

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2007

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA EDITION



WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The Double Dividend of Gender Equality



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Every year, the United Nations Children's Fund publishes *The State of the World's Children*, the most comprehensive and authoritative report on the world's youngest citizens. This year, the international edition of the report analyses the issues of gender equality and women's empowerment, and argues that one of the most powerful constraints to realizing children's rights and achieving the Millennium Development Goals at the global level is the discrimination experienced by women.

The Middle East and North Africa edition of *The State of the World's Children* examines these issues and their impact on children in the context of the experiences of women and girls in the region. It highlights the extent and pervasiveness of gender discrimination in the Middle East and North Africa, and demonstrates how gender equality benefits women and children in three critical arenas: the household, the workplace, and politics and government.

The report outlines what must be done to maximize gender equality in the Middle East and North Africa through several key actions: education, research, legislation, financing, empowering community-based women's networks, encouraging women's participation in politics and paid employment and engaging men and boys. These measures are less about radical new ideas than they are about a firm commitment to, and focus on, initiatives and paradigms that have proved to work. With concerted efforts, real progress can be made towards transforming patriarchal attitudes and institutions into a society based on universal human rights and equal opportunities for women and men alike. For women, men, and for children, the time to refocus our efforts is now.

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1

A call for equality

Equality between men and women has been a goal of the United Nations since its inception. The 1945 Preamble to the UN Charter notes its objective “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.”

Calls for gender equality were included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948 and other related proclamations. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations in 1979 as an internationally binding instrument that provides the basis for equality between women and men, and sets up an agenda for national action to end gender discrimination and to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms for women. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which focuses on the inalienable rights of children, was adopted a decade later.

The Millennium Agenda recognizes the importance of gender equality to human development. The Millennium Declaration calls for the full implementation of both CEDAW and CRC; these treaties are identified as key human rights standards for meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the international community’s blueprint for sustainable development that sets time-sensitive benchmarks for promoting gender equality and empowering women.

The status of women in the Middle East and North Africa region has improved over the past three decades. Today, women and girls have access to opportunities that previously were restricted. Primary school enrolment rates for girls have jumped and the educational gender gap is narrowing. Women are entering the labour force in greater numbers, and their representation in politics and government is increasing in many countries, albeit slowly and unevenly.



Indicators for child and maternal mortality, school enrolment and life expectancy show that many governments in the Middle East and North Africa are making significant strides in their attempt to secure the rights of women and children to shelter, medical care, proper nutrition, education and an adequate standard of living.

The principal of gender equality, moreover, is explicitly recognized in most constitutions throughout the region. Some countries go so far as to enshrine gender equality in specific spheres of the Constitution, such as guaranteeing women and men employment opportunities in public office, promoting a balance between women's responsibilities to their families and their employment outside the home, and defending the political rights of both women and men. But, as the recently released *Arab Human Development Report 2005* points out, the practice of differentiating between the rights of men and those of women within a constitution has inadvertently lead to the codification of gender bias, in violation of the principle of equality.¹

Despite these gains, however, many obstacles to the full and equal participation women and girls in society remain. The main barriers stem from discriminatory social values and attitudes, which are exceedingly difficult to quantify and rectify. Patriarchal social values promote male dominance in families, the community, places of work and governments. The consequences of entrenched gender bias range from the preference for sons over daughters to limited personal and professional choices for women to outright gender-based violence. Though there are wide variations in attitudes, behaviours and practices among individuals, families and communities across the region, the majority of women are likely to encounter gender discrimination in some form in the household, the workplace and the political sphere.

Even within some of the region's more stable and prosperous countries, gains made in the area of gender equality in recent decades are often unevenly distributed. Individual communities have specific histories and unique social dynamics that are influenced by class, linguistic, cultural and religious affiliations. Each of these different factors shapes the roles of women, men, girls and boys within families, communities and societies.

Economic and social diversity in the Middle East and North Africa

Although there is only one standard for achieving the CRC, CEDAW and the Millennium Development Goals, the region's overall progress towards gender equality – among other goals – should be viewed in the context of the economic, political and social diversity that exists among and within its 20 countries.

The region's nations includes some of the world's least developed countries (Djibouti, Sudan and Yemen) along with countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates where average gross national income per capita in 2005 was classified as 'high income' according to the World Bank's definition. National populations also vary enormously in size, ranging from 74 million in Egypt to just 727,000 in Bahrain. Approximately 40 per cent of the region's total population is concentrated in just two countries – Egypt and Islamic Republic of Iran.

Such diversity is also prevalent in the region's political systems, with democratic and authoritarian regimes at either end of the spectrum and a number of 'transitional' governments in between. Several governments remain embroiled in severe conflict and violence, most notably in Iraq, Occupied Palestinian Territory and Darfur, Sudan; in other areas, such as Algeria, Djibouti and southern Sudan, historical strife continues to impede the development process.

See References, page 47.

The Middle East and North Africa edition of *The State of the World's Children 2007* analyses the status of women and girls in the region. The report outlines how gender equality will move all the Millennium Development Goals forward, highlights best practices for eradicating gender discrimination and empowering women, and demonstrates that investment in women's rights will ultimately produce a double dividend – advancing the rights of both women and children in the Middle East and North Africa.

