



**Beijing +15
The Shadow Report**

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The Shadow Report (Beijing +15)

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Introduction:

A. Background:

The Beijing Platform of Action identified twelve (12) areas of concern relevant to women and development. The conference came as a culmination of global efforts addressing women's rights. Arab states declared their commitment to the Beijing declaration. However, traditional Arab culture rejected some of the included items, on the basis that they are in conflict with cultural norms/values, and more importantly, Islamic dogma. Arab countries had already taken the same position in relation to the Convention on Eliminating All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Sudan and Somalia did not ratify the Convention because of the radical Islamic tide in these societies.

Following the Beijing Conference, governments began to develop strategies and national plans targeting women, as well as implement a gender-component in policies, as in the case of the five-year plan of 1997-2002 in Egypt. Likewise, governmental institutions dealing with women's issues have been established—e.g. The National Council for Women (NCW) in Egypt in 2000, already preceded by The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM); the General Department of Women in the Sudan, as well as the Federation for Sudanese Women. The National Council for Women (NCW) in Egypt has been successful in mainstreaming gender in the national plan. In addition, it has also targeted the introduction of gender-based analysis of budgets and engendered statistics. A major achievement of the council is the establishment of an office of Ombudsman to receive complaints by women, also encouraging affirmative action in ministries (UNIFEM). Bahrain and Jordan also established Ombudsman.

However, governmental efforts have been considered short of achieving the desired objectives, hence the importance of the partnership with the NGO's. One positive impact of the Beijing Conference is the increasing role of Nongovernmental Organizations (NGO's), as they started to take action in bringing about changes/modifications in many fields relevant to women's issues. As such, their involvement can be seen as a result of the necessity to respond to the needs of communities, more importantly, those of women as the vulnerable group. NGO's therefore became active partners in promoting gender equity, albeit not without constraints in this respect.

What has spurred NGO activity is the support given by international organizations. Consequently, the number of NGO's addressing women's issues has grown significantly. Moreover, their activities have widened to include gender mainstreaming as an important focus. Not all Arab countries have documented data in this respect. In Egypt the number of NGO's currently involved with women's issues as part of their programs is 2000, with 144 of them working exclusively on women (Kandil, 2009). In Bahrain the number of NGO's dealing with women reached twenty (20) in 2002.

In further pursuit of women's rights, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) followed in 2000. Goal 3 clearly specified; "to promote gender equality and empowerment of women." Other MDG's, although not explicitly stating gender as a target, addressed women's issues implicitly, women being the disadvantaged group in situations of hunger, poverty, education, and health, among other concerns of the MDG's. The pursuit of women's issues cannot ignore the many conferences held before Beijing, in Mexico, Nairobi, among others. However, the major impact highlighting the emerging concern of gender issues came in the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994. The Beijing Conference therefore followed to endorse the cumulative effect of these previous efforts. The message of these international forums is the emphasis on the states' accountability through the adoption of the different agendas in their respective national plans.

The activities of the NGO's working on gender issues have correspondingly increased their focus on those activities/projects aiming at empowering women and increasing their involvement in decision-making. Furthermore, many NGO's are committed to the needs of the most marginalized females i.e., poor women and female heads of households. Advocacy and awareness-raising programs covering all areas relevant to gender concerns, including health and environment, are also increasing efforts. Moreover, there is the emphasis on literacy classes.

Micro-credit enterprises are also encouraged for women, where small loans are offered to help them establish income-generating activities, with the objective of raising their standard of living, and consequently, that of the whole family. Poverty alleviation programs target women as the poorest of the poor. Such activities indicate the trend of NGO's since the Beijing Conference. Whereas earlier they concentrated on charitable

services, their role in developmental pursuits has been rising. The current realization is that addressing women's issues should be made from the perspective of development, and more so, sustainable development, rather than charity.

NGO's have been active in addressing violence against women. This focus includes programs/projects/seminars on domestic violence, early marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), deprivation from the right to education, unequal access to health services, unpaid labor, in addition to all forms of possible abuse towards the girl child.

In the Sudan, Iraq, Palestine, and Somalia, the special situation of armed conflict has raised the concern for violence against women. NGO's have been concentrating on those areas of females highly revealing their disadvantaged situation. Poverty alleviation, health, nutrition, environmental awareness, informal education, and vocational training represent their focus, in addition to activities related to relief and crisis emergencies. The armed conflict has led to many displaced groups, where women are the most vulnerable, here potential targets of all forms of violence, especially rape.

As a result of the efforts made by the NGO's, as above-mentioned, progress has been achieved in the situation of women.

In education, figures indicate a significant rise with respect to female literacy, as well as enrolment in education. Likewise, health conditions have witnessed an obvious improvement, especially with respect to reproductive health. Health service utilization has been on the rise, and more women are seeking health care from the available centers/providers of the formal system as well as those offered by NGO's. Modification in family law is also a case in point. Credit here goes to both governmental and NGO efforts. Moreover, the appointment of women judges in Egypt represents a major step, revealing the success of advocacy/lobbying by NGO's after years of resistance/rejection by the judicial authorities. The same efforts materialized in the major achievement of the initiation of a law implementing the quota system in the Egyptian parliament. The law specifies the commitment to have sixty-four (64) seats for women in Parliament, to go on for two (2) sessions. This situation was preceded by the modifications in the Moroccan law, where thirty (30) seats are allocated to women.

The issue of violence against women, especially domestic violence, has also been brought to the surface through the strong activities of NGO's. Discussion of this topic had not

been earlier known. Shelters for battered women have been established, albeit not common.

Egyptian NGO's have likewise been targeting sexual harassment as a serious problem. They have succeeded in raising awareness not only as to its incidence, but more so, as to the women's role in reporting it. Media have also joined the campaign. Consequently, women have become more willing to report cases of sexual harassment, after it had been a cultural taboo. Legal action against the offenders is also taken as a result.

An important practice still persistent in Egypt, the Sudan, Djibouti and Mauritania is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), hence the focus of many NGO's. Awareness-raising and advocacy are important activities in this respect.

However, the fact remains that although Arab NGO's have gone a long way in initiating change with respect to women's status/rights, there is still a gap when compared to those of men. Moreover, some cultural and structural constraints still persist.

One field that may still represent a setback in women's situation is political participation. In spite of the strong pursuits in this direction by both sectors, governmental and nongovernmental, the actual situation still reflects a low representation of women in politics. Numbers in political participation are significantly dwindling among women, as voters, candidates, and members of both legislative and executive bodies. In this respect, some NGO's implement training programs to upgrade the skills of women for their involvement in decision-making positions. Advocacy/awareness-raising for female political participation has therefore been top on the agenda of NGO's. Advocacy for the quota system is hoped to be a positive step in expanding the participation of women in politics.

Similarly, the gender bias in family law has led to the need for reform; NGO's taking the lead in lobbying/advocacy efforts in this direction.

Reproductive health/nutrition is one area of concern in the efforts of NGO's, the current situation representing persistent traditional setbacks, in spite of many achievements made in this respect. The emphasis on the woman's fertility, the high cultural value of children, the low status of women in seeking health care, as well as the predominance of beliefs supporting the role of the traditional midwives—are all obstacles to upgrading the reproductive health situation. The resulting health status of Arab women is still low, as

seen in the high rate of maternal mortality. It is estimated that the rate is seventy-five (75) per 100,000 live births in half the Arab countries, and reaches 200 per 100,000 live births in one third of these countries. (UNFPA)

There is still a rising incidence of violence against women, mostly seen in episodes of sexual harassment, at both the individual and collective levels. The practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has not been eradicated.

Setbacks in women's progress are triggered, for the most part, by a rising reactionary tide, falsely explained by Islam, leading to a reversing trend, where women are caught in the middle. Religious extremists have started questioning many of the rights already gained by women after years of struggle. This situation creates a challenge for women activists, since they have to stand against this strong reactionary tide, which is gaining impetus with the culmination of unresolved issues.

Furthermore, gender issues do not represent a priority in national concerns, considering the multitude of growing problems at the political, social, and economic levels.

This report addresses the efforts made by NGO's in collaboration with the government in relation to women's situation in the last fifteen years after the Beijing Conference in 1995, as seen from the Beijing Platform for Action. It is a follow-up for the two previous reports—namely, Beijing +5, and Beijing +10. Furthermore, the report presents the still-prevailing obstacles in this respect, in addition to the achievements.

It is important to mention in this respect that one major setback in identifying the actual situation of different areas of women's issues, in terms of achievements and obstacles, is the shortage—sometimes absence—of accurate, credible data.

B. NGO's and National Machineries:

Addressing efforts made by NGO's in relation to the Beijing Platform of Action, in addition to other gender issues, cannot disregard the constraints they face. Not only does the situation include cultural factors that impede these efforts, but there are challenges the national machineries represent, and as such, NGO's have to confront. Major here are those legislations governing NGO's activities. These include regulations which, in most cases, act as constraints to their performance. Even in the case of legislations that are supposed to promote NGO activities, the actual implementation may reflect gaps that refute their objective.

