious values and traditions, the movement for women's empowerment continues to face opposition in the Arab world. Societal endorsement for addressing the critical needs of women in terms of poverty, poor health, and inadequate education quickly fades when the discussion moves to a more strategic level and includes a rights-based perspective.

Even when there are increasing number of women in public spheres, more women taking a fair share of resources, and greater public recognition of women's rights, gender values continue to play a complex role, undermining fairness and equal treatment for women.

The more than four-fold higher unemployment rate for women; the closed gates of certain specializations; the glass ceilings in many professions; the differentiated legal provisions for tax exemption, social security, and credit; the laws curtailing women's ability to work, travel, pass her nationality to her children, and participate in political life; the higher legal, financial, and social turmoil faced by divorced women as well as the inability of women to exercise the guardianship of her children, are all every day systematic gender discriminations.

Another stumbling block to corrective actions in Arab countries is the absence of a clear model toward which to strive.

Four key dimensions of women's empowerment will be investigated: 1) critical needs, 2) building capabilities, 3) enabling environment, and 4) improved well-being.

The previous discussion suggests that a comprehensive analysis of the progress of Arab women needs to explicitly cover a number of dimensions. The dimensions analyzed should go beyond meeting critical needs of women to including a more over-arching goal of women's empowerment. Also, women's empowerment must reflect the fact that such empowerment is a process that includes both building of capabilities as well as an enabling environment that allows the utilization of these capabilities and satisfaction of full potential. As UNIFEM report rightly points out, "empowerment entails both the development of women's own agency and the removal of barriers to the exercise of this agency" (UNIFEM 2000: 7).

Building on this introductory note, four key dimensions of women's empowerment will be investigated: 1) critical needs, 2) building capabilities, 3) enabling environment, and 4) improved well-being. Table 1.5 provides a summary of dimensions and key aspects to be investigated in reviewing the progress of women in Arab countries.

Table 1.5: Summary of Dimensions and Key Aspects to be Investigated in Reviewing the Progress of Women

1) Critical Needs	2) Building Capabilities	3) Enabling Environment	4) Well-being
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventable deaths • Deprivation of basic education • Knowledge poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Competitive skills • Health • Agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal environment • Affirmative actions • Knowledge and social watch • Friendly environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfaction of potentials • Fair burden & fair share • Inclusiveness and partnerships • Security

2.2 Methodology Adopted

The recent past has witnessed a large number of regional reports⁷ reflecting comprehensive efforts to assess the progress of women in the Arab region. These reports bring to the forefront key messages in terms of achieved progress and challenges. The current investigation builds on these regional reports and a few other publications⁸ with an international focus. It attempts to move them one step further by synthesizing and probing their messages. It also introduces new messages drawing on analysis of additional sources of data, particularly national cross-sectional surveys. These surveys are not always regionally representative and may describe only a specific country's experience. Nevertheless, they capture additional key aspects in the investigation and they also illustrate ways of filling the information gaps.

The investigation is organized around the identified dimensions and key aspects summarized in Table 1.5. This organization would ensure that the analysis is not driven by existing data, but is guided by a framework reflected in the four dimensions.

3. Critical Needs

The analysis of critical needs covers a number of key aspects that are known to impact women in Arab countries. These aspects include preventable deaths, deprivation of basic education, and knowledge poverty. This analysis does not attempt a description of current status that could be a reflection of general level of development, but focuses on gender gaps that are reflecting sex-differentiated practices. Of special importance in the analysis is how broad-based these gaps are in terms of the proportion of population subjected to them. In countries where the gaps are diminishing, it is important to go beyond national averages that tend to conceal the severity of these gaps for particular groups in the society.

Critical needs include preventable deaths, deprivation of basic education, and knowledge poverty.

3.1 Preventable Deaths

The key message reflected in regional analysis of mortality indicators is one of diversity that is closely linked to economic levels, significant progress across time, and sex differentials in favor of women (in expectation of life and infant mortality).

This section draws attention to the significant loss of human lives as a result of the interaction between deprivation and gender values. The occurrence of

⁷ These regional reports include: UNIFEM (2002a), LAS (2003), ESCWA (2003b), Doraid (2000), World Bank (1999), AHDR (2002), World Bank (2004).

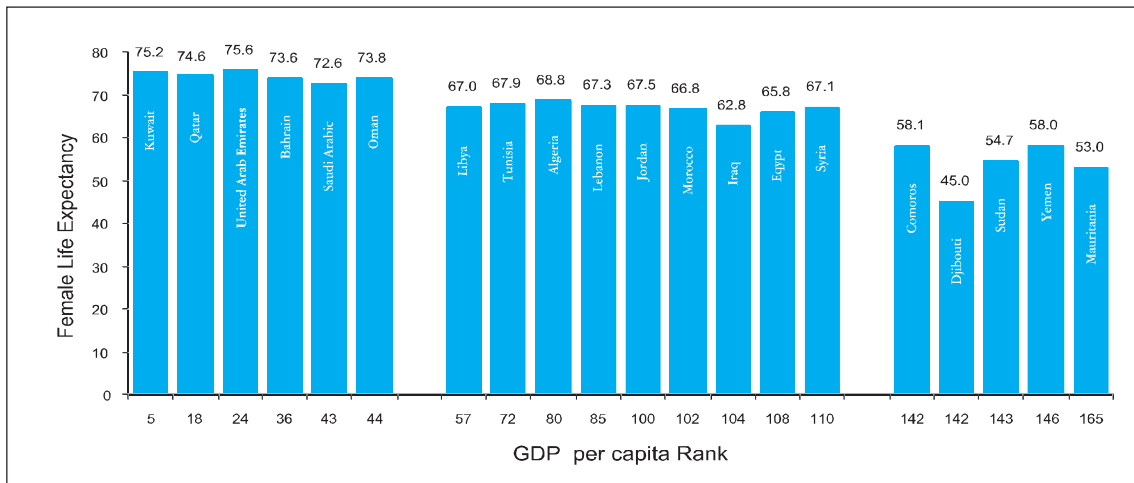
⁸ These international publications include: UNIFEM (2000, 2002b), WHO (2000).

gender-precipitated women’s deaths for disadvantaged social groups is quite high and is reflected by significant disparities by sex. This is particularly evident in the first few years of life when survival depends heavily on nutritional, environmental, and child-management factors. The following summarizes the evidence base⁹ for the key messages on preventable deaths.

3.1.1 Diversity of mortality risks

Figure 1.1 shows the wide range of variations in expectation of life at birth (e_0) in Arab countries encompassing the two brackets of countries in the lowest human development group (e_0 between 35 and 61) and that of countries in the highest human development (e_0 between 69 and 80). It also reflects three distinct groupings of high, mid, and low chances of survival. These groupings are very much consistent with the level of per capita income within Arab countries.

Figure 1.1: Female Expectation of Life by World Economic Rank for Arab Countries



Source: Rashad 2002.

⁹ This summary draws on tables A.1.1- A.1.2 and A.1.3 in the annex. It should be noted that in choosing among the different indicators cited in the literature, the analysis opted for the ones believed to be most accurate. For example, the expectation of life at birth in Table A.1 refers to 1999 rather than those published in the ESCWA 2003b report for more recent years. The 1999 estimates provided in WHO 2000 have been scrutinized by a detailed analysis. Also, the infant mortality rates analyzed are based on cross-sectional surveys rather than registered data. The latter is known to suffer from under-registration in a number of Arab countries.

However, it should be noted that e_0 is not fully shaped by income levels. Within each group, Arab countries with a wide range of per capita income (for example, between \$25,324 and \$9,960 in the highest economic rank and between \$6,697 and \$2,892 in the middle economic rank) have almost the same e_0 . This indicates that a number of Arab countries managed to effectively utilize their relatively limited economic resources in avoiding premature mortality, while others lagged behind the potentials of their income.

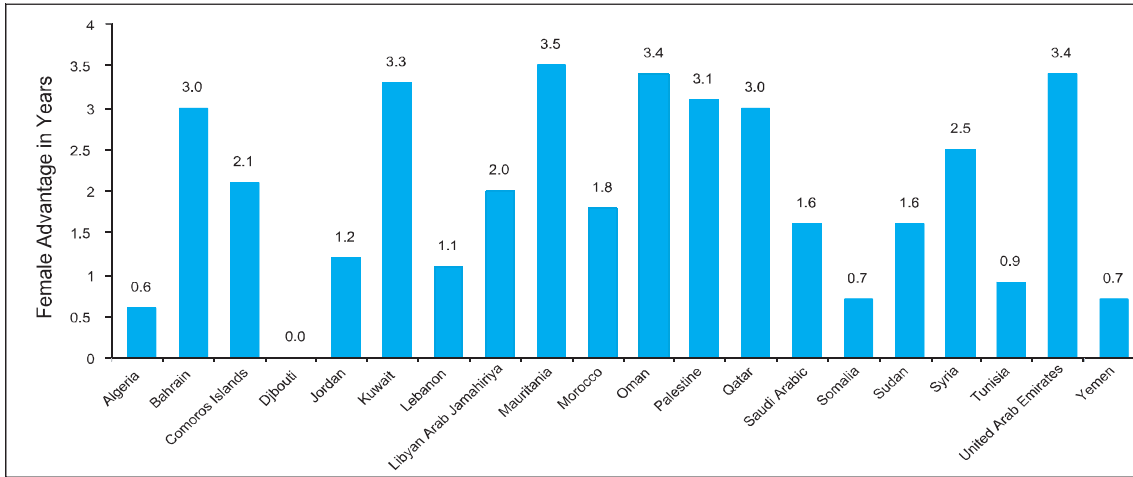
Table A.1.1 in the annex summarizes the diversity of maternal mortality ratio. High maternal mortality is a key health challenge facing most Arab countries. More than half of the Arab countries considered have a maternal mortality ratio (MMR) exceeding 75 per 100,000 live births, and as much as a third of Arab countries have an MMR exceeding 200 per 100,000 live births. Only two Arab countries (United Arab Emirates and Kuwait) have managed to reduce maternal mortality to a low level by international standards (not more than 5 per 100,000 live births). The other Gulf countries of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Oman have moderately low levels (between 10 and 20 per 100,000 live births) but their levels remain relatively higher than countries with comparable commands over economic resources.