The rights of women and children are mutually reinforcing

Gender equality furthers the cause of child survival and development. Since women are the primary caregivers and advocates for children, their well-being and influence on decision-making, particularly in the household, is directed connected

to the development and well being of their offspring. Healthy, educated and empowered women are more likely to have healthy, educated and confident daughters and sons. Women's autonomy, defined as the ability to control their own lives and to participate in making decisions that affect them and their families, is associated with improved child nutrition. Other aspects of gender equality, such as education levels among women, also correlate with improved outcomes for children's survival and development.²

Gender equality is also of primary importance in creating the world envisioned in the Millennium Declaration, one of peace, equity, tolerance, security, freedom and shared responsibility in which extra care and attention are given to the most vulnerable people, especially children. This is the world the international community has pledged to strive for – a world fit for both women and children.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child are sister treaties, inexorably linked in moving communities towards full human rights. The two conventions are complementary, overlapping in their call for precise rights and responsibilities and filling crucial gaps that may exist when either stands alone. Several articles of CEDAW address rights pertinent to children, including equality (articles 2 and 15), protecting maternity (article 4), adequate health care (article 12) and shared parental responsibility (article 16). The CRC calls for equal access for girls and boys to education and health care. Both conventions articulate freedom from violence and abuse, and are based on the principles of universality and non-discrimination, participation and accountability.

The treaties are not perfectly harmonious, however: There are areas of tension. For instance, some supporters of gender equality believe that the CRC stereotypes women as mothers, limiting their life options. Some child rights advocates think that CEDAW focuses too much on a woman's right to self-actualization and may unintentionally subvert the importance of motherhood. Despite these differences, the two conventions hold more in common than in opposition. They set the standards for an equitable world where the rights of every human being – female and male, old and young – are respected.

Although support for both treaties has been strong in theory in the Middle East and North Africa – all countries have ratified the CRC and 16 of the 20 countries in the region had endorsed CEDAW by November 2006 – in practice neither treaty has been fully implemented. Throughout the region, many women and children – particularly girl children and adolescent girls – are still denied their human rights.

Calls to eliminate gender discrimination have encountered fierce resistance from opponents who fear that the campaign for gender equality will erode the very fabric of the family, the cornerstone of society in the Middle East and North Africa. But, as this report argues, gender inequality itself threatens the well-being of families by compromising the health and limiting the potential of females throughout the life cycle.

Discrimination through the life cycle

Gender discrimination is pervasive. It may begin even before a child is born – through inadequate health care and nutrition for pregnant women – and continue through early childhood, middle childhood and on into adolescence, adulthood and old age.

Early childhood

The early years of childhood are the most important of a child's life. The foundations of health and nutrition are laid here – a healthy start early in life lowers the risk of wasting and stunting in children under five and increases the chances that children will develop into healthy adults who are able to provide for and protect their own children.³

Overall, the region has made tremendous improvements in this area of children's health and nutrition in recent decades. These gains are reflected most clearly in the under-five mortality rate, which fell by an annual average rate of 4.4 per cent between 1970 and 1990, the fastest rate of reduction among the world's developing regions. Since 1990, the under-five mortality rate has decreased by a further 33 per cent, falling to 54 per 1,000 live births by 2005, compared to 81 per 1,000 live births 15 years earlier.⁴

Substantial gains in reducing undernutrition have also been achieved. Six countries and

territories – Djibouti, Jordan, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Oman, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia – are on track to achieve the MDG target for child nutrition (which aims to reduce the incidence of underweight children under five by half between 1990 and 2015). In addition, 12 countries in the region have underweight prevalence rates of 10 per cent or less, bringing them closer to levels common in industrialized countries. However, aggregate data show that the number of underweight children in the Middle East and North Africa has increased during 1990–2004, due mainly to the situation of children living in three of the region’s most populous countries – Iraq, Sudan and Yemen.⁵

As with all summary measures, however, regional aggregates mask sharp disparities between and within countries. For instance, recent data show that female children are more likely than male children to suffer from iron deficiency anaemia, a condition that affects women of reproductive age and young children.⁶ Results also point to the need for further action on eliminating disparities within countries on nutrition and health in early childhood. In rural Egypt, for example, the under-five mortality rate for girls born to mothers who have very little or no education is almost twice the corresponding rate for

boys. In contrast, the under-five mortality rate for girls with mothers educated to secondary level or higher is far better, at 80 per cent of the corresponding rate for boys.⁷

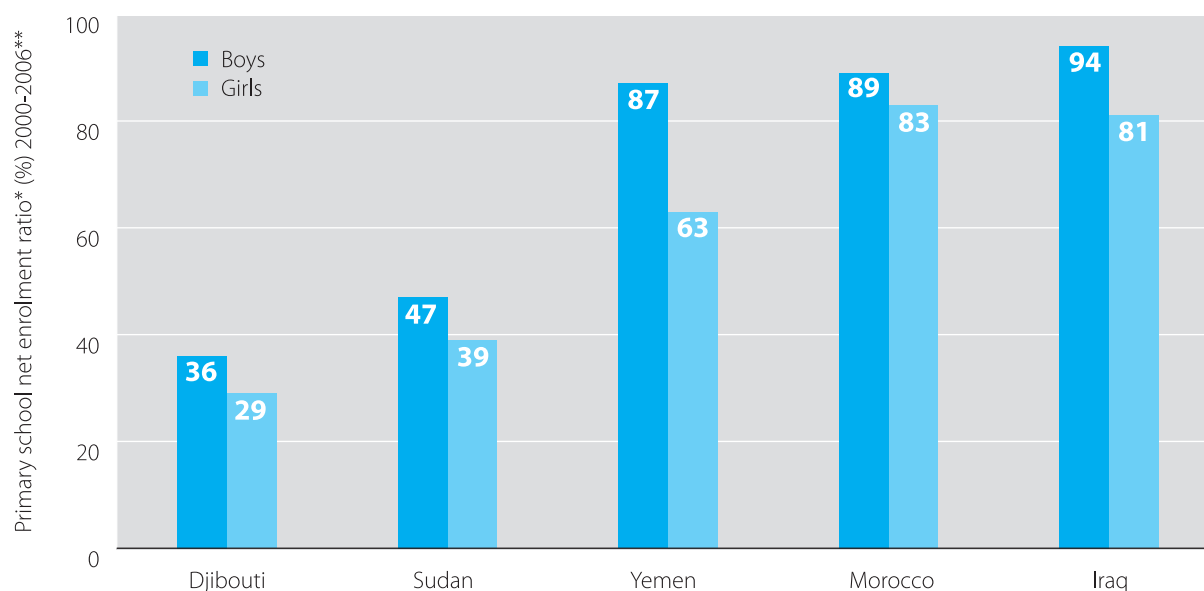
The middle years

A principal focus of the middle years of childhood is completion of a quality primary education. The decision to send girls to school is influenced by the value that parents place on investing in their daughters’ education.