Funding is another major problem, with a dual facet. In the first place, donor agencies tend to favor governments with funds, and consequently, they receive a larger share, where NGO's are underprivileged in this respect. In the second place, donor agencies may impose their priorities in the programs/activities they fund, based on their own interests/agenda.

Another obstacle hindering NGO's performance appears in their limited partnership with national machineries, in many cases discouraged by the latter, hence restricting their scope of work.

Moreover, much of national legislation includes a gender bias. Some laws explicitly discriminate against women. As an example there is the Egyptian criminal law, as in the example of Egypt with respect to adultery. There is also the case of Somalia and Saudi Arabia where women are punished for personal attire, a situation which is neither against religion or law. Furthermore, there is the penalty in the case of rape in Sudan and Somalia, where the crime is transformed against the woman as adultery. In Saudi Arabia, laws are very restrictive to women.

In many cases both tradition and the radical Islamic tide join to overrule the practice of law, as is the case of FGM.

The end result is the NGO's face a number of obstacles at both the societal and government level in their pursuits towards gender equity.

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Education:

Following the Beijing Conference on Women and Development in 1995, gender issues have come to occupy a position of high priority on the international agenda, later endorsed by the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) of the UN Millennium

Summit, held in September 2000. Two of the MDG's target women's and girls' education, based on the conviction that the achievement of the MDG's is in large part based on improving the status of women, of which education is an integral component.

In line with these international pledges, Arab countries have therefore channeled their efforts towards securing gender equality in education.

Underlying these initiatives is the crucial realization of the role of education – and particularly women's education – at the center of developmental approaches. Education is undeniably a key strategy for reducing poverty, since it is education that raises the capacity level in the labor market, thus contributing directly to the growth of national income. Moreover, education for women extends beyond their employment. It is the variable controlling their and their family's health. Most importantly, children's rights to education, security and health can be secured by the mother's schooling. In addition, education is an important factor leading to political participation. (ElSafty, 2006)

It is important to mention that female education has no barriers in either religion or law. Islam, as a worldly religion, taking into consideration the practical aspects of life, does not include any contradictions to women's right to education. It, in fact emphasizes the high value of education as a basic part of the dogma. Moreover, education is compulsory. The countries' legislation supports the right of education for women. Equality of opportunity is clearly stipulated in the constitutions, against any form of discrimination, based on religion, sex, or race.

The role of NGO's in education has emerged as a result of the shrinking role of the government because of the dwindling economic resources in some countries, in parallel to the increasing importance of partnership in developmental pursuits. Moreover, the newly emerging concept of "education for all" after the Jomtien World Conference in 1990 has gained impetus in the last two decades, and as such has led to the need to establish a relationship between the formal education system and the informal one as provided by the NGO's. NGO's involvement in education focuses for the most part on women, they being the underprivileged group in the culture. Programs offered by this sector cover literacy classes, addressing dropouts, females in general, including training programs in income-generating activities. (ElSafty, 2005).

It follows that several specific steps taken to encourage girls' education over the last decade have also assisted the trend advocated by international efforts.

Achievements:

- In Egypt, the five-year plan includes a special section on female education, emphasizing their equal access to education, as well as illiteracy alleviation.

- In 2001 the Egyptian government committed to end the gender gap by the year 2007 by launching the Girls' Education Initiative. This involves enrolling half a million out of school- girls at new and existing schools. The government initiated this process through launching awareness-raising campaigns, aimed at addressing those traditional values that may deny girls the access to education. The government has encouraged partnerships, as seen in the role of the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood (NCCM), which, in collaboration with UN agencies, has run a wide-ranging national program for girls' education since 2000 using the media for advocacy. It has also started constructing schools at a rapid rate – the plan was to establish nearly 10,000 by 2007 in the 7 districts, considered hardest to reach children, and it is estimated that 500,000 girls will benefit from this program.

-A Community Schools initiative started in Egypt in 1992 and was pushed forward, leading to a strong movement for girls' education in the rural areas, including the southern region, where female illiteracy is highest. A linked program saw the introduction of 'child-friendly' schools with particular emphasis on girls and women. Here education is based on the principle of "active learning", where the students are taught basic life skills and knowledge with a more practical orientation in order to help them improve their lives (Elsafty, 2005). In the same direction, the Ministry of Education in Iraq, in partnership with UNICEF has launched in 2005 an intensive program for children out of school, covering three years instead of six.

-An encouraging sign is the primary role women activists and NGOs are playing in the campaign to expand girls' education. Women's organizations and NGOs have also become service-providers, offering informal education programs that target women, giving them the qualifications that can help them seek employment and/or engage in income-generating activities. In Yemen, NGO's attempt to help poor families by supplying their children in education with uniforms and school bags. In Mauritania, *Terra*

Vivante, an NGO, provides literacy programs for poor females, as well as credit for small enterprises. These women have formed cooperatives on a neighborhood basis for raising goats and cattle.

-In the Sudan NGO's are trying to reach females in remote isolated areas, in particular those suffering from armed conflicts.

-Jordan revised school syllabi in accordance with a gender-sensitive approach. So has Somalia. Also, in Somalia, NGO's with the help of UNDP succeeded in providing financial aid to seventeen (17) female students to study law.

-Since the Beijing Conference, adult female literacy rate has risen to 71.4% for those aged 15+ in Egypt, 60.9% in the Sudan. In Libya, it reached 72%, and 60% in Algeria. Female primary net enrolment ratio is 97% and 56% respectively, while secondary enrolment ratio is 82% and 33% (UNDP *Human Development Report: 2007/2008*). In Syria, female illiteracy has decreased from 28% in 2003 to 14.25 % in 2007. In Saudi Arabia it reached 29% in 2005. In Bahrain it decreased from 28.75% in 1991 to 17.5% in 2000. In Tunisia, the gap in education favors females.

-In Jordan, the gap between males and females in secondary education is minimal, as represented by 37.2 % for the former and 39.3% for the latter. In Tunisia, the gap in education is in favor of women.

-In Somalia, a system of informal education was established outside the government system, through nongovernmental initiatives, after the demise of the educational institutions as a result of the fall of the government in 1991. Foreign aid has played an important role in promoting education in Somalia, especially through the efforts UNICEF. There are currently 1,172 schools as opposed to only 600 at the beginning of the civil war. These schools are owned and managed by local communities. In addition, NGO's, in collaboration with UNDP provided financial aid to seventeen (17) Somali female students to study law.

-In the Emirates the number of female graduates exceeds that of males.

-The government of Djibouti encourages female education in poor families through incentives in the form of free clothing, meals, and school equipment given to those in schools. Moreover, their families are given food aid.

However, the fact remains that female education still suffers from cultural constraints that interfere with the achievement of gender equity.

Obstacles to female's access to education are:

Obstacles:

-The educational system reflects cases of inequality, where some marginalized groups are deprived of this right. There is a gender gap. As an example, in Yemen, out of ten (10) females, six (6) are illiterate, as opposed to two (2) among males, according to the 2006 census. In Djibouti female school enrolment is 34.7%. Regional disparities exist, and the urban-rural discrepancy reveals the disadvantaged situation of the rural sector. Schools in the villages are already short of covering students of school age of both sexes. Here rural women are at a double disadvantage.

-The obstacles to women's education cover a range that extends from cultural norms to conditions of poverty to political logistics. Girls can be deprived of this right because of the prevalence of traditional values and norms requiring sex segregation and female seclusion.

It follows that in spite of the many advances in women's education, there are still those underlying cultural factors that shape gender dynamics in society, and accordingly affect female's access to education, among other rights.

In Saudi Arabia females are not allowed to enroll in certain majors in universities. Sex segregation is still the rule except at the preschool level. Girls are kept out of physical education as well as field trips. Although the country has raised the number of females sent on missions abroad, the accompaniment of a male chaperon is still a requirement.

-Other concerns are based around the safety of girls; some families may deny their daughters education because of the long distance they have to travel to go to school, especially in the rural areas. There is an unequal geographic distribution of schools at the national level, where not only is the city privileged in number, but also in the distance between schools. This helps to explain the rural-urban gap in the education system.

Whereas the government has expanded the construction of schools in Egypt, concentrating on the rural areas, and attempting a more equitable distribution to bridge the gap in this respect, there is more demand than supply. This is where the NGO's have

been playing a role in providing informal education to the segment of women deprived of this right.

-Rural areas tend to be more conservative, and traditional values pertaining to gender dynamics are strongly in evidence. A concomitant feature is the early marriage of girls, often forcing girls to drop out from school after the primary level. These cultural factors help explain the reduction in numbers as school level increases, as illustrated by the net enrolment decreasing from 90 % in the primary level to 79% in the secondary level in Egypt (*Human Development Report, 2007/2008*). In the Comoros the percentage declines from 80% in the primary level to 30% in the secondary, to 20% in the tertiary (2005). In Mauritania the decline is from 74% in the primary level to 40% in the secondary (2009). In Algeria, female enrolment in education drops from 95% to 68% to 20 % in the three stages.