3.1.2 Significant progress

In assessing the current levels of mortality in Arab countries, it is important to bring the initially high base level of mortality and the speed of improvements into the picture. Doraid (2000: 4) refers to the substantial progress in health indicators, noting that, "the mortality rates for children under five were reduced by nearly two-thirds [between 1970 and 1997]. The Arab region was the first region in the developing world where most countries reduced mortality rates of under-five children to the target of 70 per thousand by 1990, well ahead of the global goal." He also refers to the wide variation and uneven progress among, and within, Arab countries. He states that, "In general, oil-rich countries made rapid progress. Several countries from this group set world records in improving some social indicators [Tables A.1.2 and A.1.3 in the annex]. However, rapid progress was not limited to the oil rich. Yemen and Tunisia were among the ten countries that experienced the fastest improvements in the world in, respectively, raising life expectancy and reducing under-five mortality" (Doraid 2000: 5).

The Arab region was the first region in the developing world where most countries reduced mortality rates of under-five children to the target of 70 per thousand by 1990, well ahead of the global goal.

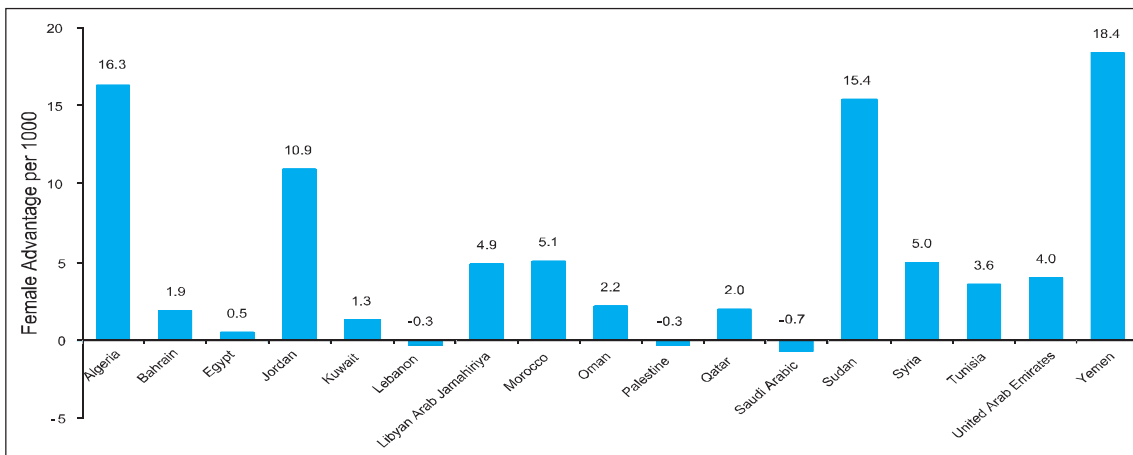
Figure 1.2: Female Advantage* in Life Expectancy at Birth



Source: Table A.1.1

*The female advantage is defined as the difference between female and male life expectancy.

Figure 1.3: Female Advantage* in Infant Mortality



Source: Table A.1.1

*Female advantage: the difference between male and female infant mortality rates.

3.1.3 Gender-precipitated mortality

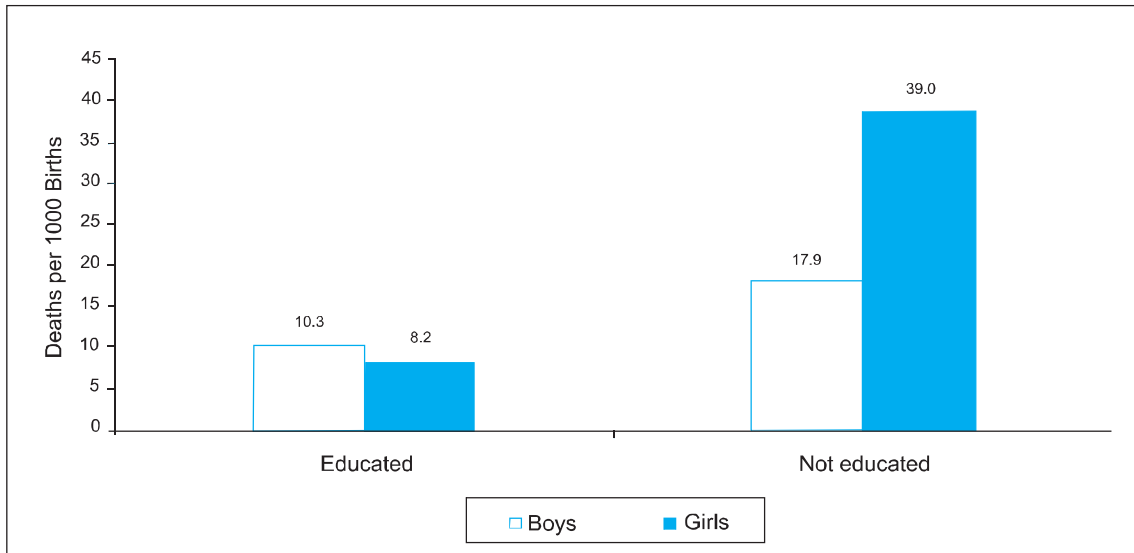
Figures 1.2 and 1.3 illustrate women's advantage in life expectancy and infant mortality. The World Bank (2004: 44) reports that, "in some [Arab] countries the female life expectancy advantage has reached levels similar to the average in middle-income countries of 4.7 years, but in other the advantage remains considerably smaller." The Arab Human Development Report (2002: 38) notes that, "in countries with high human development, it [the difference] can be as much as 11 years." The same report goes on to suggest that in terms of further improvement in women's chances for survival in Arab countries, "one area for action is reduction of high maternal mortality rates." ESCWA (2003b) notes that despite the female advantage in expectation of life, the number of females in Arab countries is lower than the number of males. The report proposes the high maternal mortality as a possible explanation of some of the discrepancy in numbers between women and men.

The need to address preventable deaths at early ages that are governed by gender dynamics does not receive similar attention. The only exception is the analysis of mortality data by social group and gender presented in report of the WB and NCW (2003). Figure 1.4 provides the evidence base for the loss of life borne by females as a result of biased gender values. In Egypt, girls born to uneducated mothers not only lose their biological advantage in life expectancy, but also face twice the risk of mortality than boys. The implication of this gender bias is in the neighborhood of 6,000 missing women per year.¹⁰ The significance of gender-precipitated mortality in Egypt should emphasize the importance of a more thorough assessment of such gender differentials for other Arab countries.

The female advantage in life expectancy is still considerably lower in some Arab countries than the middle-income country average of 4.7 years, indicating some discrimination against women in nutrition and health care.

¹⁰ This is estimated as the product of multiplying the excess post neonatal (from 1 month to less than a year) female mortality rate by the number of female births in a year.

Figure 1.4: Post-neonatal Mortality by Child Sex and Education of Mother, Egypt 2000



Source: Special tabulations from Egypt Demographic and Health Survey 2000.(b)

The key message in regional analysis is one of relatively high levels of girls' access to basic schooling and that many Arab countries have either eliminated the gender gap or are moving toward such an elimination at a very fast pace.

3.2 Deprivation of Basic Education

The key message in regional analysis is one of relatively high levels of girls' access to basic schooling and that many Arab countries have either eliminated the gender gap or are moving toward such an elimination at a very fast pace. This section documents that for some Arab countries, the deprivation in girls' education remains a serious challenge. For other Arab countries, the progress achieved has allowed many sectors of society to achieve universal female access to primary education. The deprivation of basic education is now clustered within less-fortunate groups of the society. The challenge now is not one of general access but of effective targeting. The following summarizes the evidence base for the key messages on deprivation of basic education.