Primary education

About half of the region’s countries are expected to meet the goal of universal primary education by 2015. Of all the regions in the world, the Middle East and North Africa enjoyed the highest average annual rate of increase (1.4 per cent) in net primary school enrolment/attendance ratios from 1980 to 2001, the latest period for which firm estimates are available for this indicator.⁸ By 2000, approximately nine girls were enrolled in primary school for every 10 boys.⁹ Bahrain has exceeded the goal of gender parity in primary education, with more girls than boys in elementary school.

Figure 1.1 Despite advances in getting girls in primary school, additional efforts are required in several of the region's countries



* Primary school net enrolment ratio refers to the number of children enrolled in primary school who are of official primary school age, expressed as a percentage of the total number of children of official primary school age.

** Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.



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For many countries in the region, however, gender parity in primary education at the national level is a relatively recent development. Moreover, it is far from universal in poor and marginalized communities. An estimated 8.8 million children of the appropriate age do not go to primary school, and girls are still more likely than boys to miss out on educational opportunities. The challenge of gender parity remains particularly onerous in Djibouti, Sudan and Yemen, where the gender parity indices for primary education – which measures the ratio of girls to boys in primary school – were, at 0.77, 0.83 and 0.60 respectively in 2001, among the lowest in the world.¹⁰

Gender equality in education goes beyond the number of girls in school and embraces the quality and consistency of the schooling that all children receive. A critical issue for this region is improving the quality of primary schooling. Ensuring that school curricula, textbooks and teaching methods challenge, rather than reinforce, traditional gender stereotypes can help to translate girls' education into female empowerment.

Adolescence

Adolescence is a time of great challenge in children's lives as they seek to establish emotional and psychological independence, come to terms with sexuality and begin to define a role for themselves in society. For many girls in the Middle East and North Africa, the challenges associated with adolescence are exacerbated by limited access to secondary educa-

tion, abuse, exploitation, violence and a lack of knowledge about reproductive health and the risks of sexually transmitted infections. Each of these factors can undermine a girl's right to survival, protection, development and participation in society.

Secondary education

Regional indicators show marked progress in girls' participation in secondary education. Gross female enrolment as a percentage of male enrolment increased from 75 per cent in 1980 to 90 per cent in 2000, the latest year for which comprehensive data are available. Regional data estimated from 1996 to 2005 indicate that 50 per cent of boys and 44 per cent of girls of official secondary school age attended secondary school.¹¹

While gender parity in net secondary enrolment has been achieved in several countries in the region, the goal of eliminating gender disparity in secondary education remains elusive.¹² Girls are more likely to drop out of school than boys; less than one third of the girls who enrol in secondary school complete their secondary education.¹³ For some girls, the reasons for leaving or not attending school may lie with the girls' own families. Parents may be unable to afford secondary education, which tends to be much more expensive than primary school, or families may hold the traditional view that marriage is the limit of a girl's ambitions, and further education is unnecessary.

Child marriage and premature parenthood

The minimum age for marriage recommended by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2003 is 18.¹⁴ This recommendation has yet to receive universal adoption in the Middle East and North Africa. Although the average age at marriage for both men and women in the region has risen over the past three decades, child marriages – defined as marriages or unions in which one or both partners are under 18 – remain common in some countries.¹⁵ In several countries, the minimum age of marriage for girls remains well below 18, as low as 15 in Kuwait, for example. In other countries, such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, there is no legal minimum age to protect girls from child marriage.¹⁶

Early marriage violates girls' rights to development, participation and protection by separating them from their families, restricting interaction with peers and limiting their opportunities for education.

Moreover, because child spouses are not able to refuse to have sex, they face the risk of sexual violence and exploitation, premature parenthood and, increasingly, HIV/AIDS.¹⁷

Adolescent pregnancy and motherhood are prevalent across the region. In Occupied Palestinian Territory, for example, it is estimated that one in every 10 girls or women between the ages of 15 and 19 gives birth every year.¹⁸ In the Syrian Arab Republic, 2.6 per cent of women polled had become pregnant before the age of 15, and 29.8 per cent between 15 and 19.¹⁹

Premature parenthood can have serious consequences for the reproductive and sexual health of both girls and their offspring. A young mother aged 15 or younger is five times as likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth than a woman in

her twenties, and her baby's chance of dying in its first year of life is 60 per cent higher than that of a baby born to a mother older than 19.²⁰

Sexual and reproductive health

Meeting the reproductive health needs of young people aged 10 to 24, who represent roughly one third of the region's population, poses a serious challenge for policymakers.²¹ A taboo subject throughout much of the region, sexual health is rarely addressed in classrooms and communities. Similarly, research and data on such issues as sexually transmitted infections are equally scarce, owing to stigmatization, poor reporting and a lack of research. However, the evidence available indicates that sexually transmitted infections are disproportionately high among young people.²²

Female genital mutilation/cutting: a harmful traditional practice in the Middle East and North Africa

In several countries in the Middle East and North Africa, the health, safety and development of girls is jeopardized by female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), the partial or total removal of the external genital organs for cultural and other reasons that are not medical necessities. Unlike male circumcision, FGM/C is not religiously prescribed: It is a social act intended to forge new families by ensuring that girls are marriageable.

FGM/C is generally carried out on girls between the ages of 4 and 14. In addition to being a rights violation, FGM/C is known to cause shock, severe bleeding, life-threatening infections and increased susceptibility to HIV.