-Even in the case of dropouts, the gender factor is in action. Girls may also be forced to drop out to help the mother in the household chores, or to take care of younger siblings, especially in the case of a large family. This is another example of the clearly delineated gender roles.

- There is a gender division of labor in the case of female dropouts. Girls are employed in domestic labor, where they may be subjected to all forms of abuse. In many cases, the girl here is the sole breadwinner of the family, or at most a major contributor to its income.

-Poverty also affects girls' access to schooling. It acts as a discriminating factor, and as such aggravates their disadvantaged status. In a situation of household poverty, if there is a choice to be made for the education of offspring, the decision is made in favor of the male child/children. Males are perceived as the future breadwinners in a family, in addition to the dominance of patriarchal values in the culture, and preparation for this role requires a full education. Here traditional gender roles are enhanced by the conservative culture.

The poor, rural woman is therefore the most marginalized. This is evident from the socio-economic distribution of girls in the educational system, where there is an increase in girls' numbers among the upper socio-economic strata.

- The education system is characterized by an imbalance in student enrolment in the different majors, where females are concentrated in the humanities, as opposed to the male high representation in the sciences. Underlying this gender bias is the predominant cultural stereotyping, which is also relevant to the gender division in the labor market.

-The case of the Sudan, Iraq, Palestine and Somalia includes, among the same above-mentioned constraints, the continuing problem of armed conflict, which necessarily imposes itself on girls' education. Not only is it a situation of safety, aggravated by displacement, but the resulting prevailing poverty is an important case in point. In 2006 the percentage of females among those outside the education system in Iraq was 63%.

- A study conducted by NCW in Egypt showed that one setback in the progress of literacy programs is the high rate of absenteeism of the women because of the many obligations they have, hence the high demand on their time, especially in the case of poverty. Consequently, not all women would be willing to attend these classes.

Health and Environment:

The impact of the Beijing Conference, preceded by the ICPD, has been the emerging concern for reproductive health, and its integration into the primary health system. Expenditure on the area of health has therefore increased. Reproductive health has come to be accepted as an area of major concern in the health status of the country. Both NGO's and the government engage in wide health campaigns of advocacy and awareness on reproductive health, considering the common neglect of health care during the reproductive period. . Emphasis is made on the positive impact on the mother's health in the case of well-spaced pregnancies, as well as on the family as a whole, seen from the better quality of life given to the children.

Achievements:

-The number of women seeking health care has therefore increased. NGO's have been offering health awareness programs to women, in many cases as part of the functional literacy programs, especially in the rural areas and poor urban districts. Moreover, they offer reproductive health services. Counseling on fertility and contraceptive matters, in addition to environmental concerns, is also provided.

Consequently, maternal mortality has decreased. In Egypt the maternal mortality rate is 84 out of 100,000 live births, while in the Sudan, the rate is 130. Life expectancy for

females is 73 and 58 respectively (*Human Development Report, 2007/2008*). In addition, fertility rates have decreased. In Jordan maternal mortality decreased from 48 out of 100,000 live births in 1990 to 35 in 2007. In Tunisia, maternal mortality is 69.

-In Egypt, one positive step taken in the direction of reducing the high birth rate is a supportive argument, using the Koran as a basis. Here reference is made to the instructions on breastfeeding practices mentioned in the Koran. The objective is twofold: first, to advocate breastfeeding in order to upgrade child health, at the same time using the recommended two years of breastfeeding as a good reason for spacing pregnancies.

-In Egypt the Ministry of Health offered training programs for the traditional midwives to help raise their standard as health providers, since they are performing this role in the traditional culture anyway, especially in the rural sector.

-NGO's are collaborating with the Egyptian Ministry of Health in raising awareness on the necessity of medical checkup before marriage. Clinics include this service, in order to reduce health problems in children as a result of early detection of diseases among parents, especially those of a hereditary nature. A significant point of relevance here is the commonly accepted practice of consanguine marriage. In Lebanon the law requires this medical checkup before marriage.

-An NGO targeting the health problem of HIV/AIDS has been established in Alexandria, Egypt, with the focus on this disease, commonly considered taboo. The NGO works in coordination with the special department on the disease in the Ministry of Health. The latter has a hotline for target beneficiaries.

-Environmental concerns have been emphasized in the awareness programs given in the functional literacy classes to women, especially in the poorer districts and rural areas. In addition, in Egypt the involvement of women in the recycling activity provided by NGO's is another case in point in relation to environment.

-In Somalia, NGOs work in collaboration with international organizations, especially WHO, to upgrade the poor health conditions. These efforts include providing support for home deliveries, improving health facilities, and upgrading the training/education of midwives.

NGOs in Somalia also provide health services, in collaboration with UNHCR, to the refugees in camps, including women, in Yemen and other places.

-Abortion is legal for the first three months of pregnancy in Tunisia.

Obstacles:

-In spite of the awareness campaigns given by NGO's, traditional values still prevail in the rural areas, and as such, they tend to emphasize the role of the traditional midwife in childbirth. This attitude is complicated by a rise in a falsely explained Islamic idea enhancing taboos against male doctors/health providers. Here the probability of all sorts of complications arises, in many cases leading to the woman's death, since the traditional health providers lack proper training, in addition to their use of unsterilized equipment.

-Cultural norms relate the security of women in her married life to her fertility. Moreover, her identity as a woman is very much shaped by her fertility. The result is high fertility, involving closely spaced pregnancies, not only affecting her health, but more so, the health condition of the baby.

-Women have little or no control over their reproductive life, and the situation of unwanted pregnancies is common, either through lack of information/awareness as to spacing, or as a result of family pressure, especially that of the husband/ his family.

- The traditional perception of pregnancy and childbirth as a normal situation not requiring medical intervention can be seen as a setback in the under-utilization of reproductive health services by women. In this case, the incidence of complications is common, in addition to a high maternal mortality rate.

-The social pressure on early marriage of girls, especially in the rural sector, exposes the young mothers to the risk of neonatal and maternal mortality.

-Unequal access of women to health services affects their health condition negatively, since they come at the end of the list of family members in terms of health care. Moreover, the same happens in nutrition, even during pregnancy and childbirth. Prevalence of anemia and malnutrition is therefore common among women.

-The lack of proper information on reproductive health, in spite of both governmental and nongovernmental efforts, can lead to cases of unsafe abortion, in many cases using traditionally performed methods, which can lead to complications, and even death. Induced abortion is more common in the villages, also being unsafe for the most part. There are no accurate statistics on cases of abortion, since women do not always report them, in addition to the fact that abortion is illegal.

-Medical checkups before marriage are not encouraged by the culture. The prevailing fatalistic attitude is a setback in this respect. Women fall victims to many hereditary diseases because of the strong value of consanguine marriages in a culture dominated by patriarchy.

-The situation of HIV/AIDS is problematic, because the disease is veiled with secrecy, the stigma associated with it makes it taboo. The disease is under-reported, hence, under-registered. Consequently, data on its incidence is neither accurate nor reliable. Furthermore, the role of its care providers is hindered.

-In Saudi Arabia, a woman cannot have a medical checkup without a male chaperon.

- In Palestine, Iraq, the Sudan, and Somalia armed conflict has a negative impact on reproductive health, where health care is in many cases inaccessible.

-Somalia suffers from a deficiency in health services, as seen in the low percentage of beneficiaries. Only 20% of the population receives health care. International agencies are the main providers in most areas. Health services are mostly covered by the private sector, thus making them beyond the reach of most of the population.

- Maternal mortality is still high in some Arab countries. In Somalia it reaches 1044 per 100,000live births; in Morocco it is 228; in Algeria the rate is 180; in Libya 220; in Djibouti 730.

Violence against Women:

Addressing violence against women has increased in the last decades, especially after the Beijing Platform for Action. NGO's have played an important role in advocacy, as well as awareness-raising campaigns, succeeding in the emerging concern for the issue in this respect. Violence against women has come to be seen from a wide range of practices, not restricted to physical violence. NGO's have therefore approached the problem from a broad perspective—namely, domestic violence; FGM; deprivation of human rights, including access to education, health care/proper nutrition, employment; early marriage; unpaid labor; rape; and/or sexual harassment.

-Domestic Violence is not a new phenomenon. It has always been there. Raising awareness by NGO's has helped bring it to the surface of societal/legal concerns. However, the fact remains that it is still underreported and under -registered. Cultural norms do not encourage the women to report acts of violence by the husband, although

the legal system includes clauses against it. In situations of armed conflict, the woman is doubly exposed to violence—at both the domestic and societal level, as is the case in Iraq, Palestine, the Sudan, and the Golan in Syria.

-Women are highly represented in unpaid labor, especially in agriculture. Domestic chores for the woman are also another form of unpaid labor, where her right to wages is denied.

Achievements:

-Traditional norms/values emphasize early marriage for girls. Not only is there social pressure on the family to marry their girls off at an early age— sometimes right after puberty—but the girl herself has no say in the matter.

Here the underlying factor for this practice lies in the strong concern for the girl's chastity/virginity, hence protecting her from any possible violation in this respect.

