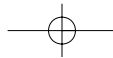
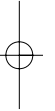
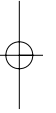
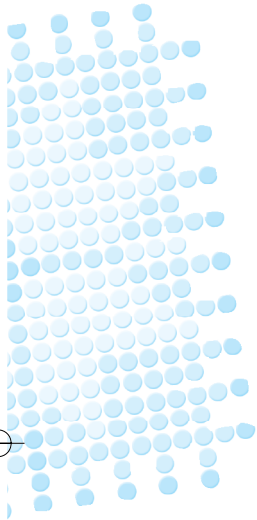
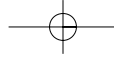


# Introduction





## 1. On Human Security

This report takes the concept of human security as its core analytical and ethical principle. Human security is concerned with reducing and—when possible—removing the insecurities that plague human lives.<sup>1</sup> It therefore calls for upholding people’s fundamental freedoms, protecting them from severe threats, and building on their own strengths and aspirations.<sup>2</sup>

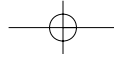
As will become clear throughout the report, the human security of women in Arab states is greatly compromised. Throughout the region, women fail to see the protection of their rights, the security of their freedoms, and recognition and support of their strengths and aspirations. Of course, there are striking differences in the lives of women throughout Arab countries. Day-to-day realities are shaped by disparate challenges and opportunities posed by the region, country, community and village in which women live. Women to a great extent also shape this context, although the opportunities and the obstacles women face when trying to effect change also vary across the region. This report does not try to homogenize women’s experience or undermine their individualism. Instead, it explores factors that threaten women’s security throughout the region—contextual variables that place women at risk simply because they are women.

To protect women’s security, we need to recognize and address the exclusion they face in their daily lives which prevents them from achieving their goals, expressing their needs, fulfilling their social responsibilities and changing their world.

The 2000 UN Millennium Summit recognized that human security remains threatened by both age-old problems and new vulnerabilities, and reaffirmed the importance of all people of the world living free from want and free from fear. Towards achieving this goal, they launched an independent Commission for Human Security to promote understanding of human security and to galvanize concrete action to support its fulfillment. This Commission launched "Human Security Now" in 2003 that focuses on ways to protect and empower all human beings.

<sup>1</sup> Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now*, (New York 2003), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now*, (New York 2003), p. 4.



This recent emphasis on human security has evolved out of increasing consensus that development should be about shielding people from acute threats and creating the conditions to allow them to control and lead their own lives. Since the mid-seventies human security has been the focus of a variety of national and international organizations and has been developed into an analytical framework that sets priorities and policies. Moreover analysts have adopted the approach of human security and tried to identify indicators and collect data to operationalize it as a research and as a policy framework.<sup>3</sup>

The framework of human security forces analysts to understand the differential impact of development, change, and growth on all social groups; it also mandates a diversification of the indicators by which progress is measured.<sup>4</sup>

The human development approach led by Mahbub ul Haq, Amartya Sen and others along with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has greatly contributed to shifting the focus of development away from growth and production (reflected in GNP or GDP) to the quality and richness of human lives, "which depend on a number of influences, of which commodity production is only one."<sup>5</sup> The human development index is a composite measurement which expresses this critique of narrow developmental ideology. This index reflects not only growth and productivity, but also individual welfare and quality of life. Human security supplements the focus on human development, which is importantly concerned with progress and augmentation, by paying primary attention to the risks and insecurities that threaten survival, safety and dignity of men and women. "Human security demands protection from these dangers and the empowerment of people so that they can cope with—and when possible overcome—these hazards."<sup>6</sup>

UNDP's Human Development Report of 1994 defined human security as freedom from fear and need.<sup>7</sup> Over the last decade, the UNDP has continued to stress the importance of focusing development on the lives of individuals rather than solely on national growth, and the security of borders or territories. Consequently indicators measuring health, education, civil liberties and politi-

<sup>3</sup> King and Murray 2002: 597-601.

<sup>4</sup> Sen 2002: 4 illustrates this point with reference to the Asian crisis of 1997 whereby the high growth rates and equitable income distribution did not protect those made redundant from the severe insecurities caused by the crisis.

<sup>5</sup> Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now*, (New York 2003), p. 8-9.

<sup>6</sup> Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now*, (New York 2003), p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> A similar definition was offered by Obuchi Keizo, prime minister of Japan in 1997 when he explained human security as the protection of human life which enables human beings to pursue a creative and productive life without fear of indignity. (see Sen p.3)





cal participation have become the basis for discourses and initiatives of development.

Human security initiatives should protect people from hunger, oppression and disease as well as safeguard men and women against the incremental or sudden decline in their incomes and standards of living. Analytical frameworks of human security have helped us understand the extent, impact, and dynamics of economic, social, and environmental crises that have affected humanity over the past decade. They have also facilitated increased visibility of how the weak, the poor, the disenfranchised and disadvantaged have experienced more risk, for a longer time due to such crises.