FGM/C is practised mainly in Djibouti, Egypt, Sudan and some communities on the Red Sea coast of Yemen. Although the practice is officially illegal in Egypt, results from the 2005 Egypt Demographic and Health Survey show that 77 per cent of girls aged 15 to 17 have undergone the procedure. There are also reports, but no clear evidence, of a limited incidence in Jordan, the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Gaza), Oman and certain Kurdish communities in Iraq.

The prevalence of FGM/C varies significantly from one country to another, from as high as 98 per cent of women in Djibouti, 97 per cent in Egypt, 90 per cent in Sudan to 23 per cent in Yemen. Prevalence also varies within countries. For instance, whereas approximately 65 per cent of women in the Darfur region of western Sudan have undergone the procedure, the incidence rises to approximately 88 per cent in the eastern regions.

Awareness of the detrimental impact of this practice on health and sexuality are well documented, and efforts to eradicate it are under way. For instance, one survey conducted in Djibouti shows that attitudes towards FGM/C have changed, with educated women rejecting the practice. In Upper Egypt, campaigns launched by the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and various other donors are helping to eliminate FGM/C in 60 villages within the six governorates of Assiut, Aswan, Beni Suef, Minya, Qena and Sohag.

One of the main obstacles to eradicating FGM/C stems from the integration of the practice into formal medical facilities and health care. For example, despite a ministerial decree prohibiting medical personnel from carrying out FGM/C in Egypt, 75 per cent of circumcisions are performed by physicians and other trained persons in hospitals and clinics, according to 2005 Egypt Demographic and Health Survey. *Dayas* (traditional birth attendants) perform the majority of remaining circumcisions (22 per cent).

See References, page 47.

Because unprotected sex carries the risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection, including HIV, knowledge of sexual and reproductive health is essential for the safety of young people. Information alone cannot provide protection, but it is certainly an important first step.

HIV/AIDS

Young people represent approximately 50 per cent of new HIV infections in the Middle East and North Africa each year.²³ While HIV prevalence in most countries of this region appears very low relative to other parts of the world, the number of AIDS-related deaths in the region has soared almost sixfold since the 1990s.²⁴ (Note: This figure is skewed

somewhat by the large increase in Sudan.) In two countries, Djibouti and Sudan, AIDS has already reached epidemic levels. According to the latest estimates from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), in 2006 an estimated 68,000 people in the region contracted HIV, and the proportion of women infected is growing. Around 36,000 adults and children in 2006 died of AIDS-related illness. UNAIDS estimates indicate that around 190,000 women aged 15 and above in the region were living with HIV/AIDS in 2005.²⁵

For a variety of reasons that are typically beyond their control, women are at greater risk of contracting HIV infection than men. In southern Sudan, for example, young women aged 15–25 are more

Honour killings

Honour killings – the murder of a girl or woman for a perceived violation of the social norms of sexuality – are an affront to fundamental human rights. Grounded in the belief that men have the ‘right’ to punish women suspected of adultery or other types of ‘improper’ conduct, honour killings are viewed as a way to redeem family respectability.

Because the region’s courts and society at large view domestic disputes as private matters, honour killings are under-reported and reliable statistical data scarce. Available data indicate that honour killings occur in Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon, Morocco, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. A Jordanian study reveals that in 1999, Jordan’s Family Protection Department dealt with 507 cases of family violence, of which 38 per cent (192 cases) were crimes of honour, the most of common type of case. In Egypt, one study of 125 honour killings reported in the press found that 79 per cent of the women were killed on suspicion of adultery, 9 per cent for adultery, 6 per cent for incest and 6 per cent for other unspecified reasons. Perpetrators of these killings – which included husbands, fathers, brothers and other male relatives – strangled, burned, poisoned or physically abused their victims. Reports indicate that honour killings have also occurred in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with 20 honour killings and 15 attempts recorded between March 2004 and March 2005.

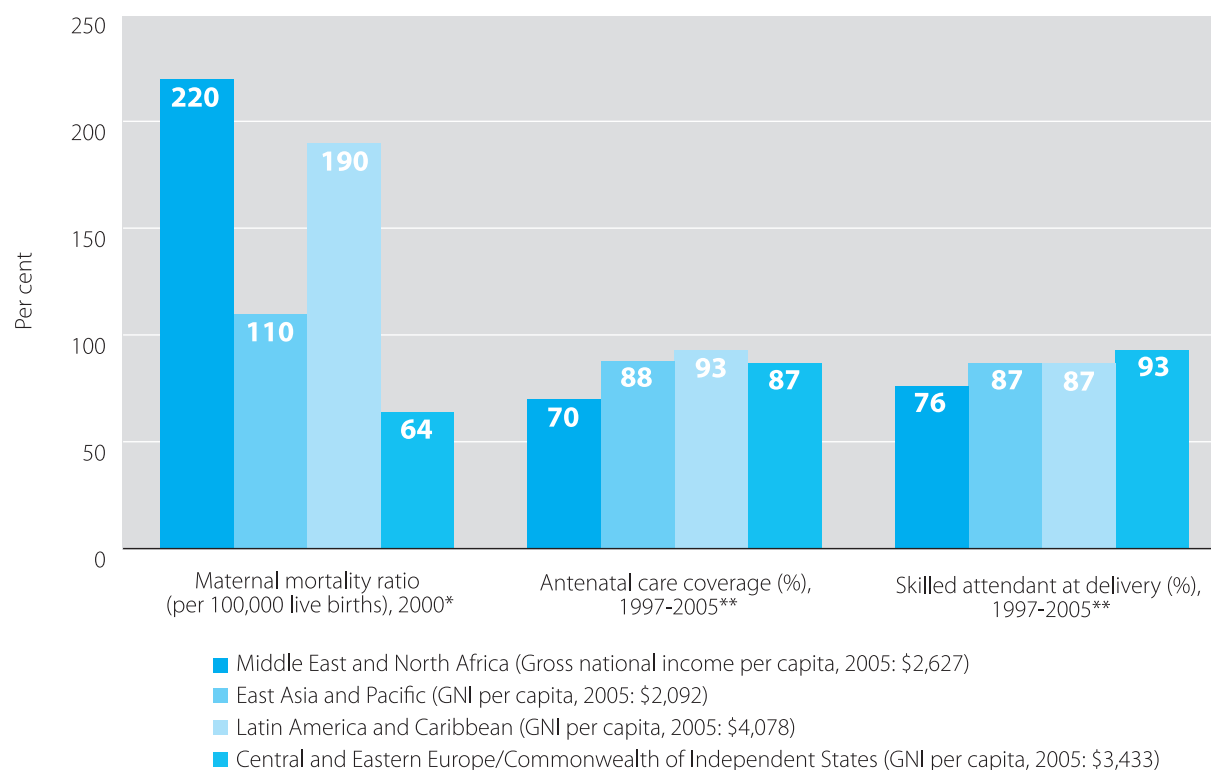
Perpetrators of honour crimes often go unpunished. In Islamic Republic of Iran, for example, article 630 of the country’s Islamic Penal Code states, “Whenever a man finds his wife committing adultery, being aware of her willingness [towards the adulterer] he may kill both his wife and the adulterer at the scene.” In Egypt, article 17 of the Egyptian Penal Code allows judges to soften the usual murder sentence in cases of honour killing, particularly when the perpetrator claims ‘enraged emotions’ as his defence. Syrian women themselves were found to be responsible for the defendants’ actions in 55 per cent of cases where husbands killed their wives for adultery.