NGO's have therefore initiated campaigns to raise awareness among families against early marriage, especially in rural areas, where it is most common.

-Relevant to the female chastity code is the still persistent practice of female circumcision in Egypt, Djibouti, Mauritania and the Sudan, more commonly known as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Problems associated with the practice have made it necessary for NGO's to intervene. FGM constitutes a major focus of their activities. The NCCM in Egypt is engaged in a wide campaign of advocacy/awareness -raising in this respect, using the media. One NGO in the Sudan has developed an information campaign, whereby midwives, the traditional practitioners of the practice, are engaged in soap production to replace the activity as their means of livelihood.

- In Somalia NGOs succeeded in raising awareness among Islamic authorities, which resulted in banning FGM.

-Sexual harassment against females has been on the rise in Egypt. Many explanations for male behavior are given in this respect, major among them being the number of problems associated with delayed marriage—e.g., financial difficulties and sexual repression. A number of NGO's have come to focus especially on sexual harassment, engaging in campaigns to raise awareness, as well as advocacy to initiate a wide response by both community and government. The impact of the advocacy efforts by NGO's in Egypt has

led to a number of lawsuits filed against offenders, as an earlier unknown action. The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) in particular has been initiating efforts in this direction.

-The number of rape cases is rising; due to the above-mentioned problems the youth are experiencing. Violence is increasing in society, and in this case, it is the vulnerable group that is targeted—namely, women. Rape is addressed by NGO's as an extreme case of sexual harassment.

The Egyptian penal code had removed the penalty on the rapist, in the case when he marries his victim. This article of the law was later cancelled, as a result of strong public opinion.

There is a current ruling by Shaikh Al Azhar, which endorsed an earlier ruling by him in 1994 during the proceedings of ICPD, when he was then Mufti, allowing abortion for the victim of rape. There is wide opposition to this ruling, especially by Islamists.

The situation of armed conflict in the Sudan has raised the incidence of rape, hence increasing the focus of NGO's on the issue.

- Shelters for battered women have been established by NGO's, albeit not common. In Bahrain, a shelter, Dar El Aman, is one example. It is a joint effort between an NGO and the government. The Emirates provides shelter for women and children who may be subjected to any form of violence. An NGO in Mauritania receives battered women, especially victims of domestic violence. NGO's in Algeria also provide the service, but have problems in funding.

-The law in Tunisia penalizes rape in marriage.

-Yemen included violence against women in the current Five-year Plan, as a priority issue. Local networks have been consequently established to address the problem.

Obstacles:

- There are no accurate statistics on cases of violence against women.

Domestic violence is under-registered and under-reported. Cultural norms/values give the man the right to use some form of violence against his wife. There is a false interpretation of Islam in this respect. Moreover, women who are exposed to domestic violence are reluctant to report. The cultural taboo is a case in point. In addition police authorities are

likewise hesitant to register the case, even if and when it is reported, since they consider it a private, family matter.

-Similarly, cases of sexual harassment and rape are underreported and under-registered. Not only is the woman subjected to embarrassment/humiliation, but more so, the cultural perspective blames her for the act. Her image is therefore blemished. In the Sudan the situation is aggravated in areas of armed conflict, especially Darfur. Rape is both individual and collective. It is even considered a war strategy. However, cases of rape are significantly under-reported because of a number of reasons. In the first place, most rapists are from the military, and as such they enjoy a status of legal immunity, hence no action is taken against them. In the second place, a woman who reports a case of rape is likely to be confronted with the crime of adultery. Here the penalty is death. The victim therefore faces the predicament of having to prove that she was not engaged in adultery, thus avoiding any attempt at reporting the crime. In Mauritania, rich rapists get away with the crime.

Moreover, the war zones include cases of kidnapping women (Siha Report on the Project Addressing Institutional Violence on Women).

- In Somalia, there are cases of collective rape at gun point.

-Female agricultural labor is culturally perceived as a family obligation, however unpaid and exploitative that is. Similarly, a woman's responsibility in the household goes unpaid. A clear indicator of this discriminatory situation is the absence of this labor from national statistics.

-FGM is still practiced, supported by the still-persisting cultural beliefs, and the false religious interpretation. The concept of its meaning as "purification", referring to the sexual purity of the girl, based on the Arabic translation, still dominates.

The last two decades have witnessed a surprisingly growing upsurge of the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Egypt, which has come to be explained on Islamic basis, in line with a rising Islamic tide. Efforts on the part of the health authorities to explain the many complications associated with the practice have not proved successful, in the face of a strong so-called Islamic trend advocating the practice, supporting the long historical cultural norm. The attempted intervention by the Egyptian government to

control the increasing incidence of female circumcision was confronted by a wave of opposition, especially by whoever claimed to have a say in Islam.

One minister of health tried to pass a law banning female circumcision, but he failed. A ministerial decree was issued, banning the practice. However, the decree is not binding, since it does not have the effect of law. A later attempt was made to restrict the practice and to avoid the many problems arising from its malpractice. This step was taken through a decree to limit its practice to hospitals and medical centers, and only by doctors. The underlying reason here is a practical measure. The actual practitioners of female circumcision are the traditional health providers---e.g., traditional midwives, health barbers and herbalists. In most cases the operation would proceed under conditions of a multitude of health hazards that eventually lead to all sorts of complications, least of which is hemorrhage, let alone the long -term negative physical/psychological effects that afflict the victim. The fact that a restriction is made on the providers of the service was meant to guarantee against these complications. The practical side of this decision lay in the fact that the operation is performed anyway. By requiring that its practice be limited to trained, qualified practitioners aimed at reducing the ensuing health hazards through the performance of unqualified providers.

Lawsuits against the government were filed in court, trying to find a religious base for the practice. The cases have not been resolved.

However, a lower court ruling overturned the ministerial decree banning FGM. In 1997, the State Council revised this ruling (GTZ, 2005). Currently, the Convention of the Child includes a clause banning FGM.

The practice in the Sudan still takes an extreme form, and excision extends beyond the clitoris, leading to the possible disfigurement of the woman. In many cases, the situation requires surgical intervention when the girl is exposed to her first sexual experience on the wedding night. Moreover, it is common knowledge that many cases of childbirth get complicated because the circumcision operation for the woman had gone too far.

In Somalia, traditions overrule the Islamic ban, and the practice of FGM is still represented by 98%. It is still found in Djibouti and Mauritania. Although FGM is not practiced in the Maghreb Region, there is concern in Morocco that it be introduced because of the rising extremist tide.

-In Somalia, extremist Islamic movements have emerged, inflicting the penalty of public whipping for the woman who wears a brassiere.

-There is a widespread practice in Mauritania, where young girls are given large quantities of food by force, with the objective of fattening them, in order to beautify them in the eyes of men for marriage.

-Slavery is still practiced in Mauritania, although it was abolished in 1007. Females fall victims to all forms of exploitation in this respect, sexually and in forced labor.

-Libya denies the presence of any forms of violence against women. Consequently, there are no laws against it. Neither are there shelters for battered women.

-Libya has social rehabilitation centers for females classified as “deviants”. These include those exposed to rape, prostitutes, and any woman suspected of misbehavior. These females are required to undergo a virginity test before admission. Similarly, Algeria requires the same procedure—i.e., virginity tests, before marriage.

-The location of Djibouti represents a source, destination, and transit point for trafficking of females, especially to Arab countries.

Success Story:

-In Egypt, a woman subjected to sexual harassment in the street filed a lawsuit against the offender. The case was quickly seen in court, and he was sentenced to imprisonment. This action by the woman, earlier unknown, came as a result of the strong campaign by NGO’s in particular, major among them being ECWR. Moreover, the quick decision was also spurred by the wide public opinion campaign in this respect.

- Similarly, eleven (11) men received the death penalty in another quick court decision for having collectively kidnapped and raped a woman in Egypt.

-A group of young women organized a protest against the phenomenon of coercive fattening of females.

Women and the Economy:

Women’s participation in economic activity has been rising. Both governmental and NGO efforts collaborate to encourage this trend, in line with the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as CEDAW and MDG’s

Moreover, a logical sequence of expansion in female education is the opening up of employment opportunities for women. New venues emerged. The number of women in

the labor market thus increased, covering all fields. One significant variable leading to the wider access of females to the labor market is the support of a legislative system guaranteeing their equality in hiring opportunities as well as in wages.

Achievements:

-Governmental and nongovernmental organizations have been working to guarantee gender equity in economic participation, without any discriminatory practices against women, neither in hiring nor promotional opportunities, as well as wages. Jordan established a special department for female labor, with the objective of guaranteeing gender equity.

-Women are now granted maternity rights by law, major among them being the three-month paid leave for childbirth in Egypt. An unpaid leave can be taken at any time for child/family care. Maternity laws as such guarantee security for women at work, since they help them cope with their dual role.

Iraq grants the woman working in the public sector a six-month paid leave, with an optional leave for the same period with half pay. Women in the private sector benefit from the former leave. In Oman, the maternity leave is for five months.