3.2.1 High levels of access

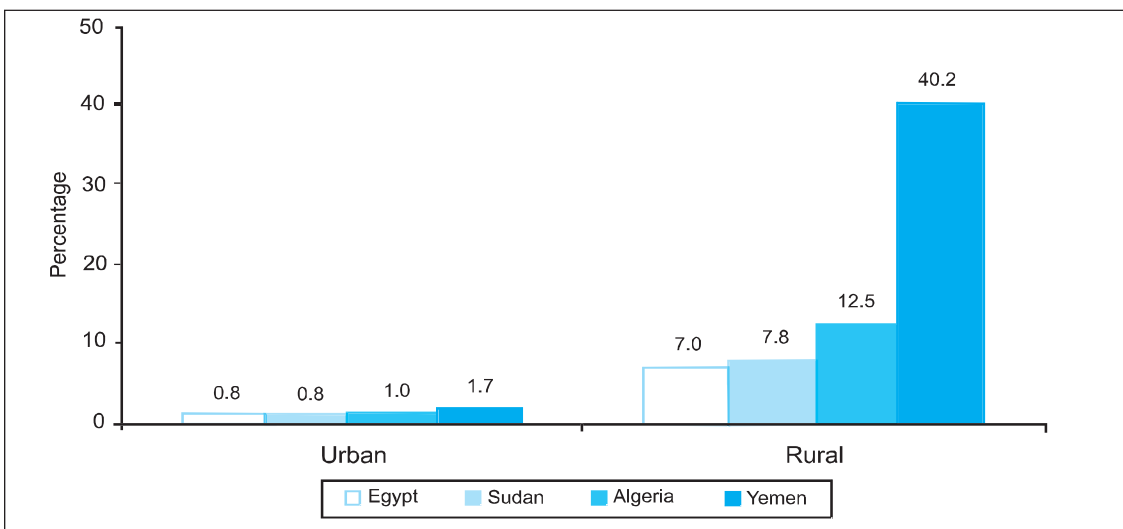
As indicated in Table A.1.4 in the annex, a relatively high level of girls' access to primary education has been achieved in a large number of Arab countries. The female primary gross enrollment ratio exceeded 85% for more than half of the

Arab countries and was higher than 70% for three quarters of the countries. Only three Arab countries (Djibouti, Sudan, and Yemen) are still facing a major challenge with more than half of the girls deprived of primary education.

3.2.2 Clustered gender gaps

The gender index of equality¹¹ in net primary enrollment is above 0.9 for around three quarters of Arab countries and is above 0.77 for all Arab countries with the exception of Yemen with an equality index of 0.56. Figure 1.5 illustrates that for Arab countries with relatively high levels of access to primary schooling, the gender gaps have practically been eliminated for girls in urban setting while girls in rural areas still face severe deprivations in education.

Figure 1.5: Gender Differentials* in Access to School by Residence



Source: Special tabulations from cross-sectional surveys (Egypt: Demographic and Health Survey 2000; Sudan: Maternal and Child Health Survey 1992/1993; Algeria: Maternal and Child Health Survey 1992; Yemen: Demographic and Maternal and Child Health Survey 1997).

*Gender differentials: the difference between females and males in percentage aged 8–10 not attending school.

¹¹ The index is 1.0 when girls' enrollment ratio is equal to that of the boys and is less than 1.0 when girls' enrollment is lower than that of boys.

Improvement in female literacy rates across time could be more a reflection of the success in achieving higher school enrollment than in serving the out-of-school population. An integrated development model combining a holistic approach to women's needs should be pursued to influence the demand for literacy.

Improving literacy for women at the margins of society, such as the elderly and extreme poor, remains a challenge.

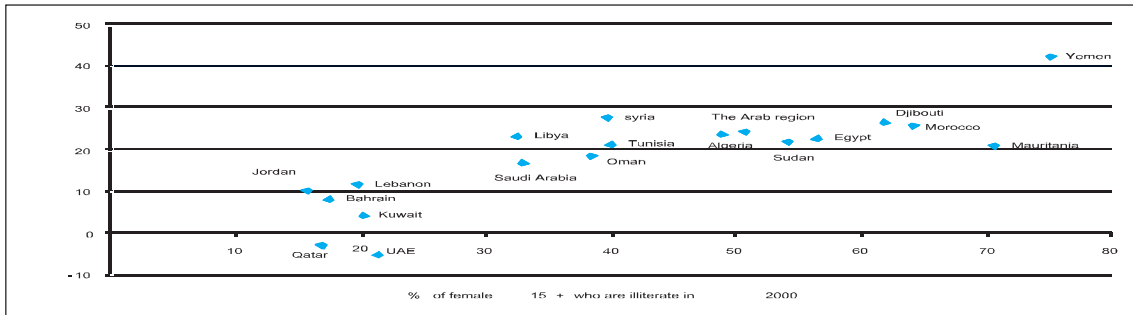
3.3 Knowledge Poverty

Knowledge acquisition requires literacy, exposure to media, networking, and channels of communications. One of the well-known deficiencies in the prerequisites of knowledge is the high level of illiteracy in the Arab region.

Existing reports show that the current levels of female illiteracy remain high with a significant gender gap. It also documents a reduction in level of illiteracy post-Beijing with some reductions in gender gaps. However, given the magnitude of the remaining challenge, the progress achieved does not respond to existing aspirations. This section illustrates that the improvement in women's illiteracy rates across time could be more a reflection of the success in achieving higher school enrollment than in serving the out-of-school population. Our analysis suggests that improving literacy for women at the margins of society, such as the elderly and extreme poor, remains a challenge.

The first priority in efforts to eradicate illiteracy should address the roots of illiteracy through universal enrollment. The previous section of this chapter demonstrates that this target remains elusive for large sectors of the society. Furthermore, illiteracy interventions should not simply be directed towards those women who demand literacy as there may be many women whose voices are simply not being heard or who for contextual reasons, such as poverty or social pressures, do not express a desire for literacy. Following the narrow 'supply model,' which ignores contextual forces that inhibit the demand for literacy is not enough. An integrated development model combining a holistic approach to women's needs should be pursued to influence the demand for literacy. This should be combined with targeted, high-quality services for the subgroup of the female population with an existing articulated demand for literacy.

Figure 1.6: Level of Illiteracy by Gender Gap*



Source: ESCWA 2003b.

*Gender Gap: The difference between female and male illiteracy rates.

3.3.1 High levels of illiteracy and large gender gaps

Figure 1.6 and Table A.1.5 in the annex show that during 2000, the proportion of women in the Arab world (aged 15+) who were unable to read and write ranged from 16% to as high as 75%. For the majority of Arab countries, the proportion of illiterate women constitutes between a third and two-thirds of adults with a significant difference between women and men. Figure 1.6 illustrates that the magnitude of gender gaps is quite considerable regardless of the level of illiteracy. The average gender gap index¹² for the Arab region is approximately 2 (1.94), indicating that women are twice as likely to be illiterate than men.

3.3.2 Progress post-Beijing

The reduction of illiteracy and gender gaps post-Beijing is summarized in Table A.1.5 in the annex, which shows that for the Arab region, around 6% of women moved from illiteracy to literacy during 1995 to 2000. However, since a similar percentage of men also shifted, the gender gap remains as large as it was in 1995 with a very minor reduction of approximately 1.8 points.

3.3.3 The need for revisiting illiteracy eradication efforts

The lessons based on the experience of Egypt are discussed in this section. Egypt has benefited from an in-depth study of illiteracy efforts. Such a study needs to be replicated in other countries the findings do provide insight that may be helpful for developing programs and understanding opportunities and risks in other contexts.

The NCW in Egypt has conducted a number of household surveys at the governorate levels to support, monitor, and evaluate the female illiteracy eradication efforts. The findings of the NCW indicate that the main problem in the slow progress eliminating illiteracy in women is due to low demand for programs. The majority of illiterate women did not attend the literacy classes and do not express a wish to do so as summarized in Table 1.6. The main reason for this weak attendance was the social conditions of women, particularly the demand on her time and energy due to poverty.

During 2000, the proportion of women in the Arab world (aged 15+) who were unable to read and write ranged from 16% to as high as 75%.

The average gender gap index for the Arab region is approximately 2 (1.94), indicating that women are twice as likely to be illiterate than men.

Table 1.6: Percentage of Women (Aged 14–35), in Two Governorates in Egypt, Ever Attending Literacy Classes and the Drop-out Rate among Those Attending

Governorate	% ever attended	% dropped out
Fayoum	20.3	47.1
Kalyoubia	16.0	34.4

Source: Hamed and El Saadany (2004).

¹² Gender gap index: ratio of female illiteracy to male illiteracy.

The results of the household surveys indicated that around half of the illiterate women do not express a wish to join literacy classes. As is clear from Table 1.7, the expression of a wish to attend literacy classes was higher among young illiterate women (less than 30 years old) than older ones.

Table 1.7: Percentage of Illiterate Women (Aged 10–50) in the Fayoum Governorate Who Expressed a Wish to Join Literacy Classes by Age

Age	10–19	20–29	30–39	40–50
% expressing a wish to join literacy classes	66.2	52.8	45.6	26.8

Source: Hamed and El Saadany 2004.

The weak motive of women (or more precisely the constraints on women that translate into weak motives) to attend literacy classes may explain the slow progress in literacy over time. In Egypt, according to the 1996 census, the illiteracy rate among population aged 10+ was 39%. The rate was significantly higher among women (50%). The rate was even higher among women living in rural Upper Egypt (72%). According to the official statistics, the illiteracy rate among women decreased by only 8% between 1996 and 2002 (a yearly average decrease of 1.3%). Furthermore, part of this progress may be attributed to the fact that the percentage of women and girls attending school increased, rather than illustrating successful literacy program rates. The NCW studies in Fayoum indicated that the percentage of women ever attending school has increased from 56% among the age group 10+ to 80% among the age group 10–15. Hence the reduction in illiteracy across time among those in the age group 10+ is partly reflecting the increased school attendance by the younger cohort.