Efforts are under way to challenge attitudes and legal codes pertaining to honour killings. In Lebanon, for instance, revisions to the legal system in 1991 stiffened sentences for perpetrators convicted of honour killings. In Egypt, the Centre for Egyptian Women’s Legal Assistance is working with other non-governmental organizations, including the Alliance for Arab Women, to lobby legislators for legal reforms and to encourage the media to stop portraying men as the guardians of women’s sexuality.

Palestinian women’s organizations assert that women suspected of having been involved in an extra-marital sexual relationship, including victims of rape, are punished, and sometimes murdered for their actions. Women’s rights activists also note that the absence of reliable data on the number of honour killings in Palestinian society make it exceedingly difficult to mobilize popular and political support for campaigns against this heinous crime. Women’s organizations such as the Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) in the West Bank are working to improve the level and quality of information available on honour killings in Palestinian society, and both the Women’s Empowerment Project in Gaza and WCLAC in the West Bank are coordinating with police officers to train local authorities to deal with women whose lives have been endangered by attempted honour killings.

See References, page 47.

Figure 1.2 Compared to other middle-income developing regions, the Middle East and North Africa lags behind in providing maternal health services



* The maternal mortality ratio refers to reported data that is subsequently adjusted by UNICEF, World Health Organization and United Nations Population Fund to account for well-documented problems of under-reporting and misclassification.

** Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified.

Sources: *Gross national income per capita* - World Bank. *Maternal mortality ratio* - World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF. *Antenatal care coverage and skilled attendant at delivery* - Demographic and Health Surveys, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, WHO and UNICEF.

than twice as likely to be infected as young men.²⁶ One important explanation for the difference in men's and women's susceptibility to the virus is physiological – women are at least twice as likely as men to become infected with HIV during unprotected intercourse.²⁷ The other crucial, and largely reversible, factor is social – cultural norms limit discussion of sexual reproductive issues and prevent women from taking control of their own sexual health.²⁸ For instance, only 12 per cent of women surveyed in Morocco in 2005 had comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS.²⁹

Infants contract the infection from their mothers during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding. Research shows that without preventive measures, about 35 per cent of children born to HIV-positive women contract the virus.³⁰ Relative to other regions, treatment and access to antiretroviral drugs is very limited in the Middle East and North Africa. Of the estimated 75,000 people who required treatment by December 2005, only 5 per cent were receiving antiretroviral therapy.³¹

Motherhood and old age

The challenges faced by women and girls in the Middle East and North Africa are discussed in the following three chapters. Disparities exist not just between women and men, girls and boys, but also among women themselves. Poverty remains a pivotal factor in determining whether girls and women survive birth and early childhood, complete primary education, go to secondary school, or are engaged in informal or precarious forms of labour. For many women, the pernicious effects of these disparities are often brought into sharp focus in two key periods of life – motherhood and old age.

Maternal mortality

Compared to other middle-income regions, such as Latin America and the Caribbean and Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS), maternal mortality rates in the Middle East and North Africa remain high. Approximately

21,000 women in the region die from complications in pregnancy and childbirth each year.³² One quarter of the region's countries had a maternal mortality ratio greater than 200 per 100,000 live births in 2000, the latest year for which comprehensive data is available.³³ To date, only Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates have managed to reduce reported maternal mortality to a low level by international standards (not more than 5 per 100,000 live births).