-The government is the major target for female employment, since women see in it security for the job and the guarantee of maternity rights, as well as other granted legal rights.

-In the Sudan, joint efforts by the government and NGO's have led to small business projects for women, including cottage industries, small scale farming, soap production, olive presses, and pottery. The objective is to allow them more access to the economy. The government in Bahrain likewise supports projects for women through the provision of loans.

-Similarly, in Egypt, both government and NGO's have been providing training programs in handicrafts for women. One example here is the Society of Productive Families under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Cooperation (formerly the Ministry of Social Affairs). The program involves poultry, livestock, handicrafts, and food processing. The Social Fund for Development also provides help for small businesses. It has a special unit for women. NCCM seeks to prevent child labor through a pilot project, training mothers

of working children in the garment industry, to enable them to find jobs, rather than subjecting their children to exploitation.

-Jordan encourages the participation of women in small enterprises through facilitated loans. Syria grants priority to females in credit.

-Women in leading managerial positions in large enterprises in Lebanon constitute 17.15 % of all positions, and 8.3% of small enterprises. 36% of females in the age group 18-35 are employed.

-The Central Agency for Statistics in Palestine reports that in 2006 female economic participation rose from 40.0% to 40.9 %, paralleled with an increase in labor from 12.7% to 13.7%. In Bahrain, the percentage of women in the labor force rose from 3.2 in 1959 to 25.8 in 2001. In Oman the percentage is 28% in 2008.

-Yemen established the Council for Businesswomen in 2007.

-In the Emirates the female has the right to own and run private companies. Women in business are therefore increasing in number.

-In Somalia women represent 43% of labor, because since the nineties and with the beginning of the civil war, the difficult conditions have forced women to enter the labor market because of the absence, and mostly death, of men in war. 80% of Somali trade is run by women in 2006.

-Libya provides training programs in management and business for females to equip them with special skills in these areas.

-Women in Algeria work in the police force at all levels.

Obstacles:

-The labor market is characterized by a gender division of labor, where females prevail in the services sector, and males dominate jobs like medicine, architecture, engineering, as well as those in the business sector, in spite of the legally guaranteed equality of opportunity. The rate of employment by economic activity in Egypt indicates this discrepancy: in industry, it is 6% for females and 23% for males; in the services it is 55% and 49% respectively. In agriculture the representation of females is high, as given by 39% compared to 28% for males (UNDP *Human Development Report: 2007/2008*). Women in industry are concentrated in textiles, electronics, and pharmaceuticals. The same discrepancy appears in economic participation in Jordan, where males are

represented by 40.8% as opposed to 8.8% for females; in Morocco, the percentages are 69.3% and 25.2% respectively; and in Djibouti they are 73% and 35% respectively.

- In Syria and Iraq females represent 13% of labor. In Saudi Arabia, the percentage is 13.5%; in Yemen 7.7%; in Libya 22.5%; in Algeria 18%; and in Tunisia it does not exceed 31% in spite of the high educational level of females in the country.

The average economic participation of Arab women is 2.6%, with some variations in the different countries (*Arab Human Development Report, 2009*).

-The still existing gender discrepancy in skills/qualifications is a constraint against achieving gender equity in the labor market. Illiteracy rate is higher among females; their enrolment in education is lower.

-This situation is still a factor in the high numbers of females in the informal labor sector. No exact figures are available because of the “informal” situation of the sector, in most cases not made public.

-The informal labor sector is congested with women, they being the underprivileged group, with lower skills/qualifications. This sector has no labor guarantees whatsoever, neither in wages, working hours, social security, medical insurance, nor work environment. Women still work in tedious jobs, even at an old age.

-Unpaid labor, especially in agriculture, and the household continues, as a family obligation dictated by culture.

-Although the percentage of women in labor is 43% in the Comoros, they are restricted to marginal jobs.

- In Mauritania women are paid less than men. Women are not employed in strategic jobs.

-Females may be refused some jobs, in spite of the legally/constitutionally guaranteed equality of opportunity. This discriminatory practice is informal, and not openly acknowledged, but is the result of a culturally deep-rooted, gender-biased attitude. In Saudi Arabia females are denied top managerial jobs—e.g., ministers, judges, ambassadors, and other decision-making positions.

-Some employers in the private sector refuse to hire women because of the maternity rights they have gained. In this case, a woman employee can be considered an economic

liability because of her absence from work, or even the prospect of it, hence discouraging employers to hire females.

-Whereas the government used to be the main employer for women, the trend towards privatization has led to diminished opportunities for them, aggravated by cutbacks in the private sector.

-Female beneficiaries from the enterprises offered by the Social Fund for Development in Egypt are still limited in number, in spite of the existence of a separate unit for women. More than one reason underlies this situation. In the first place, the many complicated bureaucratic procedures exclude women as beneficiaries. In the second place, the absence of the eligibility criteria among women, for the most part is a case in point, considering their low skills/qualifications, especially among the poor.

-Females in Saudi Arabia face the constraints created by the religious authorities, that issue rulings against female empowerment.

-Business and professional women in Oman attempted to establish an NGO for networking purposes in 2004, but were refused by the government as an illegal activity.

- Although Libya has progressed in advancing women, females are required to have their fathers' permission before enrolling in the Police Academy.

Women and Poverty:

Conditions in the last decades have led to increased poverty, females being the most marginalized in this situation. Women fall victims to globalization, structural adjustment programs, and economic reforms, hence the need to address the *feminization of poverty*.

It is important to mention that the report presented by Kuwait confirms that there is no poverty in the country in the internationally accepted sense.

Achievements:

-Both governmental and nongovernmental organizations have focused on gender equity in their poverty- alleviation programs.

- Moreover, international organizations—e.g., the World Bank, UNDP, USAID— have been sponsoring more female-targeted poverty-alleviation programs, in collaboration with both the government and NGO's.

-Social security benefits provided by the government for females covers a wide range, from widows, divorced, disabled, to ageing. Syria grants child financial rights to the

widow and divorcee employed in the public sector. The same applies to the woman whose husband is not employed in the public sector.

- The Ombudsman in Egypt has targeted poor women who have complaints in cases of divorce—e.g., where the husband refuses to pay his financial obligations, or when the woman is childless and therefore has no right to the residence. In addition, there are those complaints from divorced women who have no access to social insurance.

-The shortage in skills/qualifications among females is approached by NGO's through the programs of training in income-generating activities that can help provide them with an income. In Egypt, NGO's working with women in the garbage –collecting communities are engaged in recycling activities, in addition to the other programs of literacy and health/environmental awareness. A good example of a success story in this respect is seen in the work of the Association for the Protection of the Environment, which has women in the garbage-collecting community, dominated by poverty, as its target beneficiaries. . This NGO provides women with training in recycling garbage material, later to employ them in the workshop of this activity. The Association as such gives women jobs, in addition to their access to many services—i.e., literacy and health/environment awareness programs, health care, as well as a preschool for their children. In this way, both poverty and unemployment are addressed.

-Many NGO's provide women, especially the poor, with loans that can help them start small enterprises. A case of success is the Egyptian “*Tadamon*” for Micro-credit, an NGO born of the long-rooted “*Tahseen El Sehha*”. This NGO works on the Grameen Bank principle, targeting poor women. The return rate of loans is reported to be 100%.

-Many NGO's have gone beyond training women in the traditional skills like sewing and embroidery, because the products from these businesses have saturated the market. Therefore, some NGO's provide training in more modern skills, especially secretarial work and computer, to help prepare the women to a wider labor market.

-The Zakat Fund in the Sudan is a social safety network based on the Islamic pillar of *Zakat*, and as such targets the poor. Its beneficiaries include orphans, divorced women, female-headed households, abandoned and elderly women, and the handicapped. The Fund allocates 65% for poor households; the remaining 35% supports productive

projects. In 1990 the beneficiaries of the Fund were 26% of the poor, the proportion rising to 50% in 1999 (UNIFEM).

-Safety net programs in Egypt are: the Social Insurance Program, Sadat Pension Fund, Productive Families, Nasr Social Bank, and the Social Fund for Development (UNIFEM).

-NGOs in Somalia work on the economic empowerment of women, in collaboration with international agencies, through training programs to enable them to join the labor market. One such NGO is “the Association for Women’s Defense and Development”. Similarly, NGO’s in Algeria offers training programs for females to help them financially, also providing them with credit.

- Females in Mauritania succeeded in forming groups, mostly among neighbors, to replace safety nets.

Obstacles:

-The informal sector continues to be congested with women, because of lower skills/qualification, especially illiteracy.

-In this respect, there is no universal social security coverage for old women, and many continue to live under conditions of poverty, sometimes seeking jobs in the informal sector, not suited to their age/health. A corresponding situation to the *feminization of poverty* is the *feminization of ageing*, because of the longer life expectancy of females, hence the aggravated situation of the poor old women. In most cases, it is the sons that provide for the old woman—still a prevailing traditional value.

-Reports by social security beneficiaries confirm the inadequacy of pensions to cover their expenses.