This report, which focuses on the everyday realities of women in Arab states scratches beneath the available data on national and regional trends to illuminate the risks and opportunities for women's security in the region.

### **1.1 Setting the Scene: History of women's movements in Arab states**

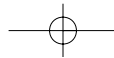
The following paragraphs touch on the historical roots of women's movements in Arab states, as well as the many positive changes and constraints facing these movements in the current era.

The concern with women's empowerment is not new on the development scene either internationally or in the Arab region. The protection of women's rights has long been seen as critical for achieving progress and national development. However, the current agenda is considerably different. It is shaped by a major paradigm shift focusing on the individual, and a much broader range of committed actors. Furthermore, the new paradigm is backed up by budgetary allocations and measures to enhance accountability.

In the Arab region, the early movement for gender equality is not well documented but there are signs of sporadic calls, particularly for girl's education, in the nineteenth century. The movement crystallized in the early twentieth century. This early phase witnessed the active participation of women in the efforts to fulfill national aspirations for independence. However, it should be noted that during this early phase explicit demands were formulated and that, as of yet, a number of them are still unfulfilled in some Arab countries.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For a summary of these demands see ESCWA 2003b: 96. Based on an analysis of the writings of Malak Hefni Nassef and Hoda Shaarawi and others presented by Rose Gharib and quoted in ESCWA 2003b: 96: Securing freedom of education, including higher education; encouraging women to study female medicine and acquire mathematical and managerial skills; allowing the unveiling or modifying the veil [this was intended to uncover the face not the hair]; the necessity for those engaged to be married to know each other; abolition of polygamy; restricting men's right to divorce and allowing women that right in situations of maltreatment; raising the age for marriage and for child custody; the right to vote and to participate in politics.



During the 1950s and 60s, the movement for women's emancipation changed from being mainly the aspirations of progressive groups, made up mostly of women from the elite classes and integrated within larger, national independence movements, to being placed on the state's agenda as part of the overall development plans for the nation.

This was the period during which many Arab countries gained independence and undertook ambitious actions for forging new national identities and for state modernization. Women's empowerment became part and parcel of the state plans as many countries adopted new constitutions and charters explicitly incorporating women as equal citizens. Also, women greatly benefited from investments in education, health, job creation, and greater political rights.

The period also witnessed concrete actions to encourage women's participation in public life. For example, the introduction of new labor laws allowing women maternity leaves and child care benefits, the introduction of women's suffrage, and the establishment of ministries and organizations for women affairs.

Not all Arab countries joined in this movement or participated in it at the same level. Some observers linked these variations to the nature of the national economy. Countries like Tunisia and Morocco, with labor intensive and export oriented economies, needed women in the labor market and adopted progressive policies. On the other hand, the oil exporting countries with their large public sectors and capital-intensive economies found no real incentives for targeting social change.

In terms of international interests, the concern with women's empowerment has its roots in human rights treaties and in basic principles for non-discrimination on the basis of race, gender, language, or religion. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms were incorporated in the United Nations Charter (1945) (The Avalon Project, 1996) adopted by all member states, and the Declaration for Human Rights (1948) [The United Nations, 1992]. The first international conference on women held in Mexico (1975) with its plan of action for the decade (1976 to 1985) laid the groundwork for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW was adopted in 1979 and entered into force as a binding treaty in 1981, following ratification by twenty states. This two-year period between adoption and ratification made it the fastest human rights convention to come into force. Sixteen out of the twenty-two Arab countries signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). These countries are: Algeria, Comoros Islands, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait,

Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia, Syria, Bahrain, Djibouti, and Mauritania.<sup>9</sup>

The three other international conferences on women held in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995) reflect a gradual maturation and convergence in terms of the conceptualization of the agenda and the focus of the discussion on women's rights. The early conferences highlighted the inequality of women before the law and targeted women particularly in terms of education, health, and employment. Arab countries participating in these meetings emphasized the volatile political context and the plight of Arab women under occupation (Palestine and Lebanon).

By the mid-1980s, both the discourse and the interventions by Arab countries started to change. As quoted in United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM 2002: 10), "Following 1985, the debate on women's progress and gender issues intensified. It became apparent that working with women alone is insufficient to achieve change since men and society as a whole must be equally responsible for introducing change."

Comparing the two platforms of action from the mid-1970s to mid-1990s, the main difference is that the earlier platform emphasized women's equality in development (called the 'WID approach') while the later explicitly recognized the need for institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. Also in the 1990s, governments made commitments to mainstream gender equality in their institutions, policies, planning, and decision making (the 'Gender Approach'). Furthermore, by the mid-nineties, the centrality of civil society in supporting women's human rights was firmly established.