The NCW also found that around 50% of women (10+) who dropped out of education after five years of education were illiterate. Table 1.8 illustrates that dropping out of education before completing the primary stage increases the possibility of being illiterate as an adult.

Table 1.8: Percentage of Illiterate Women in Fayoum by Number of Years of Education and Age Groups

Years of Education	1	2	3	4	5
Age group 10–15	69.3	32.4	25.9	15.7	12.1
Age group 10+	88.8	80.7	62.6	48.5	52.2

Source: Hamed and El Saadany 2004.

Thus, a successful illiteracy eradication effort starts with high-quality, universal education; targeted and efficient illiteracy services to those demanding it; and an integrated development effort that allows women to develop a demand for literacy, or at least reduce the constraints that result in their reluctance or lack of interest.

4. Building Capabilities

The discussion in this section recognizes that equality of opportunity requires equality in the resources of human capital. Education, skills, and health care are key to developing human capabilities. Capabilities also include traits and attitudes that allow women to take control of their own lives and exercise their agency. These traits and attitudes are described as:

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and ways in which these relations may be changed;
- Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life;
- Gaining the ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power;
- Developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. (UNIFEM 2000: 7)

4.1 Education and Skills

Existing regional analysis documents that gender gaps in secondary and university education have been markedly reduced and that for many Arab countries there are more girls in secondary-and tertiary-level education than boys. The impressive pool of young, educated girls is considered to be one of the greatest assets of Arab countries. These assets could be further enhanced both in size and quality. For example, the small gender gaps are sometimes achieved at low levels of enrollment. Also, girls, while outperforming boys in educational exams, have lower completion rates. Furthermore, there is a tendency for girls to concentrate more in specializations that are less competitive for the labor market.

4.1.1 Closing gender gaps in education with room for improvement

A World Bank report (2004: 30–31) notes that at the secondary level, many MENA countries appear to have closed the gender gap. Indeed, in six of the fifteen countries with data for 2000, girls had higher gross secondary enrollment rates than boys. However, several countries still had low secondary enrollment rates for girls in 2000: Morocco (35%), Syrian Arab Republic (41%), and the Republic of Yemen (25%).

Education, skills, and health care are key to developing human capabilities. Traits and attitudes are also essential components of capabilities.

Regional analysis documents that gender gaps in secondary and university education have been markedly reduced and that for many Arab countries there are more girls in secondary and tertiary level education than boys. However, girls have lower educational completion rates than boys and tend to cluster in less-competitive specializations.



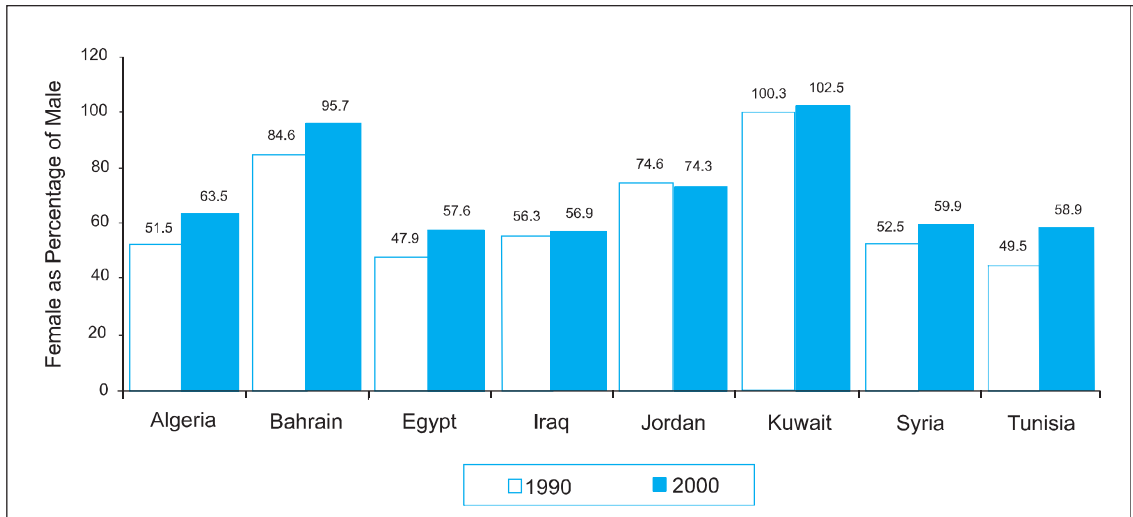
The World Bank report (2004) also indicates that gender gaps in tertiary enrollment have steadily narrowed across the region. By 2000, women outnumbered men in entering local colleges and universities in several countries, including Lebanon, Oman, and Qatar. It is important to note, however, that data are not as accurate for tertiary education as for the other levels.

4.1.2 Lower completion rates

At the secondary level, though several countries raised the completion rates of girls in the 1990s, completion rates in 2000 were still much lower for girls than for boys [Figure 1.7]. The World Bank notes that, "at the secondary level fewer than one-third of the girls who enroll actually complete school. At the tertiary level, more than two fifths of women students drop out before graduating" (World Bank 2004: 32–33).

The statistics on gender differences in completion rates suggest that the discouragements to girls are progressively greater at successive stages of education and that the gender gap in completion rate has changed relatively little over the past decade.

Figure 1.7: Secondary School Completion Rates: Female as Percentage of Male, Arab Countries, 1990 and 2000



Source: World Bank 2004.

4.1.3 Acquisition of core competencies

Girls and women in Arab countries that attend universities and colleges are predominantly concentrated in faculties of arts and humanities. These branches are less competitive in the labor markets; the evidence base for this pattern is summarized in ESCWA (2003b).

Table A.1.6 in the annex demonstrates that of the total number of females enrolled in university education, 55.4% are enrolled in the arts and humanities, compared with 35.8% for males. Although the statistics suggest the same percentage of female and male students major in science (9.2% of women and 9% of men major in science), men are much more predominant in engineering.

4.2 Health

Health as a capability extends beyond escaping mortality and diseases to encompass aspects of physical, mental, and social well-being. The Arab region, similar to most other developing countries, has an extremely limited knowledge-base on the psychological and social dimensions of health and well-being. In assessment of health capabilities, there is clearly a need for a more holistic approach. The call is for a 'social health model' as well as a broader physical health approach that includes a larger set of health conditions and allows measurement of discomfort, dissatisfaction, and perceived ill health.

This call is particularly relevant when assessing women's health. For example, in an assessment of the global burden of disease, it is noted that: "in both developing and developed regions, depression is women's leading cause of disease burden . . . [and that] women's psychological health also deserves much more attention" (World Health Organization [WHO] 1996: 25).

This section¹³ investigates gender gaps in chronic illness and disability, the prevalence of maternal and reproductive morbidity, as well as the differences in the health of elderly men and women. Our analysis suggests that women more often are burdened with poor health, particularly with respect to reproduction. This section also outlines certain reproductive patterns that may have negative effects on the physical and social well-being of women. The discussion of the reproductive patterns treats high levels of unwanted fertility as just one component of reproductive choice. It incorporates other unfavorable features such as high unmet need, short spacing between pregnancies, and induced abortion as other important components of reproductive health. Furthermore, it draws the attention to the neglected problems of infertility and pregnancy loss and their negative physical and psychosocial implications for women.

¹³ The analysis of this section is based on Rashad (2002).

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Adult HIV prevalence is estimated to be between 0.005% and 0.18% among MENA countries.

4.2.1 Women's health insecurity

Recent surveys on family health⁽⁶⁾ which as of yet, have only been conducted in the Gulf countries and few other Arab countries (Algeria, Djibouti, Syria, and Tunisia) are one step forward in filling some gaps in the information base on women's health.

Table A.1.7 in the annex indicates that close to one in five adults (age 15+) in each of the Gulf countries experiences a chronic illness or disability,¹⁴ and that women may experience these conditions more often than men. The proportion of women reporting chronic illness exceeds that of men by more than 6% and reaches as high as 8.5%. Among the conditions investigated, women tend to experience a much higher incidence of joint disease, high blood pressure, cardio-vascular disorder, persistent headache, and dental problems. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to suffer from asthma and heart disease. For Arab countries other than those in the Gulf, the existing information on the burden of ill health is unfortunately scarce.

Table A.1.8 in the annex indicates the high prevalence of maternal ill health in all Arab countries, regardless of the income level. Even the high-income countries that succeeded in avoiding loss of mothers' lives during pregnancy and delivery still face many challenges including the high prevalence of anemia, high levels of complaints during pregnancy, and complications in deliveries.

Other reproductive health issues and sexually transmitted diseases are not sufficiently investigated. Only recently have some countries in the region attempted to assess the extent of such concerns on a national basis (for example, Oman). The limited available information (World Bank, 1999) suggests that the estimated prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the Middle East and North Africa region is the second lowest among six developing regions, the prevalence of syphilis among blood donors and pregnant women is relatively low (the highest being around 1.5% in Jordan and Morocco), incidences of uterine, ovarian, and breast cancers are lower than other regions, and that the relatively young age distribution in the MENA region has resulted in smaller relative weight of health issues of postmenopausal and elder women. The report also notes that, "Although the number of reported AIDS cases is still relatively small, it has increased dramatically in the past seven years throughout the MENA region. Only 391 AIDS-related deaths in the region had been reported by 1990, but the number increased six-fold to 2,278 by 1997. Adult HIV prevalence is

¹⁴ A person was considered as having a longstanding illness or disability if he/she was reported to have had any of the following doctor-diagnosed conditions: high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, stroke, asthma, joint disease, peptic disease, renal disease, liver disease, nervous disease, cancer, or any long-standing condition which prevents or limits his/her participation in activities normal for a person of his/her age.

estimated to be between 0.005 percent and 0.18 percent among MENA countries [Table A.1.9]. This prevalence rate is lower than that for countries in other developing regions" (World Bank 1999: 20).