-The plight of women in poverty is aggravated by the shortage in social security coverage in spite of the many poverty-alleviating programs. There is still a high number of women who have no access to them. In some cases, the reason lies in the abundance of required paper work, which, they lack in most cases, in addition to complicated bureaucratic measures. In other cases, poor women do not seek social security because they lack awareness as to this right. The absence of information/communication channels reaching them is a case in point in this respect. Moreover, divorced women who move back to

their parents' home are denied social insurance, since the assumption is that their parents provide for their expenses in this case.

-Following up the micro credit programs provided by NGO's for females has revealed that the female is a recipient of the loan in name only in many cases. It is the male in the family—in most cases a husband—who is the actual beneficiary. He takes charge of the enterprise, usually being more qualified than the female to run it. True, the family benefits from the credit, but the service cannot be attributed to the female.

-Most of the loan-providing agencies are urban-based, and the rural sector is underprivileged in this respect.

-Female labor in Somalia is restricted to those traditional activities like agriculture and trade in basic goods. Fields like export and the private sector are male domains, because of the lower qualifications of females.

-In spite of the fact that Somali women have entered the labor market as a result of the absence of men, they have no control over money. Those females that are in control of their money is only 20%. This situation represents a challenge facing NGOs in their efforts to empower women.

-Poverty among women is also addressed through the focus on the needs of the female heads of households, whose number is growing, and who, in many cases, are a major component of the *feminization of poverty*. In addition, most of them are illiterate. In Jordan, one (1) out of eight (8) families is headed by a female in 2002, whereas in 1979 the figure was one (1) out of eleven (11). In Mauritania, the percentage of female heads of households is 30%. In Egypt the percentage of female heads of households is reported by informal sources to be 25%, predominantly appearing in the urban sector, whereas in the Sudan, their proportion is higher in the rural sector.

Political Participation and Decision-Making:

Since the Beijing Conference, female political participation has increased, albeit with some fluctuations. Most Arab constitutions grant women equal political rights.

Achievements:

-The Sudanese constitution stipulates a minimum of 10% representation of women in all legislative bodies. Likewise, women have been holding ministerial portfolios, their numbers rising significantly in time. Women are appointed as advisors to the President.

-Women have likewise been appointed in the Egyptian cabinet, although not exceeding three (3) in number at one time. Similarly, in Bahrain there are two (2) female ministers, and in Oman there are four (4). Yemen has two (20 women in ministerial positions out of a total of thirty three (33).

-Bahraini women received the political rights in 2002, allowing them to run in parliamentary elections. In 2006 the number of appointed females in the *Shura* council reached eleven (11). In Oman fourteen (14) women out of a total of seventy (70) members were appointed in the Upper Chamber of Parliament in 2007. However, no women candidates in the *Shura* elections won the elections.

- Females in the Emirates occupy 22.5% of the Federal Parliament. The Federal Cabinet includes four (4) women. Females are also trained for the police and military forces.

-Kuwaiti women gained their political rights in 2005. Four females were elected for Parliament. Women had already held ministerial positions

-NGO's have been active in the pursuit of expanding political participation for women, both as voters, candidates, and members in the political system. Moreover, the strong lobbying movement to introduce the quota system in Egypt has succeeded in initiating a law requiring the allocation of 64 seats for women in parliament to be applied for a period of 2 sessions. Jordan introduced the quota system in 2003, by allocating six (6) seats for women in parliament, in addition to any additional seats that women can get through free elections. As such, female representation rose from 7.9% in 2003 to 8.5% in 2007. Women in the upper chamber are appointed by a royal decree. In 2007 seven (7) women were appointed, also establishing a family committee in this chamber. The Jordanian woman also has the right to vote and run for elections in local councils, with a quota of 20%. In 2005-2007 females represent 15% of cabinet positions. In 2007 women received the permit to establish a political party. In 2007 the first woman governor was appointed. In addition a woman received her clan's approval for appointment as mayor, making a precedent.

-Representation of females in the Syrian government is 7%. Since 1991, two (2) women are appointed in each cabinet. Representation in Parliament rose from 26 to 31 members in the period 2005-2009. A woman was appointed Vice President. The first position for women in the Lebanese government was in 2004.

-Egyptian political participation of women is currently represented by 2.0% in the lower chamber of parliament, and 6.7% in the upper chamber. Some of these women were appointed, because the number of those that succeeded in the elections was significantly low. The percentage of women in the government at the ministerial level is 5.9%.

-In the Sudan women in the lower chamber of parliament include 17.8% of the total number of members, while the upper chamber is represented by 4.0%. Women in the government at the ministerial level represent 2.6% (*Human Development Report, 2007/2008*).

-In Egypt, the role of NGO's in strengthening the position of women in the political process has been in the form of seminars, training programs, and awareness-raising campaigns, with the objective of enhancing their participation in voting, especially in the rural sector. In this respect, I.D. cards have been issued for women, as well as voting cards, to encourage their active involvement in the political process. In addition, NGO's helped in registering women in the voting lists. Consequently, the number of women registered in the electorates rose.

-NGO's in Egypt also provided support for women candidates, through training workshops, including leadership and communication skills, in addition to preparing their electoral agenda.

- The Alliance for Arab Women has been active in Egypt in raising awareness among women as voters, including issuing voting cards, especially in the rural sector. In addition, the NGO worked to support women candidates by providing them with the necessary training.

- This role of NGO's complemented that of the Egyptian NCW when it established the Political Training Center to support and prepare women candidates for elections. NCW also established the Women's Political Forum, a program covering 27 governorates, with the objective of raising women's political awareness as voters. The program enlightened women as to the rules of elections, the choice of candidates, and the follow-up of the candidates once they get into parliament (UNIFEM).

-The Egyptian First Lady established the Arab Women's Organization (A WO) to coordinate Arab efforts on gender issues.

-A major achievement by NGO's in Egypt in politics is the wide, persistent advocacy/lobbying for the position of judge for women. Consequently, the long resistance/rejection of hiring women to this job was finally resolved as a result of these efforts, initiated by The Alliance for Arab Women, and supported by The National Council for Women. In the year 2002 the first woman was appointed in the Constitutional Court, followed by thirty (30) women judges in family courts in August 2007. Currently, judicial authorities are considering appointing women in the judicial line starting with the beginning of the career ladder. This achievement is a significant success story by an NGO in the area of female employment in decision making positions.

-In Jordan the percentage of women judges is 11.2%, and prosecutors 12.1% in 2006. In Bahrain there are three (3) female judges; in Yemen 145 women occupy judicial positions out of 2257.

- In the Sudan, there are 76 women judges (UNIFEM). In Iraq 25 women were appointed judges in the Judicial Institute, and 16 as general attorneys. Females in Algeria represent 34 of judges. They also occupy 38 positions in the highest judicial council, also headed by a woman.

-Oman granted females rights equal to males in testimony before courts in -2008, also in owning land.

-Somali females occupy twenty -five(25) seats in the National Transitional Council in 2000. These seats have been equally divided among the Four (4) competing tribes, represented by five (5) seats for each respectively, with the additional five (5) given to the smaller tribes. The women in the Council have formed a coalition dealing with women's interests.

-The Somali Transitional Council allocates 12% out of 275 seats for women.

-The Transitional Government includes two (2) female ministers since it came to power in 2000.

-NGOs in Somalia are active in working towards peace and women's political rights.

-NGOs in Somalia played an important role in writing the national charter with the objective of guaranteeing gender equity, by assuring the use of "he/she".

- Algeria is the first Arab country to have a woman president of a political party. Two political parties out of a total of forty (40) have female presidents. Moreover, females occupy the position of governor.

-The quota system was implemented in Morocco in 2002, allocating thirty (30) seats for women in parliament. Seven (7) women were appointed as ministers in 2007. Tunisian women represent 22.75% of the lower chamber of Parliament, 7% of ministerial positions, and 13% of the Advisory Council which is the Upper Chamber of Parliament.

-The quota system in Parliament was introduced in Mauritania in 2006, allocating 20% of seats to women. In 2007 women occupy 18% of seats and (3) ministerial positions out of 27.

- In Djibouti women represent 5.3% of government and ministerial positions in 2000. The percentage of female representation in parliament rose in the years 2003, 2005, and 2006 to 10.85 after it had been absent until the year 1997. In 1999 a woman was appointed minister. In addition, the woman holds the highest judicial position, which allows its occupier to replace the president if he is absent for whatever reason.

- In Djibouti there are 24 judges, and women hold positions in the local government.

Obstacles:

-In spite of the wide campaigns conducted by NGO's aiming to increase the role of women in political participation, the results have not achieved the desired success. Cultural norms can be seen as one cause in this respect, where the image for public life pertains to males for the most part, hence the low number of votes given to women candidates. In Egypt, the president had to appoint a certain number of women in parliament in order to raise their representation, following the 2005 parliamentary elections.