Maternal and infant mortality rates are highest where health systems are weak and where transportation is difficult – for example, in rural areas – and where systemic gender discrimination stands in the way of change. Chief among the critical interventions required for reducing maternal and newborn deaths are the attendance of health professionals at all births and emergency obstetric care for all women who develop complications.³⁴

According to the latest available estimates, 30 per cent of women aged 15–49 in the region do not receive even a single visit or consultation from a skilled health professional during pregnancy, and 24 per cent do not have the assistance of a skilled attendant at birth.³⁵ When a mother dies in childbirth, her child's chances of survival are drastically reduced: Motherless newborns are between 3 and 10 times more likely to die than infants whose mothers survive.³⁶

Older women

The United Nations defines older people as those over 60 years of age. Definitions vary, however, depending on culture, life expectancy and people's own perceptions of age. According to the traditional values associated with patriarchal family structures, older people in the Middle East and North Africa are to be revered and cared for by all family members. Women in old age, grandmothers in particular, have a great deal of knowledge of maternal health and childcare and are often primary or secondary caregivers for children.³⁷

In recent years, however, older populations, particularly women, have become an increasingly vulnerable group. Economic and political pressures, especially those related to political conflicts, are eroding the traditional family-based safety nets. Regional evidence confirms that while women tend

to live longer than men, they do not necessarily enjoy better health in old age. When the expectation of life to age 60 is adjusted for disability, men are expected to live to a similar or higher number of healthy years in around half of the countries surveyed. Gender discrimination compounds the threat of destitution facing older women, particularly those who are widowed, unmarried or childless. Obstacles that women face in the labour market throughout their working years, including low salaries and discriminatory inheritance and property laws that recognize men only, deprive women of the opportunity to accumulate pensions and financial security for old age. And while some governments across the region do provide women with some form of pension, the real value of these payments is often too low to support an adequate livelihood.

In some countries, ministries of social affairs have increased their outreach programmes for the elderly, sponsoring care facilities and providing community extension services. Additional resources must be invested to identify how best to respond to the unique needs facing elderly women. Governments need to introduce social security programmes that recognize the household and caring roles that women perform throughout their lives.³⁸

The double dividend of gender equality

World leaders spoke as one when the UN pledged to make the world fit for children at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in May 2002. The status of women is a crucial measurement by which to accurately gauge the state of the region's children. To maximize gender equality's impact on poverty relief and sustainable development, women's equal access to power must be achieved in three distinct arenas: the household and community, the workplace and the political sphere. A change for the better in any one of these realms, as the subsequent chapters of this report argue, enhances women's equality in the others. Equality will not only enable women to fulfil their own rights, it will empower them to improve the lives of their children.

Countries reap double dividends when gender equality is promoted and ultimately attained. Women are healthy, educated and productive, and children survive and thrive. These benefits are bequeathed to future generations. The following chapters will analyse quantitative

and qualitative information about the status of women and its relationship to child survival and development in the Middle East and North Africa. Only when gender equality is attained will women be empowered and they and their children thrive.

UNICEF in action: Challenging gender discrimination across the life cycle

Across the Middle East and North Africa, UNICEF is partnering with governments and civil society organizations to combat gender discrimination against girls and women. Three such initiatives – in Egypt, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic – are outlined below.

Egypt: Promoting girls' education

While girls in Egypt's urban areas, particularly in the more developed north of the country, are almost as likely as boys to be enrolled in school, the same cannot be said for girls in rural, southern areas. The costs of school – fees, obligatory school donations, and supplies such as uniforms, stationery and non-ministry textbooks – are a major financial burden for poor households. When weighed against the low value placed on girls' education and the need for daughters to assist with domestic chores, many families choose to invest limited financial resources in boys' education only.

In response to such challenges, UNICEF – in partnership with the Ministry of Education – set up the Community Schools initiative in 1992 in the governorates of Assiut, Sohag and Qena. Based on the principles of 'active learning', community schools provide knowledge and life skills through peer learning and community participation, helping girls acquire independence and self-confidence.

Women in the community are playing a key role in girls' education. By participating in the Community Schools committees, women raise awareness of the importance of girls' education and, in so doing, augment their own roles as influential decision-makers within their communities.

The Community Schools initiative has been mainstreamed into the formal educational system in 90 conventional government schools in Assiut, Sohag and Qena, providing a proven model for more effective schools, a relevant and active curriculum, competent teachers and educators, management excellence of the education system and community participation.

Jordan: Integrating adolescent girls into communities

The Queen Rania Family and Child Centre, a community centre that aims to combat child abuse by strengthening families, has recognized that limited opportunities are offered to girls in some communities. The Centre's innovative programmes aim to enhance girls' participation in the community and build their self-confidence, enabling them to create a better life for themselves and their children. 'How to Live with Adolescence' is a guidance programme designed to explain the characteristics of adolescence and its associated physical and psychological changes. To give girls a greater opportunity to ask questions, interact with each other and discuss the problems and emotions they experience in this stage of life, the Centre provides one-on-one sessions with well-trained female mentors, who communicate information to teen girls in a friendly and educational manner.

The Syrian Arab Republic: Giving school dropouts a second chance

The Ministries of Education and Culture, with support from UNICEF, are giving a second chance to girls who are either school dropouts or illiterate. This project is particularly important in rural areas, where the dropout rates among girls are the highest, reaching 50 per cent in some areas of Der Ezzor Governorate. The project aims to re-enrol 15,000 girls aged 10–17 in a special programme run by the Ministry of Education. The programme employs a condensed curriculum, and aims to enrol 50,000 girls aged 13–18 in literacy classes supervised by Ministry of Culture. To maximize awareness of the importance of girls' education, the Women's General Union and the Ministry of Culture are broadcasting TV spots and filming traditional poetry reciting (*zajal*) to encourage girls and parents to pursue secondary education.

See References, page 47.

2

Equality in the household

For children, the most important people in the world are not world leaders and heads of development agencies but parents and caregivers, who make crucial decisions on a daily basis. How members of the household decide to use their collective resources determines the levels of nutrition, health care, education and protection that each family member receives.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the primary role and responsibility of the family as the first and ideally the last line of protection and care for the child. It calls upon States parties to respect the rights of all parents – and where applicable, members of the extended family or community – to provide guidance for their children and to recognize that parents or legal guardians have joint responsibility for raising children. Discriminatory laws and customs that refuse to recognize women as key decision makers in households violate their rights and freedoms and deny children their right to grow up in the family environment envisioned by the Convention.