It may be true that the low prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases can be attributed to cultural moral codes. However, the lack of reliable reporting systems and the stigma associated with STDs are also likely to result in under-reporting. The few small community studies point to a high burden of ill health for women and to the culture of silence surrounding reproductive health issues. Zurayk (1994) reviews the findings of a medical exam in a small study conducted in early 1990s in two villages in Egypt. The study documented a prevalence of over 50% for reproductive-tract infections, for genital prolapse, and for anemia. Also, substantial proportions of women were shown to be suffering from urinary-tract infections, high blood pressure, and obesity. While the study is not representative and is exploratory in nature, the magnitude of ill health reflected in it calls for better assessment of reproductive and other health conditions.

Another neglected aspect of women's health is the health of the elderly. The advantage of female life expectancy for all Arab countries does not imply that women experience a higher quality of life in old age. Indeed, as discussed in WHO (2000), when expectation of life at age sixty is adjusted for disability, men are expected to live to a similar or higher number of healthy years in around half of the Arab countries.

4.2.2 Unfulfilled reproductive choice

The ability of couples to conceive and to bring a pregnancy to term and to avoid unwanted pregnancy are all important aspects of reproductive choice. This section documents the problem of unfulfilled reproductive choice. The section suggests that the problems Arab women suffer with infertility and pregnancy loss tend to be neglected, which is detrimental to their psychosocial well-being. Furthermore, certain reproductive patterns may present great risks and challenges for women. These include very short spacing between pregnancies, unmet needs for family planning,¹⁵ unwanted pregnancies, and induced abortions.

Given the importance of female reproductive roles in Arab countries, and the values attached to children, infertility is clearly a serious health hazard with sig-

¹⁵ Unmet needs for family planning is defined in the demographic literature as the proportion of exposed women who do not want an additional birth but still do not utilize contraceptives. The gap between intentions and practice demonstrates a need for family planning.

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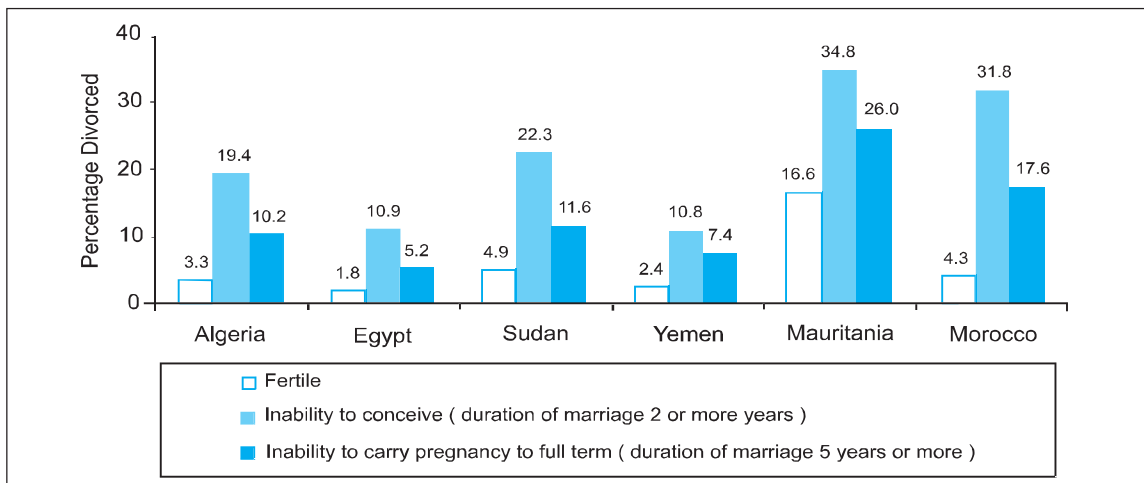
Despite the extensive concern with high fertility and the recent declines in fertility, there remain a number of problematic reproductive patterns of women. These include very short spacing between pregnancies, unmet needs for family planning, unwanted pregnancies, and induced abortions.

nificant consequences to the well-being of women and their families. The limited available information only provides a glimpse on this aspect of health.

Table A.1.10 in the annex shows that the level of childlessness among women who are or have been married that are aged 40–44 is between 3% and 5%. It also provides different indicators of the very high level of primary infertility during short marriage durations. The combination of inability to conceive, pregnancy loss, as well as child mortality raises the probability of a woman being childless during 5–9 years of marriage duration to a level between 6% and 13.5%.

The pressure to have a child generally starts within a relatively short period of marriage. Delays in conceiving cause great stress for women and result in great efforts to access therapeutic practices that can be costly and unregulated. Some of these treatments rely on outdated and potentially dangerous medical technologies (electrocautery, dilatation and curettage, tubal insufflation, among others) which can impoverish women and their families and leave their reproductive systems in worse shape than when they began (Greenhalgh 1995:431). Furthermore, the prevalence of divorce among women who are having difficulty conceiving or bringing the pregnancy to full term is much higher than women who had at least one birth (Figure 1.8).

Figure 1.8: Prevalence of Divorce by Fertility Status



Source: Rashad 2002.

Another aspect of reproductive choice is the successful completion of pregnancy and avoiding the physical and psychological ill health associated with pregnancy loss. Table A.1.11 in the annex indicates the high pregnancy losses experienced by women in reproductive ages. In the Arab countries considered, between a quarter and a third of ever-married women aged 15–49 experience a pregnancy loss. By the end of a woman's reproductive period, this proportion ranges from a third to a half of all ever-married women. The number of pregnancy losses per hundred women at the end of their reproductive period ranges from 72 to 129. Furthermore, the experience of a pregnancy loss is not randomly distributed but is clustered within certain groups. Indeed, among women who ever experience a pregnancy loss as much as 20% appear to go through three or more losses.

Moving from high pregnancy loss to high fertility, we note that many Arab countries have identified high population growth as a development challenge and adopted policies (particularly family planning programs) to reduce fertility. Currently, all Arab countries are undergoing a fertility decline (Table A.1.12 in the annex) and some of these countries, whose transitional experiences have occurred relatively recently, are going through such a decline at an exceptionally fast pace.

Many women continue to have little control over pregnancy. The data summarized in Table A.1.12 in the annex suggest that a large proportion of women have six or more live births and that short spacing between successive births remains prevalent. The proportion of ever married women aged 15–49 years with 6+ births ranges between 15% to 61%, and short spacing between successive births (less than 18 months) is reflected in between 10% and 21.5% of recent deliveries. The Occupied Palestinian Territories is an extreme exception with 34% of successive births occurring within less than 18 months. Even countries with a total fertility rate (TFR) lower than three have between a fifth and a quarter of their female population having 6+ live births. Furthermore, Table A.1.12 indicates that for the majority of Arab countries a large gap remains between the desire for an additional birth and the practice of family planning (unmet need estimated to range between 14% and 50%), a high proportion of unwanted pregnancies do occur and induced abortions are practiced.

Measures of unwanted pregnancies and induced abortions do not easily lend themselves to estimation. Attempts to estimate whether the last pregnancy was planned (wanted) yielded a percentage between 14% and 22% of pregnancies not wanted and between 11% and 23% wanted later (Table 1.9).

The number of pregnancy losses per hundred women at the end of their reproductive period ranges from 72 to 129.

Arab countries have been undergoing a fertility decline and some of these countries, whose transitional experiences have occurred relatively recently, are going through such a decline at an exceptionally fast pace.

Table 1.9: Percent Distribution of Births in the Five Years Preceding the Survey and Current Pregnancies, by Fertility Planning Status

Country	Planning Status of Birth		
	Wanted then	Wanted later	Not wanted
Egypt (DHS 1995)	69.0	10.5	20.2
Jordan (DHS 1997)	62.7	20.4	16.9
Morocco (DHS 1995)	73.2	12.5	14.1
Yemen (DHS 1997)	54.6	23.0	21.8

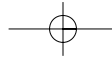
Source: Survey reports as provided in endnote a.

Only limited information on induced abortions is available in Egypt, Tunisia, and Jordan. In Egypt a number of proxy estimates for induced abortion was attempted. Huntington, et al (1998) projected an induced abortion rate of 14.8 per 100 pregnancies, while Ragab's (1996) study in a rural a community indicates that 14% of respondents reported at least one induced abortion and that a much higher level is reflected in his qualitative investigation.

The incidence of induced abortions among unwanted pregnancies is of course higher than previous estimates. The National Population Council (1998) estimated that in Egypt, around 31.7% of women with unwanted pregnancies tried to abort. Ragab, et al (1996) found that among women who ever experienced an unwanted pregnancy in a rural community in Egypt, about 21% tried inducing abortion but failed and 31% tried and succeeded. It should be noted that the 1992–93 National Maternal Mortality Study in Egypt estimated that 41% of abortions that have been classified as a direct cause of maternal death were induced (El-Kassas 1994).