During the course of the last twenty years, Arab countries participating in international forums moved from being cautious observers lobbying for their political concerns (particularly, those of women in war-like situations) to active participants, introducing a regional perspective on women's priorities. Of particular relevance is the Nairobi preparatory meeting organized by Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in 1984. The meeting moved the plateau of discussion from political concerns to cultural specificity, realities of women in Arab countries, and the need to appreciate the nature of women's work at home and the informal sector.

Similarly, a number of interim national committees composed of non-governmental and governmental organizations as well as other civil society groups were established to prepare comprehensive reports on the status of women in each Arab country, and to coordinate national efforts for their participation in the Beijing con-



<sup>9</sup> [http://www.unifem.org/jo/human\\_rights.htm#cedaw](http://www.unifem.org/jo/human_rights.htm#cedaw)

ference. Once finalized, these reports were integrated into a regional document that was submitted for inclusion in the Platform of Action on national priorities in the Arab region. Also, the 1996 conference of Ministers of Social Affairs in Arab region that was held in Jordan reflected the commitment of Arab states to adopt concrete plans of action that respond to the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA).

Another demonstration of Arab states' active participation in the international movement is their adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which emphasize the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (Goal 3). All Arab states in the region adopted the Millennium Declaration from which the MDGs are derived.<sup>10</sup>

The publication of *The Liberation of Women* by Qasim Amin in 1899, and the prevalence of Arab journals such as the *al-Fatat* that explored issues of central concern to women as early as the 1890s are just some of many examples of historical efforts to achieve gender justice led by both women and men in Arab and Muslim regions of the world. These efforts continue, bolstered by the focus on achieving women's security and increased consensus and commitment to protecting women's rights and dignity.

It is particularly relevant that the population and health fields have now moved away from the single focus of family planning and improving maternal care as a targeted narrow concern into embracing reproductive health as an integrated package for improved well-being.

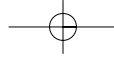
As has been repeatedly indicated in the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), reproductive health should be accepted as both a concept and an approach that is sensitive to the inferior position of women, such an approach emphasizes the implications of this inferior position on how women experience sexuality and reproduction.

Similarly, the economic field that moved from the macro focus on development in general to human development specifically, has also explicitly included the right of women to be treated as equal citizens and to benefit from the fruits of development.

Key development actors (the World Bank [WB], United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], United Nations Development Program [UNDP], bilateral donors, and others) continue to integrate their strategies and pool their resources to achieve better impact. Also, the movement for women's empowerment is currently supported by emphasizing the state's accountability through the adoption of goals, detailed targets, and progress indicators.

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<sup>10</sup> The Millennium Development Goals in Arab Countries [a regional report] found at: <http://www.undp.org/rbas/regional/ARABMDenglish.pdf>



The Arab region, as a full participant in the international consensus, is now implementing national actions and effecting changes on the ground. The majority of Arab countries have ratified CEDAW, established or modified existing institutional structures to lead the national movements for women's empowerment developed action plans, and have undertaken actual changes with far-reaching impacts.

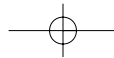
Despite these advances, it should be noted that the vibrant and ambitious movements for women's empowerment in Arab countries that are continuously gaining strength and speed have many obstacles still to face along the road towards women's security. Difficulties are encountered at every stage and level of action. The tension starts at the early stages when commitments are made and frameworks of actions are adopted. Country reservations and endless negotiations around resolutions are but one example of these difficulties, while the discourse and heated discussions among observers and pressure groups are further signs of stress. The movement from policy to action is also plagued by a wide spectrum of obstacles ranging from a lack of clear public endorsement to operational difficulties and budgetary limitations.

A quick review of the nature of constraints in Arab countries shows that despite the diversity between and within countries in income, quality of life, and social structures there are many similarities in the factors that hinder the realization of gender equality. Many are suspicious of the agenda and its content perceiving gender equality as a western imposition that is inappropriate to the religious and cultural context of Arab states. As evident from the discussion above, this perception is wholly inaccurate. The Islamists' discourse is the most overt evidence of such suspicions. The plethora of articles condemning the international women's forums as evil plots against Islam are but the tip of iceberg. Throughout the Arab world, there are factions that continue to endorse the view that Islam and gender inequality are incompatible.

The complicated debates concerning women's rights in Islamic thought continue with women and men on all sides of the spectrum.

The impact of the Beijing Conference more often than not has placed opponents to women's equality on the defensive. Sharp confrontations over how Islamic requirements affect women's rights by both Islamic feminists and by foes of women's rights reveal a religious tradition in turmoil as Muslims variously react with enthusiasm or with hostility to the message of Beijing.' (IGWS 2003: 1-2)

The tradition of women's activism in Arab states and Muslim populations is diverse, but in general the importance of understanding and learning from other women's movements without losing sight of Arab and Muslim history, culture and religion has been stressed. The view that gender equality is a concept for-





eign or outside of the Arab and Muslim tradition continues to be challenged by those who see gender justice as wholly consistent if not called for by foundational religious and cultural values.