In the Middle East and North Africa, barriers to women's decision-making in the household are rooted in social attitudes and legal customs. Within the 'traditional' Arab family, women are viewed primarily as mothers and wives, while men are revered as the family breadwinners and chief decision makers. Recent data from the World Values Survey, which examines trends in social values and attitudes across countries, show that more than 80 per cent of men polled in several of the largest countries in the region – Algeria, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and Saudi Arabia – believe that wives should submit to their husbands' authority on household decisions.¹

One of the most direct sources of information on household decision-making dynamics is the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS). One DHS report has asked women to specify their level of influence in household decisions in three crucial areas: their own



Women's personal rights and freedoms in the Middle East and North Africa

In 2003, Freedom House, a non-profit organization that promotes democracy and human rights, commissioned an intensive 20-month-long investigation of the situation of women's personal rights and freedoms in the Middle East and North Africa. A team of 40 scholars, analysts and women's rights experts analysed the situation of women across the region in terms of non-discrimination and access to justice; autonomy, security and freedom of the person; economic rights and equal opportunity; political rights and civic voice; and social and cultural rights. After analysing each country's performance in these areas, researchers ranked countries on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing the lowest score and 5 the highest. A score of 3 in any category indicates an imperfect adherence to universally accepted rights standards. The study's findings confirm that while some governments in the region have made considerable strides in the area of women's empowerment, none of the countries reviewed can claim to meet internationally agreed standards for women's rights. A significant deficit in women's rights persists in virtually every country and territory visited by researchers. Moreover, gender discrimination remains visible in nearly every institution of society – the legal system, the economy, education, health care and the media.

Final Ratings Chart

	Non-discrimination and access to justice	Autonomy, security and freedom of the person	Economic rights and equal opportunity	Political rights and civic voice	Social and cultural rights
Algeria	3.0	2.4	2.8	3.0	2.9
Bahrain	2.2	2.3	2.9	2.1	2.8
Egypt	3.0	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.4
Iraq	2.7	2.6	2.8	2.2	2.1
Jordan	2.4	2.4	2.8	2.8	2.5
Kuwait	1.9	2.2	2.9	1.4	2.8
Lebanon	2.8	2.9	2.8	2.9	2.9
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	2.3	2.1	2.3	1.2	1.8
Morocco	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.0	3.0
Oman	2.0	2.1	2.7	1.2	2.1
Occupied Palestinian Territory	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.6	2.9
Qatar	2.0	2.1	2.8	1.7	2.5
Saudi Arabia	1.2	1.1	1.4	1.0	1.6
Syrian Arab Republic	2.7	2.2	2.8	2.2	2.3
Tunisia	3.6	3.4	3.1	2.8	3.3
United Arab Emirates	1.7	2.1	2.8	1.2	2.3
Yemen	2.4	2.3	2.3	2.6	2.1

Note: According to Freedom House, the score of 3 means that women's ability to exercise their rights is sometimes restricted by government or non-state actors; some laws that provide adequate protection for women are in place but only partially implemented; and that women suffer discrimination in some areas of political, economic or social life.

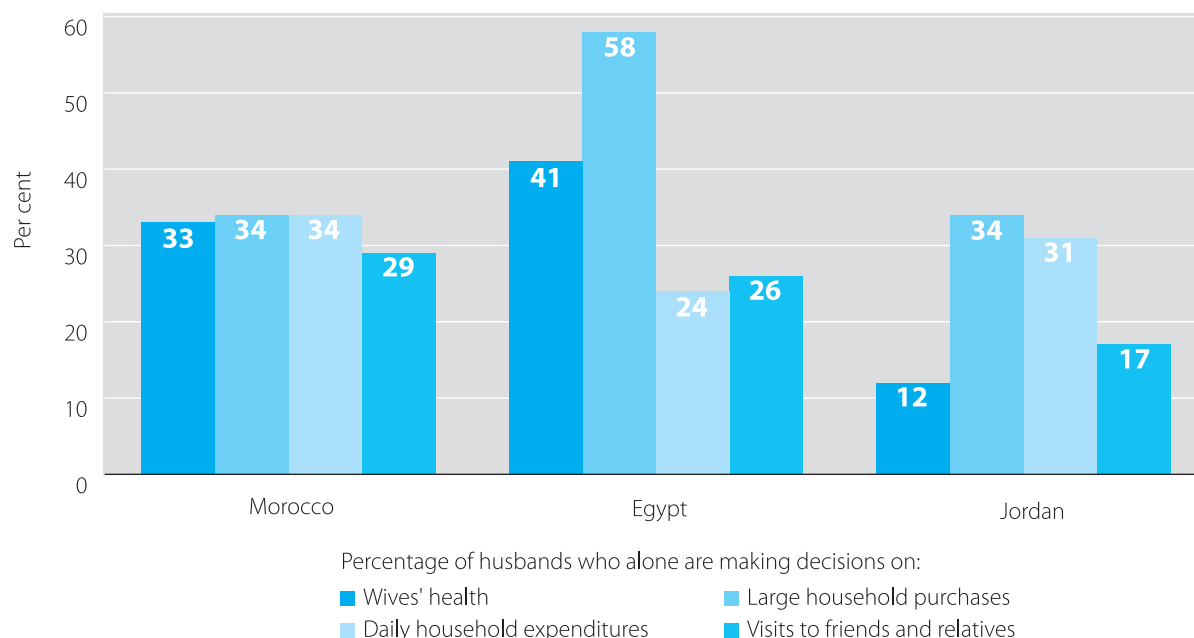
The study covers developments to the end of 2003 and does not reflect recent reforms to the Moroccan family laws.

Occupie Palestine Territory refers to the Palestinian population living in Gaza and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem).

Source: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/pdf/wstac.pdf>

See References, page 48.

Figure 2.1 Some husbands are making crucial household decisions alone*



* Data refer to most recent year available during the period 2000-2004. Data from the Demographic and Health Surveys.