- The number of women in the Lebanese Parliament decreased from six (6) women in the 2000 elections to four (4) women in 2005. The same happened in Iraq. In Morocco, the number dropped from 35 to 34 in 2007. In Palestine the Legislative Council includes Five (5) women as opposed to 83 men, at the same time that the representation of females in ministries and the government is only 13.4%. In Algeria female representation in legislative councils is 5% and in political parties 8% (2007).

-In addition, some structural factors intervened with the representation of women in parliament, thus reducing their chances of success in the elections. The limited number of women candidates nominated by the different parties is a case in point. The role of females in political parties is generally marginal. They therefore lack support for their political participation. Some women also reported their limited accessibility to funds for the elections campaign.

-Women in general lack proper training in political participation, in spite of the efforts made by many NGO's, hence their limited chances of success when compared with those of men, who have more background in this respect.

-The high illiteracy rate does not create the proper background for political participation, since women in this case lack exposure and awareness of political life.

-Restrictions on female political participation are still seen in the low representation of adult women eligible for voting in the birth records, hence the difficulty—sometimes inability—to issue I.D.'s.

-The low political participation of women is also seen in their low representation in syndicates and trade unions, where there is a gender gap. Female members represent 3% of trade unions in Egypt (GTZ).

-In the Sudan, armed conflict acts as a setback to women's political participation.

-Poverty can also act as a constraint against female political participation, since it leaves no room for other than the struggle for survival.

- Although there may be a relative increase in women voters/candidates, and even participants in politics, their actual impact is minimal, qualitatively speaking. Whether in legislative bodies or executive positions, male impact is stronger. The question arises as to the underlying factors in this respect. In some cases, this lower impact is attributed to female lack of training in politics. Other cases consider the traditionally stronger voice of men in these bodies as being responsible for the limited influence of women.

-In Egypt, women in elections were exposed to acts of violence.

- In Saudi Arabia, elections for local councils were restricted to males. In 12/10/2009, the Ministry of Interior declared the prohibition of females from the coming elections.

- Saudi Arabia appointed female advisors in the *Shura* council, however restricting their role as advisors only, without having the right to vote or participate in any decision-making. They can only participate by attending those sessions dealing with female issues.
- Extremist Islamic views in Somalia still act as a constraint keeping women from decision-making positions, like judge and president.
- In assertion of the patriarchal authority, some fathers of female candidates, did not allow them to put their pictures on posters during the elections campaign.
- Female members of parliament in Comoros do not exceed 3%.

Success Stories:

- Appointing women judges in Egypt is a major step in gender equity.
- Lobbying for the quota system has materialized in the current elections plan, allocating 64 seats for women for 2 sessions in the coming Parliamentary elections in Egypt.

Women and Armed Conflict:

Women fall victims in countries experiencing armed conflict—i.e., Sudan, Palestine, Iraq, the Golan. These conditions expose them to poverty, loss of male providers, unemployment, and many forms of violence. Moreover, by being displaced for the most part, their situation is aggravated. The *Human Development Report* gives the number of displaced females in the Sudan as 5,355,000 (2007/2008). In the Sudan, in addition to rape, sexual slavery, there is the additional problem of giving birth to children as a product of rape, coupled with sexually transmitted diseases. Displacement has led to a rising rate of early marriages, since parents try, in this way, to protect their daughters (Elabd, 2009).

Achievements:

- NGO's in these countries in collaboration with the government, are trying to cope with the needs of the women in the areas of conflict, providing shelter, health care, and food, among other services.

Obstacles:

- Armed conflict leads to conditions of deprivation for families, characterized by unemployment, poverty, and loss of resources. The resulting situation is one where the woman has to face all these challenges, in the absence of supporting conditions.

-The major obstacle here lies in the violence in the target areas, where security is highly threatened. Likewise, the accessibility to the females affected by the conditions and therefore need medical and psychological

help is a tedious task, sometimes, even impossible.

-Cultural taboos related to rape work against their reporting the incident, especially as these women are ostracized, and husbands may disown them. In many cases they resort to prostitution as a means of livelihood (Elabd).

The Girl Child:

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994, followed by the Beijing Conference in 1995, highlighted the status of the girl child as an integral part of gender issues, having earlier been ignored in this respect. Consequently, governmental and nongovernmental organizations started to include the girl child on its agenda.

Achievements:

-At the governmental level, The National Council on Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) in Egypt directed its focus to the girl child, initiating awareness campaigns, which extended to the media. NGO's likewise worked on programs to help address the same issue. Campaigns explain the negative consequences of FGM, early marriage, child labor, and any form of exploitation; the importance of education for the girl child and her right to equity. In addition, NCCM has provided recommendations to the Ministry of Education to exclude the gender bias in textbooks, and advocate gender equity.

-The government launched wide campaigns for girls' education. NGO's joined by providing literacy classes for those who were deprived of this right, expanding the curriculum to include health and environmental awareness.

-Egyptian NGO's lobbied to enact the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which was issued by the government in 1996, guaranteeing the rights of children, including those of the girl child, also banning FGM.

Obstacles:

-Socialization enhances discrimination in terms of gender roles, where the culture emphasizes the inequality between the sexes, favoring the males. Even in matters of nutrition, health care, and education males have priority. --Infant mortality rate is higher

among females, as an indicator of male preference, and hence better care, especially health.

-All socialization channels tend to confirm this gender role discrepancy. In the education system, the textbooks still have a clear differentiation between gender roles. The girl's role as a housewife and mother is highly enhanced, whereas the boy's role as the stronger party, the breadwinner, is presented.

-The culture still retains the high value of the male child. Correspondingly, he occupies a privileged position, as the bearer of the family name; the supporter of kinship solidarity; the source of security for parents in their old age; and the one maintaining property-ownership. This situation therefore places the girl in an inferior position.

Family Law:

NGO's have initiated a public opinion movement to reform certain clauses of the Law of Personal Status, in line with a more egalitarian situation for women, as stated in the Beijing Platform for Action, without violating Sharia'.

Achievements:

-Egypt, Jordan and Iraq have succeeded in reforming some items of the Family Law. Basic here is the introduction of the already existing Islamic, although not commonly practiced, right of *khul*, closest translated as "repudiation". In Egypt, an amendment was issued in 2000, granting women this right. The objective was to facilitate lengthy, complicated divorce procedures in courts. Consequently, women who had earlier been reluctant to file divorce cases because of these lengthy, complicated procedures, found an outlet in *khul*'.

-A new family court system was also introduced in Egypt, maintaining the special identity of family courts. Family counseling centers are established to help facilitate the job of these courts. This step has been an achievement by the NCW in Egypt. Jordan established special centers in family courts for counseling families before filing lawsuits, in order to reduce the number of cases.

-Jordan and Egypt abolished the requirement that the husband's permission be given for the woman to issue a passport. The same happened in Egypt, also adding the case when the wife is leaving the country.

-In 2002 the citizenship law was amended to allow the Egyptian mother to pass her citizenship to her offspring, in the case she is married to a foreigner. The only exception is when the father is a Palestinian, with the objective of maintaining the Palestinian identity, following the protocol of the League of Arab Nations. This amendment came as a result of a strong movement of lobbying by NGO's, especially the Alliance for Arab Women. Many seminars were held to highlight this serious issue, indicating many of the tragic consequences entailed in this respect. Later, because of further lobbying by NGO's, as well as many complaints by mothers in this situation, the Ministry of Interior has declared considering the Palestinian matter on a case -by- case basis, after the mother files an application.

-Iraq allows the offspring the mother's citizenship with some reservations, among which is his/her choice, and residence in Iraq at the time of application.

-Lebanon is flexible in granting women the right to keep or change their citizenship, though not giving it to the children except if the child is born out of wedlock or a minor born to a mother who acquired the Lebanese citizenship and outlived the father.

-Jordan raised the age of marriage to eighteen (18) for both sexes. Syria issued a proposal for a law in 5/4/2009, requiring the age to be eighteen (18) for the male, and seventeen (17) for the female.

- As a result of lobbying by NCW and NGO's to reform Family Law in Egypt, amendments were introduced, endorsing women's rights in the case of divorce. These amendments were meant to be guarantees for both the mother and child's rights, the latter being especially endorsed by the Convention of the Right of the Child. Revision of the Family Law has therefore led to raising the age of custody to fifteen years for the child, in realization of the importance of the mother's role for his/her welfare. A judge can extend this period, if he sees it necessary for the child's welfare.

-More provisions for the interests of the mother/child had already been included in the 1986 amendments, stipulating the divorcee's right to keep the residence so long as she has the right to the child/children's custody.

-The Ombudsman in Egypt has helped poor women who cannot afford to pay the expenses of the lawsuits filed in family courts.