When abortion is legal, as in Tunisia, the incidence of unsafe abortion is very low and the health consequences of the surgical procedure are relatively minor. According to a World Bank (1999) report, the estimated incidence of unsafe abortion is 130 per 1,000 live births in Northern Africa and 110 per 1000 live births in Western Asia. The estimated mortality ratios for unsafe abortion in Northern Africa and Western Asia are 24 and 20, respectively, per 100,000 live births. These figures on the incidence and mortality ratios are lower than those in other developing countries. Also, the share of unsafe abortions as a cause of maternal deaths is lower than the share for other developing regions. The World Bank (1999) draft report notes, however, that this low proportion of unsafe-abor-

The consequences of unwanted pregnancies are not only unsafe abortions but also possible physical and psychological stresses for mothers and children. One approach to reduce these problems is to satisfy unmet needs, for family planning and contraception.



tion mortality indicates that maternal mortality is still high and caused primarily by the improper management of pregnancies and deliveries. When maternal mortality is low, unsafe abortion mortality occupies a higher share of it.

Clearly, the consequences of unwanted pregnancies among married women are high in Arab countries. Unwanted pregnancies not only can lead to unsafe abortions but also to physical and psychological stresses on mothers and children. One approach to reduce these problems is to satisfy unmet needs for family planning and contraception. Social stigmas and silence about reproductive issues continue to pose a threat to women's reproductive health. Support for women to allow them to have greater control over their reproductive lives and adopt healthy reproductive patterns is needed in Arab countries.

4.3 Agency

This section explores how women view themselves, define their position vis-à-vis men, and understand their role in society. Socialization starts early in childhood and is continuously reinforced through implicit and explicit messages. Parents' aspirations and expectations that differ by sex of the child are one area of influence. Teachers also play a key role in perpetuating traditional gender roles and behaviors among students.

It is important to draw attention to the lack of data on women's views of themselves and on gender attitudes and values more generally. The findings of a recent qualitative study¹⁶ (Center of Arab Women for Training and Research 2003) noted that, while the majority of adolescent did not approve of the situation of women in Arab societies, this did not automatically lead to an orientation towards changing this situation neither to an acceptance of the idea of equality of rights between males and females.

4.3.1. Gendered expectations

As indicated in Table 1.10, a very high level of aspirations for university education is prevalent in all Arab countries. For the majority of countries considered (7 out of 10), more than 90% of mothers would like their daughters to receive university education. However, the aspirations for boys is generally higher than for girls.

The expectation for traditional roles is more evident in mothers' approval of work for their daughters. Table 1.10 indicates that in only 40% of countries more than 90% unconditionally approve work for their daughters. Other pieces of evidence on different gender expectations are provided in the National Survey on Adolescence in Egypt, summarized in Table 1.11.

¹⁶ The study was based on interviews with 138 female adolescents and 59 male adolescents in the age group (15-18 years), in addition to 27 interviews with parents and specialists as well as 6 focus groups.

Socialization process through implicit and explicit messages by parents and teachers systematically reinforce traditional values and attitudes.

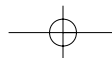


Table 1.10: Percentage of Mothers Aspiring for University Education for Their Children by Sex and Percentage Approving for their Daughters to Work

Country	% Aspiring for university education for:		Mothers approval of girls work:	
	Girls	Boys	Disapprove or conditionally approve	Approve
Algeria	78.9	89.6	16.3	83.7
Bahrain	93.6	96.0	8.2	91.8
Kuwait	97.0	98.3	8.2	91.8
Lebanon	94.6	95.8	23.3	76.7
Libya	91.9	98.3	10.6	89.4
Morocco	76.0	89.7	19.4	80.6
Oman	93.7	96.4	4.1	95.9
Qatar	98.0	98.3	11.4	88.6
Saudi Arabia	96.8	93.2	9.2	90.8
Sudan	73.9	79.8	13.4	86.6

Source: Survey Reports endnote a.

Table 1.11: Treatment of and Expectation from Adolescents in Egypt by Sex

	Boys	Girls
Schools as a socializing agent (percent)		
In mixed schools reporting gender – based unequal treatment	11.9	13.1
Reporting non-gender-based unequal treatment	22.8	24.0
Reporting teachers encourage students' opinions	71.5	67.2
Able to express own opinion freely in class	59.4	49.8
Reporting teachers hit students in class	61.4	46.1
Expression of opinions at home (percent)		
Adolescent expresses his /her opinions	77.4	71.9
Family respects opinions	83.3	77.3
Exposure to peers		
Allowed to meet friends and go out	67.3	36.9
Only allowed to exchange visits	22.4	39.6
Not allowed to meet with friends	10.4	23.6
Reports of activities during the previous day:		
School-related	36.7	33.5
Home/Family	40.7	81.5
Employment	36.3	11.4
Media-related	87.0	86.8
Social	67.2	43.2
Religious	56.9	41.7
Sports activities outside school		
Played sport yesterday	56.5	5.2
Mobility: Percent left house yesterday for:		
Visit friends (10–14)	21.6	18.8
(15–19)	38.5	18.4
Visit relatives (10–14)	29.7	30.2
(15–19)	27.4	21.6
Go for a walk (10–14)	28.6	10.8
(15–19)	47.6	12.0

Source: El Tawila et al 1999.



5. Enabling Environment

Women’s security must be facilitated by the environment in which women live. The following paragraphs will examine key aspects of an enabling environment: the legal environment, the nature of affirmative actions, the existence of knowledge and social watch, as well as the role of friendly environments.

5.1 Legal Environment

The recent past has brought with it impressive and major changes on the legal front. The ratification of CEDAW and its regular reporting system prompted countries to revisit articles in their laws that violate the principle of equality. The establishment of institutional mechanisms provided a channel for articulating needed changes and for a system of national monitoring of the states’ response. The move toward a more open and active civil society has allowed advocates of women’s rights a more visible and influential voice in requesting legislative changes.

Legislative amendments appear to have lent themselves more readily, though not necessarily smoothly given the lack of societal endorsement, to real change. A sample of these legislative changes (or intensified pressure for such changes) is witnessed in many Arab countries in legal amendments that allow women to claim their divorce rights, to pass their nationality to their children, or to protect their family rights in women’s retirement benefits.

Despite the achievements on the legal front, a closer look to the nature of changes in Arab countries would note that most of the effected changes address the position of women vis-à-vis the state with very little changes in the relative rights of men and women in the private sphere. To clarify this observation, we note that the existing legal frameworks in Arab countries have two central features that are reflected in a traditional orientation, bringing with it different laws by gender. The first feature emphasizes the reproductive role of women and the responsibility of men to provide for their family. The second places the protection of the family unit above individual rights within the family. These features have translated themselves into a legal structure that earmarks men as sole beneficiaries for direct transfers and non-wage benefits from the state, and also bestows them with privileges and duties that accompany the role of the family provider. Furthermore, the legal structure tends to treat women not as individuals but as wives, mothers, and daughters.

This traditional gender orientation reflected in legislation contradicts women’s constitutional rights as equal citizens. For example, in many Arab countries only married male employees receive tax exemptions for family allowance or direct housing and children’s educational benefits. Also, gender-

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based work regulations, that are perceived by some as protective to women (types of work, hours of work) are quite common. Similarly, the rights of women to work, travel, pass their nationality to their children, and exercise responsibilities of custody are infringed upon in legal articles.

In many Arab countries, the male breadwinners are the sole point of reference for all decisions affecting wives' work and travel, birth registration, children's schooling and travel, initiation of divorce, or entrance into a polygamous marriage. Women and men also often have different legal ages for marriage. Women are less able to independently undertake contractual marriage arrangements, and face a different penal code for honor crimes and adultery. Furthermore, despite the emphasis on women's reproductive role, such a role does not bring with it adequate compensation, particularly in divorce situations, for women work in nurturing and caring for family members.

Recent legislative amendments have emphasized the treatment of women by the state as equal citizens such as the revisions of travel restrictions imposed by states, the granting of matrilineal transference of nationality, and the review of family rights in women's retirement benefits. Yet women still face great insecurity with the private and household sphere.

There remain a large number of unresolved issues in the family law that appear sustained by misinterpretation of the two basic principles of *kawama*¹⁷ and *welaya*.¹⁸ The patriarchal interpretations of these principles underlie the existing legislation that entail unequal rights and power in the family sphere.

Despite the emphasis on women's reproductive role, such a role does not bring with it adequate compensation, particularly in divorce situations, for women work in nurturing and caring for family members.

Unequal rights and power in the family spheres are sustained by misinterpretations of the two basic principles of *kawama* and *welaya*.

¹⁷ *Kawama* is introduced in sharia to describe the responsibility of men for their families derived from the income they spend and the endowments that were bestowed on some of them. It is being misinterpreted by the lay public as implying a superiority of men over women despite the existence of more rational interpretations by religious leaders.

¹⁸ *Welaya* refers to the rights of men to make financial decisions. Such a right is clearly associated with the role of men as the sole breadwinner, a role that is no longer confined to men in the family.

Box 1.3: Legal Environment

Morocco Adopts Landmark Family Law Supporting Women's Equality

On January 25, 2004, the government of Morocco adopted a new landmark family law supporting women's equality and granting them new rights in marriage and divorce, among other areas.