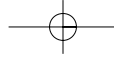
Another serious obstacle encountered is a lack of prioritization on gender justice. Women's empowerment tends to be pushed backstage in the face of political insecurity, the pressures for improved socio-economic conditions, and alleviation of poverty. It is no coincidence that recent development literature emphasizes the synergistic relations between women's empowerment and development more generally. Illuminating the consequences not only for women but for society as a whole if gender is not mainstreamed in development efforts is needed for sustained support in addressing gender concerns.

The implementation of the agenda faces additional obstacles. Many critical needs vie for limited resources. Other issues can often be operationalized and funded more easily because they face less social and institutional resistance. The critical needs of female-headed households and the deprivation of education and health are widely endorsed as legitimate goals deserving a share of limited resources, while actions to ensure equality of rights and opportunities are viewed as peripherals to national challenges particularly if they require financial support.

## 1.2 Objectives of this Report

The review of the progress made on implementation of the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women and the Beijing Platform for Action is gaining momentum leading up to the 49th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women to be held in March 2005 (Beijing +10). This process coincides with a major five year review of achievement towards the Millennium Development Goals culminating in September 2005. Goal 3 of the MDGs, to promote gender equality and empower women, includes targets for both 2005 and 2015. In such a time of reflection and examination, this report aims to illuminate stagnant and unfulfilled promises, and offer suggestions of how to move forward to achieve women's security in Arab states. As was made clear in the 2003 Arab Human Development Report, one of the challenges with such a task is the lack of data and knowledge generated and published from within the region. This report aims to increase understanding of the lives of women in Arab states with the hope not only of tracing progress but also to further galvanize change in the region from within to promote women's security and gender justice.

Against this background of clear emphasis on women's empowerment, significant actions taken, and serious obstacles encountered, it is important to identify and appreciate the achievements and major challenges to women's



advancement and gender equality in the Arab region. Thus, the key objective of this report is to serve as a tool for identifying unfulfilled promises and for revisiting the current strategies and programs of actions. The report is also intended as a resource for networks across countries and regions that are working towards women's empowerment and gender equality. Finally, this report examines the limitations of using generic indicators to reflect and assess the progress to women's empowerment and gender equality.

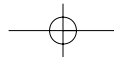
The chapters that follow explore the gains and losses of the past decade from a human security framework, delving into these trends to explore how they have translated into risks and opportunities for the security of individual women. The authors aim to bridge the public and private spheres by illustrating the many inter-connections between gender injustices within and outside of the household. The chapters also address the paradox of governments that recognize the role of women in the care-economy—raising children and families and tending to sick and elderly relatives—but that fail to endorse policies to support women in shouldering their double burdens of work and family. Women's work in the informal economy continues to be under-recognized and under-valued.

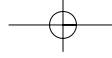
### **1.3 Organization of the Report**

The first chapter, following the three introductory parts that set the scene and the objectives and organization of the report, addresses three levels of actions: the policy level where commitments are being made, the operational plans that translate the adopted policies into actions, and the outcome levels where the efforts come to fruition.

The first chapter starts by investigating the responses of Arab countries to the international consensus reflected in both CEDAW and the BPFA. The purpose is to investigate whether reservations at these forums expressed by Arab countries are indicative of a deep reluctance to endorse a vision of women's equality and empowerment. It also reviews the plans of actions, their nature, and specificity. The purpose is to investigate whether these plans capture the vision of the BPFA and reflect the needed shift of emphasis from critical needs embedded in the WID approach to the more strategic one adopted by the Gender Approach. The remaining sections of this chapter review the success in meeting goals highlighting the achievements, challenges and missing ingredients.

The subsequent three chapters use an analytical framework detailing present and prospective challenges in three central spheres of women's life: social, economic, and political security. These realities are drawn upon to recommend new





strategic orientations to push forward the agenda for women's security. The logic of the themes selected for Chapters 2, 3, and 4 reflect the decision to focus on three spheres relevant to the BPFA rather than attempting to deal with all twelve BPFA concerns across all Arab countries.

These critical spheres were identified at the Arab Conference for Ministers of Social Affairs held in Amman, Jordan in 1996 as the main three axes of the Arab plan of action. Within these spheres a number of issues were highlighted in the Amman Conference. They address the situation of poor women and the use of gender analysis in planning and monitoring development; expanding women's participation in decision making and local governance; the critical needs of women, family cohesion, and support for women not receiving family support, as well as the conceptual and methodological basis for dealing with women within the family (use of the family as a unit of analysis and discussion of family policies).