- Amendments in Jordan, Syria, Iraq and Egypt require notifying the first wife in the case of a second marriage. The first three countries stipulate the judge's permission, based on the husband's financial ability to support the two wives.
- Currently the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Affairs (CELWA) in Egypt is lobbying for a more egalitarian Law of Personal Status, through the reform of some of the existing clauses.
- In addition, CELWA provides help to women who need legal assistance through consultations, services, and training in order to enlighten them about their rights, considering the prevailing lack of awareness in this respect.
- Syria allows the children to inherit the mother's pension in the case of her death.
- Somalia has adopted the Islamic law in 2009 as the basis for the government, with the purpose of gaining public opinion by implementing a moderate law in the face of the extremist movement.
- Libya sets the age of marriage at twenty (20) for both sexes. Divorce is by the judge.
- Morocco modified the Family law in 2004, raising the age of marriage to eighteen (18) for both sexes. Divorce is by the judge. In the case of the second wife, the first wife has to give a written statement of approval. The divorced wife has to benefit from the financial achievements during marriage. The law also removed patronage over women.
- The citizenship law was modified in Morocco in 2007, allowing the woman to pass the citizenship to her children, in the case she is married to a foreigner.
- The foreign husband married to a Moroccan wife can acquire citizenship if he has been living in Morocco for at least five years, and speaking one of the accepted languages. Children living abroad can receive the citizenship based on certain requirements specified by the law.
- In Mauritania, the foreign husband to a native wife can get the citizenship if the family has lived in the country for at least five (5) years, and if he speaks any of the official languages. Children living abroad can get the citizenship according to certain conditions specified by the law.
- Djibouti modified the family law in 2002, in order to protect women's rights. In 2007 a network of consultative centers were established in 2007, to help women understand their rights as well as protect them.

- In Egypt NGO's are working to modify visitation rights, in order to protect the children, especially psychologically.

-In Comoros customary law is applied in inheritance, allowing the woman the freedom of passing her property freely, without being committed to *Sharia*.

Obstacles:

-The actual implementation of the law is still confronted by many obstacles. Lengthy, complicated procedures of divorce in courts still continue. Even in the case of *khul'*, the case still takes time. The belief that this right would speed up procedures has not been fully validated. However, *khul'* cases take a relatively shorter period than divorce cases.

-Currently, there is a call to restrict polygamy through a much-needed reform in Egypt. Efforts by NGO's to reform the law with this objective have been translated in the form of seminars/conferences, trying to use *Sharia'* as a basis. Traditional/religious resistance is very strong against this step.

- The newly added clause allowing the divorcee to keep the residence in the Egyptian Law has a loophole. She has this right so long as the child/children are in the legal age of custody. However, if the judge gives the mother the right to keep them for a longer period, she does not keep the right to retain the residence. This right is valid only for the period of the legal age of custody as specified by the law.

-Family courts are still filled with unresolved cases, especially those where women's rights are not guaranteed, because of the tendency towards a gender bias.

-Visitation rights as specified by the law still create problems for both parties. Currently, the situation is very controversial, where the children are caught in the middle. There is a strong call to reform visitation rights in a way that does not threaten the children's welfare, especially psychologically. The clause pertaining to visitation rights is currently under discussion by legislative authorities.

-Polygamy is still an unresolved issue. The culture provides males with a religious justification of the practice. Especially in rural areas is polygamy dominant. The male perspective sees it as a right to be practiced in an absolute sense, without restrictions. Polygamy can be seen as one reason in the high fertility rate, because it can be used as a threat for women when they cannot bear children.

-In the Sudan, polygamy is very common, and among traditional segments in the desert and rural areas, and especially Darfour, it is a sign of the man's status. He gets his dignity from the number of wives he has. In Somalia too, there is a high incidence of polygamy, in spite of the law that requires the permission of the court in the case of the second marriage. Tribal culture overrules.

- Islamic law grants the woman the right to inherit property and handle it independently of any male guardian. However, traditional culture may deny the woman this right. In some cases, she may be totally disinherited. In others, she may be given less than her rightful share. The previous government in Somalia had tried to introduce a more egalitarian system, but was met with opposition from the Islamic tide.

- In Somalia, the weak government has led way to the emergence of Islamic courts, which take an extremist position towards women, much against their rights.

-NGO's are also lobbying to reform the Christian Family Law, since it clearly prohibits divorce; with the result that there is a high number of unresolved cases, waiting for action. The Orthodox Coptic Church, headed by the Pope, stands very strongly against modifying the Family Law because of its strict position against divorce.

-The Syrian Law deprives the wife of financial support by the husband if she has a job without his consent. Iraq likewise stipulates the same penalty if she leaves home without his permission, or refuses to accompany him when traveling.

- Palestine still retains the high value of early marriage.

- Saudi law does not allow females to issue passports or appear before courts without a chaperon. In 2008 a law was passed allowing the woman to stay in a hotel without a chaperon, provided she has an I.D. However, this law is disregarded

-There is a call in Tunisia to reconsider the legal ban on polygamy.

-Religious authorities in Morocco oppose raising the age of marriage to eighteen (18) as violating *Sharia*.

-There is the possible abuse of the clause in the law that gives the judge the right to grant a minor the exception on the legal age of marriage. This situation has led to the increasing number of early marriages.

-Algerian law still puts the female under her the man's patronage, requiring the father's consent in marriage. In the case of divorce, the husband keeps the residence. The gender

gap still persists, in spite of the modifications that were meant to guarantee women's rights

Success Stories:

-Lobbying by NGO's and NCW in Egypt succeeded in a number of achievements:

- Introducing the earlier ignored Islamic right of *khul'* has helped give women security in their family legal status, in addition to facilitating divorce procedures.
- Family courts have likewise provided a special forum for cases under Family Law.
- Raising the age of custody is also a positive step for the child/children's well-being.
- A major achievement is the reform of the Citizenship Law.

Women and the Media:

The Beijing Platform of Action called on governments to ensure the positive image of women in the media as an active member of the family and society, also emphasizing those values that support her advancement.

Achievements:

-In Egypt, the National Council for Women (NCW), as well as Arab NGO's, emphasized the necessity to portray the positive image of women in the media, at the same time eliminating all negative stereotypes that may be rooted in the culture. Such action can be made through the presentation of cases of successful women, especially in the scientific and professional fields, to counter effect these negative stereotypes, and set good examples/role models for the younger generations of women.

-It is important to mention that women dominate the positions in both the Egyptian Television and Radio Broadcasting Service, especially at the senior level.

Obstacles:

-Violence against women still continues to be shown in both television drama and movies.

-Commercials still portray women as "sex objects", with their emphasis on their physical, feminine qualities, rather than their achievement capabilities.

-Newspapers/magazines still concentrate on the female traditional role in women's sections. Such topics as woman's beauty, fashion, cooking, and dieting represent their

major focus. Likewise, many of the television programs targeting women are in the same direction. Professional/scientific accomplishments made by women receive little concern. -The rising reactionary tide as falsely interpreted by Islam is highly represented in so-called religious programs on both radio and television, the latter having a wider audience. These programs tend to reduce women to inferior beings, more as sex objects, and in many cases emphasize their role in reproductive functions, rather than as active members of society.

Directions for a Future Plan of Action:

The following are the proposed directions for future plan of action addressing the existing challenges facing the progress of women in Arab countries:

First: Challenges of the Financial Crisis:

1. Making available gender disaggregated data on the crisis, highlighting its different impact on both sexes, and taking such difference into consideration in decisions to deal with the crisis.
2. Reviewing the decisions made in the ESCWA Expert Meeting held in December 2009 on the impact of the crisis on the region, assuring that these decisions are gender sensitive and guaranteeing female participation in future meetings, and in formulating policies to deal with the crisis.
3. Requiring that commercial banks that are supported by central banks maintain micro credit funding, because of its vital role in the informal labor sector, which is highly congested with women

Second: On the Laws and General Policies level:

1. Revising those laws that discriminate against women, to eliminate such discrimination, especially in family, criminal and nationality laws.
2. Generalizing the ratification of CEDAW and its protocol by all Arab countries, and lifting the reservations made by some countries
3. Guaranteeing the enforcement of laws and judicial measures through the proper mechanisms, and bridge the gap between the laws and their practice

4. Expanding the political participation of women by enacting laws and policies for positive discrimination.
5. Enforcing a deterring penalty for cases of violence against women, particularly for cases of sexual harassment and rape
6. Providing women with information as to their rights in all spheres.
7. Enforcing the laws that help the working woman to carry her many roles, especially in the area of child care.

Third: On the Institutions Level:

1. Guaranteeing the national institutions which are responsible of planning, and coordinating, the authority to monitor executive bodies implementing the plans, and help them focus on their main responsibilities through the proper mechanisms
2. Establishing scientific criteria to measure the success of these institutions in carrying their main responsibilities.
3. Revising the NGO law and modify it to remove the obstacles to their performance
4. Guaranteeing transparency of national institution dealing with NGOs, avoid competition between them and coordinate with donor agencies to guarantee an equitable distribution of funds among NGOs.

Fourth: Programs and Services:

1. Expanding social safety nets to cover all groups of females.
2. Guaranteeing the participation of women in planning, executing and evaluating the programs and services provided for them, to assure their relevance to their need/priorities

3. Revising concepts, frameworks and methodologies used in the provision of services and programs, while measuring their effectiveness, and modifying them as needed
4. Increase the access of poor women to loans and credit, facilitate the required measures and reduce the interest rates it entails.
5. Making information about existing services and programs available for all women.

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