In April 2001, efforts to pass similar family law reforms were suspended while a Consultative Commission established by His Majesty King Mohammed VI studied the possibility of revising the Moudawana, Morocco's Civil Status Code that encompassed family law governing women's status. The continued advocacy and awareness-raising efforts of women's rights activists, strong backing by government leaders such as Prime Minister Abderrahmane Yousoufi, and the personal public support of HM King Mohammed VI contributed to the Commission's decision in favor of a reformed Moroccan family law. In October 2003, almost two and a half years after the establishment of the Commission, HM King Mohammed VI publicly announced new reforms creating a modern family law consistent with the tolerant spirit of Islam and "lifting the iniquity imposed on women, protecting children's rights, and safeguarding men's dignity." During the fall and winter of 2003, women's rights organizations, organized within the "Printemps de l'Egalité" network, analyzed the details of the draft legislation's text and organized workshops, round tables, and discussion groups to prepare for renewed lobbying efforts in Parliament and to educate the public about the reforms.

On February 3, 2004, the presidents of both houses of parliament presented the unanimously approved new family law to HM King Mohammed

VI. The new legislation replaces the family law included in the Moudawana and includes the following reforms:

Equality:

Husband and wife share joint responsibility for the family; the wife is no longer legally obliged to obey her husband; the adult woman is entitled to self-guardianship, rather than that of a male family member, and may exercise it freely and independently; the minimum age of marriage is 18 for both men and women.

Divorce:

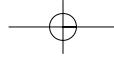
The right to divorce is a prerogative of both men and women, exercised under judicial supervision; the principle of divorce by mutual consent is established.

Polygamy:

Polygamy is subject to the judge's authorization and to stringent legal conditions, making the practice nearly impossible; the woman has the right to impose a condition in the marriage contract requiring that her husband refrain from taking other wives; if there is no pre-established condition, the first wife must be informed of her husband's intent to remarry, the second wife must be informed that her husband-to-be is already married, and moreover, the first wife may ask for a divorce due to harm suffered.

Enforcement of Law:

The family law assigns a key role to the judiciary in upholding the rule of law and provides for the pub-



<p>lic prosecutor to be a party to every legal action involving the enforcement of family law stipulations.</p> <p>Children's Rights: The woman is given the possibility of retaining custody of her child even upon remarrying or moving out of the area where her husband lives; the child's</p>	<p>right to acknowledgment of paternity is protected in the case that the marriage has not been officially registered.</p> <p>(Reported by Women's Learning Partnership [WLP] and our partner organization l'Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc [ADFM]. For further details: http://www.learningpartnership.org/events/newsalerts/morocco0204.phtml#adfmoc)</p>
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5.2 Affirmative Action

Affirmative action refers to measures adopted, on a temporary basis, to correct imbalances and to attain equality. Targeting women with gender-sensitive policies is viewed as affirmative action. For example, direct support for girls' education or female illiteracy eradication are ways of correcting gender gaps. These interventions appreciate that women face higher constraints than men and hence should benefit from focused attention to alleviate the consequences of these higher constraints. The Arab region is adopting a number of gender-sensitive approaches.

It should be noted, however, that the call for applying affirmative actions in ensuring better representations of women on the political front has been objected to as unconstitutional in many Arab countries. Similarly, affirmative actions have rarely been pursued or adopted to ensure women's higher participation in the labor force, or access to credit, or to positions of power.

5.3 Knowledge and Social Watch

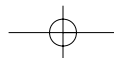
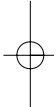
Knowledge is needed at two levels. First, on an individual level to ensure that women are fully aware of their rights and are able to exercise these rights. Second, on a more macro level to allow for advocacy, public endorsement, and accountability.

The high level of illiteracy in many Arab countries, and the reinforcement of gender values through socialization and extreme interpretations of sharia are clear deterrents to individual-level knowledge. Such deterrents need to be addressed to allow women to move from being the perpetrators of traditional values to the lobbyists for change. At the macro level, indicators have been developed to allow better monitoring of achievements. Indeed, the increased

The Arab regions is adopting gender-sensitive policies to address critical needs of women, but affirmative action is rarely pursued on more strategic fronts.

Affirmative action refers to the measures adopted, on a temporary basis, to correct imbalances and to attain effective equality.

Knowledge is needed at two levels. First, on an individual level to ensure that women are fully aware of their rights and are able to exercise these rights. Second, on a more macro level to allow for advocacy, public endorsement, and accountability.



Illiteracy, socialization practices, and extreme interpretations of sharia underlie women's role as perpetrators of traditional values.

efforts to mainstream gender in national statistics and advance gender-specific indicators to better capture the realities of women's lives are quite evident on the regional and national fronts. Of particular importance, the series of regional workshops addressing gender statistics and the development of gender indices. For example, the workshops held in United Arab Emirates on February 2003 and Beirut during June and December 2003.¹⁹ These workshops were supported by ESCWA, UNIFEM, Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR), and UNFPA.

Box 1.4: UNIFEM Gender-empowered Measurements through Statistics Initiative in Egypt, Jordan, and Syria

In the last ten years there has been a focus on using statistics as a tool for change in addressing and understanding gender issues. Statistics help promote change by making information on women and men available. Most of the problems and data gaps in gender statistics result from the inadequate definitions of concepts used in surveys and censuses. The term "gender statistics" has a broader meaning than merely presenting indicators on men and women. It also implies producing and presenting data that reflects women's and men's living conditions, their contribution to society, and their needs and particular issues. Collecting gender statistics should not necessarily be separated from collecting other statistical information, but instead it should be mainstreamed into all official statistical production systems. The insufficient capacities of producers of statistics to define, collect, analyze, and present gender statistics as well as the limited skills of researchers,

advocates, policy-makers and other users of statistics to communicate their needs for specific and accurate gender related statistics have resulted in the production of inaccurate and/or incomplete assessments of women's and men's conditions and contributions in society. Indeed, the relationship between the users of statistics and producers of statistics should be strengthened to enhance dialogue about user needs. Furthermore, the capacity of the users of statistics, such as policy makers, advocates and researchers to utilize statistics as a tool for change toward gender equality in the Arab states should be enhanced to ensure progress by countries in fulfilling their commitments to implementing international conventions and declarations.

The United Nations Fund For Women, Arab States Regional Office (UNIFEM) executed the Gender Equality Measured through Statistics project (GEMS). Through this initiative UNIFEM Amman

¹⁹ These series of regional workshops include: Workshop on Gender Indicators organized by United Arab Emirates University, United Nations Population Fund and Cairo Demographic Center, Al-Ain, 2-5 February, 2003; Workshop on Gender Statistics as a Tool in Policy Formation and Analysis organized by ESCWA in cooperation with CAWTAR and UNIFEM, Beirut, 17-19 June 2003; and First Session of the Committee on Woman, organized by ESCWA, Beirut, 4-5 December 2003 (ESCWA 2003a).

worked in partnership with the Departments of Statistics and civil organizations working on gender issues and women advancement in Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. GEMS aims to strengthen those countries accountability mechanisms, and specifically their statistical monitoring systems, helping them to fulfill their national and international commitment for gender equality. The GEMS initiative aims to mainstream the gender perspective in the national depart-

ments of statistics operations and structures; to institutionalize a replicable working analysis framework that promotes user–producer cooperation to produce gender indicators and statistics; to improve the use of statistical information as an advocacy tool that inspires change; and to provide a forum for Arab countries to share experiences, adopt a common gender statistics measurement framework, and document best practices.

Another excellent demonstration of the use of indicators to ensure action and accountability is evidenced in the program of the Fourth National Conference organized by Egypt's NCW during March 2004. The Conference is an attempt to engender the Millennium Development Goals and Indicators and to establish broader and more ambitious benchmarks for Egypt as well as more detailed assignment of responsibilities.

Despite these positive developments, the current progress on the indicators front lacks two elements. The first relates to a concern with the quality of the information base, and the second to the need for broadening the list and the conceptualization of indicators to allow better reflections of strategic needs of women, realities of their lives, and their overall well-being.

5.4 Friendly Environment

Given the impediments on women's mobility, and the extra concerns with girls safety and honor in Arab countries, making the public sphere physically safe for women can greatly help to improve women's outside access. Girls and women often face censure and abuse for participating in a public sphere. Securing a space where women can participate freely and equally without fear of social retribution is critical.

In order to develop a "friendly environment" for women encompasses, access to public services; safe transport; qualitative aspects of the school, classrooms, and health unit environments; the availability of female teachers and health workers are a few of many factors that need to be considered. Friendly environment also encompasses public infrastructure and norms that frustrate or disallow women from dealing with public officials and bureaucracy, from registering

Friendly environment encompasses access to public services; qualitative aspects of the school, classrooms, and health unit environments; the availability of female teachers and health workers; and public infrastructure and norms that do not deter women from interacting with the patriarchal bureaucracy, from registering complaints in an unfriendly police environment and even in participating in a volatile and violent political participation domains.

Remunerated economic participation, as a central element of self fulfillment and exercise of choice, remains quite low.

complaints in an unfriendly police environment and even from participating in a confrontational or volatile political fora.

6. Well-being

Measurement of well-being is highly subjective and operationally difficult, nevertheless it is important to integrate this neglected dimension into the measurement of progress. This section proposes some aspects that are deemed relevant in achieving a sense of well-being, and illustrates the few available findings that could inform the assessment of how far we have succeeded in fulfilling the goal of women's empowerment.

6.1 Satisfaction of Potentials

Women's economic participation is considered here as an element of well-being since such a participation is assumed to allow for satisfaction of women's potential as well as their economic and social security. The ability of women to earn an income and to have networks outside the immediate family often provides a sense of self-fulfillment and opportunities to exercise choice.

The following section on 'Fair Share and Fair Burden' will highlight the fact that the link between economic participation and well-being is not straightforward and that in absence of certain qualifiers women's participation in the work-force may be negative for their well-being. Furthermore, economic participation is not the only venue for self-fulfillment and achievements of economic and social security. Nevertheless, remunerated economic participation remains a central element of well-being.

Table A.1.13 in the annex demonstrates that women's participation in the labor force, and their share in paid employment in the non-agricultural sector in Arab countries is quite low. It is quite revealing to note that despite this low participation, women's unemployment rates remain much higher than those of men.

6.2 Fair Share and Fair Burden

The low levels of women's participation in the labor force and the corresponding widely quoted low share of women in economic activity do not reflect the actual contributions of women. They simply reflect lack of recognition of the value of women's unpaid work of nurturing and weaving the fabric of communities. There is clearly a need for a more systematic way of measuring time spent in such work and in appreciating the burden born by women and their real contributions to society. Indeed, as UNIFEM (2000: 7) observes "conventional conceptions of the way in which economies operate offer limited guidance for policies to promote women's empowerment and ways to combine gender justice



with economic justice. This because they leave out much of the work that women do, especially the unpaid care work that women do for their families and communities."

Recognizing the convention of home-based work is one step toward ensuring that the burden borne by women in unpaid work is compensated by a fair share of family income and wealth. Indeed, a recent fatwa in Egypt articulating the rights of women to compensation for work done at home could be built upon to revisit the rights of housewives to economic security.

In absence of a fair appreciation for women's family work, paid employment remains the only venue for women to obtain a fair share for their contributions to development.

Despite the importance of women's engagement in paid work for their well-being, such engagement is greatly compromised by the lack of family and community support, forcing women to leave or not seek paid employment or causing them to carry a heavy dual burden of productive and reproductive activities.

Furthermore, it is widely noted that women's paid economic participation tends to cluster in informal activities with harsh working conditions (invisible paid work in small workshops, on the streets, and in subcontracted home-based work) and high vulnerability.

Women "have to defend their right to paid work in the private, public and NGO sectors in the face of familial and community opposition, their right to better terms and conditions of paid work in the face of global competitive pressures, and their right to more equal ways of sharing and supporting unpaid care work in the face of economic evaluations that do not recognize the costs and benefits of this work" (UNIFEM 2000: 8).

6.3 Inclusiveness and Participation

The AHDR (2002) emphasized enhancing governance as an important component of liberating human capabilities. Inclusiveness and participation are two central characteristics of good governance. Inclusiveness is discussed in World Bank (2003) as a protection of people's basic right to uniform treatment before the law. With respect to participation, the World Bank report notes that: "All men and women should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their interests. Such broad participations built on freedom of association and speech as well as on capacities to participate constructively." Many of the issues discussed in more detail above, such as traditional gender norms and lack of educational opportunities for women, negatively affect women's full inclusiveness and partnership in Arab society.

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It is widely noted that women's paid economic participation tends to cluster in informal activities with harsh working conditions (invisible paid work in small workshops, on the streets, and in sub-contracted home-based work) and high vulnerability.

Inclusiveness and partnership that provide a sense of a role in life is needed for both women and men, but women suffer from a higher level of marginalization.

The concern with inclusiveness and partnership is not treated here as part of good governance but as a well-being criteria that derives from a sense of a role in life and contribution to a better future.

Extensive evidence reveals a minimal role played by women in the political arena. UNIFEM (2002), focusing on seven Arab countries, discusses women's participation in the political area (legislative, judicial, executive, and diplomatic) at two levels: their participation as citizens in the process and their participation within the structure. Clearly at both levels women's participation is quite low. The more recent analysis presented in ESCWA (2003) echoes these findings.

6.4 Security

Security over the life cycle and in the context of family life must also be furthered by measures that reflect the 'insecurities' experienced by women. On the one hand, the family is still perceived (explicitly and implicitly) as the resource for extending security to women. As explored above, the family, although a fundamental and important institution in women's lives and Arab society more generally, cannot be assumed to protect women's rights or security, particularly in the absences of an enabling societal environment. Social insurance and assistance programs may also fail to capture the needs of women for a variety of reasons that will be elaborated in the following chapter.

The literature on social protection distinguishes between four types of measures for women's security:

- *Promotive* measures to improve capability such as improving health and educational services and working conditions.
- *Preventative* measures that aim to avert deprivation, such as insurance schemes.
- *Protective* measures such as social safety nets and direct assistance programs that directly address and alleviate the consequences of social trauma and crisis.
- *Transformative* measures that change the structural position of women in society thus providing them with true security and relieving the state and non-state actors from fending for women as the weaker.

This report discusses the possibility of transformative measures to promote the conditions of Arab society as a whole towards protecting women's security. While huge gains have been made at the level of promoting women to gain skills and services to enable them to attain well-being and security, the strategic need now is for a social consensus on the necessity of transforming women's abilities and capabilities, and transforming current society into an enabling environment for gender justice.

7: The Missing Ingredients: What Should We Do Differently?

The analysis in this section demonstrates that at the policy level, Arab countries have been a full and active partner in all relevant international forums and have adopted action plans that reflect the strategic orientation of the gender approach. Furthermore, reasonable progress has been witnessed in addressing a number of critical needs and in building capabilities.

The analysis also documents that there are serious gaps at the level of women’s agency and prevailing gender attitudes and values. Prevailing gender attitudes continue to exert pressure on all women, regardless of their age, education or access to the public sphere. Furthermore, although in some countries there have been impressive changes on the legal front, customary treatment of women frustrates steps towards full and equal citizenship.

Women also continue to face gender inequality in their own homes. Women who are called upon to support their families in times of crisis are not in turn supported by their families and society to engage in self-fulfilling employment. Inclusiveness, participation, and security are aspects of women’s well-being that are not just absent, but are also unrecognized as legitimate needs of women that society must promote and protect. This section of the report calls for an explicit strategy and more concentrated actions to address three key missing ingredients.

7.1 Integrating Private and Public Spheres

In the Arab region, many women and men continue to see the family rather than the individual as the central unit in society. They ascribe to a relational model that emphasizes interactive exchange of rights and duties, and also defines the centrality of the family as a cultural asset that should be protected. This report does not challenge this view, but instead examines the ways in which women’s insecurity can be perpetuated by the family to the detriment of women, the family and society as a whole. The analysis presented throughout this chapter suggest that there is no tension between focusing on individual rights of women, and recognizing the importance of the family in society.

This report offers insight into how government family policies can further protect the private lives of women. Such policies revisit gender inequalities that are barriers to women’s public contribution and to their safety in their own homes. These policies work to develop sustained and efficient family support systems, open up women’s rooms for choice, and value their reproductive contributions to the family. Of particular importance is increasing women’s ability to combine work with family responsibilities. Both men and women agree that

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the centrality of the family in society is an important cultural asset. For both men and women, one's obligations and interests in the family often override personal interests and strongly affect one's aspirations and choices. The value placed on the family suggests that women's ability to combine work with family responsibilities will be a key factor in increasing women's participation in the labor force (World Bank 2004: 94–95). Also, "One way forward is to promote the transformation of the institutional norms and values of business corporations, public agencies and NGO's to reflect the patterns of women's as well as men's lives and to support not only individual choice but also economic justice. Gender mainstreaming should be understood as a process that brings about that kind of institutional transformation. In particular, it should change the expectation that people who are decision makers in economic and political life have no responsibilities for unpaid care work or can delegate them to others. Men need to take a larger share of the pains and pleasures of unpaid care work. Fortunately, there are men who are already thinking along these lines" (UNIFEM 2000: 8).

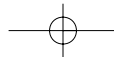
7.2 Ideational Change and Ensuring Rights-based Perspectives

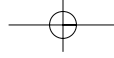
There is a clear need to address the stereotyped image and traditional gender perceptions of all members of Arab society. Such perceptions are adopted by both the young (male and female alike) and the older generations. Ideational changes are not easily targeted, particularly if they are based on long-established cultural norms successfully disguised as religious directives. Furthermore, the continued focus on women as mothers, daughters and sisters that first and foremost must carry out certain roles and obligations in the family can overshadow and overwhelm the view that women have fundamental rights. Empowerment of women remains accepted as the means to achieve better welfare for the child, the family, and society. However, attaining women's rights as the goal for its own sake fuels greater debate as it relates to deep differences in view in society over the relationship between women's rights, custom, traditional gender norms and family responsibilities.

The absence of a rights-based perspective is easily illustrated when noting the recent calls for restricting women's participation in the labor force as a solution for high male unemployment. This call finds relatively wide support despite the much higher levels of female unemployment.

7.3 Addressing the Gender Knowledge-base

Despite major efforts to engender statistics and the increased appreciation of the role of indicators and targets in guiding actions and ensuring accountability, the





gender knowledge-base remains a real constraint. It is important to stress that the operational needs for simplicity by prioritizing and reducing the number of indicators should not go too far by failing to capture the real lives of women and men.

There is a need to engage in country-level discussions to develop appropriate indicators that respond to different contextual forces. These indicators should serve as a 'social watch instrument' that can register unfulfilled commitments and assess progress towards women's security and greater gender justice.

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