Sources: UNICEF calculations based on data derived from Demographic and Health Surveys. The data were accessed from the DHS Statcompiler in June 2006. A summary of the methodology employed can be found in United Nations Children's Fund, *The State of the World's Children 2007* (International Edition), p. 91.

health care, major household purchases and women's visits to family or relatives outside of the household. Results from the three countries in the region – Egypt, Jordan and Morocco – surveyed between 2000 and 2004 revealed that in many households, women have little influence over the decisions that affect their own health and well being. Among respondents, over 40 per cent of married Egyptian women, 33 per cent of women in Morocco and 12 per cent of women in Jordan indicated that they had no say in household decisions that affect their own health and well-being, while 58 per cent of married women in Egypt and 34 per cent in Morocco and Jordan had no influence in household decisions concerning large expenditures.²

Key determinants of influence in household decisions include:

Control of land and assets: In almost every country in the region, cultural traditions and religious laws favour men over women in ownership of assets.³

Age gaps: The distribution of household bargaining power is influenced by a woman's age at marriage and the age difference between husbands and wives. A significant age gap between a young woman and an older man can skew the distribution of house-

hold influence in the husband's favour. Although the ages of spouses vary widely among individual households, regional data indicate that, on average, husbands in the middle East and North Africa tend to be about 10 per cent older than their wives.⁴ In Egypt and Lebanon, one quarter of recent marriages involved women who were at least 10 years younger than their husbands.⁵

Levels of education: In addition to greater knowledge, self-confidence and assertiveness, education confers social status and increases income-earning potential. Disparate levels of knowledge and formal education between men and women may reinforce household gender inequalities. The latest data available, from a 1999 survey of Arab states, show that men had roughly 6.2 years of schooling compared with 4.5 years for women.⁶ Data from a number of countries throughout the region also reveal marked differences in literacy rates between men and women (aged 15 and above). According to the latest available estimates, which span the period 2000–2004, in Algeria, for instance, only 60 per cent of women are literate, compared to 80 per cent of men. Gaps of similar magnitude are observed in other countries of the region, including Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Tunisia. The gender literacy gap is narrowest in Kuwait, where

Islamic family law

Throughout much of the region, state constitutions guarantee the equality of all citizens under the law. At the same time, however, citizens' rights to participate in society are often viewed through the lens of Islamic legal, social and cultural norms which see the patriarchal family (rather than the individual) as the primary building block of society. Islamic family laws, or personal status codes, rely on customary gender hierarchy to determine the legal status of men and women. In codifying the patriarchal family structure, personal status codes place women under male guardianship and treat them as dependents and minors on issues such as marriage, divorce, citizenship, inheritance and freedom of movement. In these areas, women have fewer rights than men (and non-Muslim wives have fewer rights than Muslim wives). Indeed, the existence of personal status codes is one of the main reasons for the region's lengthy list of reservations to CEDAW, most of which deal with women's equality within the family.

Marriage law: Although the formal Islamic marriage contract requires the wife's consent, Islamic family law grants the husband the right of access to his wife's body and requires obedience from the wife. As a result, crimes such as marital rape are not recognized, and honour crimes tend to be treated with lenience. Moreover, personal status codes extend to men alone the right to marry non-Muslims.

Citizenship: Except in Tunisia, nationality and citizenship has traditionally been determined by paternal descent. Children acquire the nationality of their father, and only assume the mother's nationality if the father is stateless or his identity unknown. Legal restrictions on women's citizenship and nationality rights affect millions of women across a region where transnational marriages and migration are commonplace. Women married to foreigners must obtain special residency permits for their children to attend public school, qualify for scholarships, and seek employment, although this situation is starting to change in a number of countries across the region. Bahrain, Jordan and Morocco recently adopted reforms that allow the children of a citizen mother and non-citizen father to access public services. In 2004, Algeria and Egypt introduced reforms that grant women the right to pass on their citizenship to their children, regardless of the father's citizenship.

Divorce: Women have limited means for initiating or protecting themselves from divorce under most personal status codes in the region. Men have the right to initiate divorce (*talaq*) at their discretion, regardless of the cause or the economic and emotional consequences to the wife and children. Although most legal systems in the region provide for alimony and legal entitlements to protect women, the interpretation of family law tends to be biased in favour of husbands. For instance, the Jordanian personal status law (article

69) denies entitlements to a 'disobedient' wife, one who leaves the matrimonial home without lawful justification (for example, harm inflicted by a violent husband). In other countries, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran and Morocco, a lack of resources in the courts often prevents the successful prosecution of men who fail to pay child support.

Inheritance: In almost every country in the region, the practice of inheritance is regulated by religious law and custom. While Shi'i inheritance laws tend to be gender-neutral, allowing daughters to receive their full inheritance, Sunni law privileges men over women. Because men are viewed as financially responsible for families and are therefore considered to have more financial obligations than women, daughters inherit half of what sons receive, up to a maximum of two thirds of a parent's property. Any remaining property is distributed to male relatives.

In certain cases, women bear the double burden of gender discrimination and religious difference. Non-Muslim citizens (*dhimmi*) are tolerated and integrated to varying degrees across the region, but rarely are they accorded status equal to that of Muslim citizens. For example, even in relatively liberal Tunisia, the non-Muslim widow of a Muslim man cannot share in her late husband's inheritance.

Freedom of movement: Several States retain laws that inhibit a woman's freedom of movement unless she is accompanied by a male relative or has the explicit approval of a male guardian, as in Saudi Arabia. Such restrictions assume that family stability and well-being are contingent on women's restricted mobility and physical presence. Yet prohibitions on women's independence outside of the family or household actually compromise the well-being of all family members, including her. Obligating women to consult husbands before they can seek medical care for sick children restricts women's freedom of movement and reduces children's timely access to health care.

Several legal systems throughout the region have undergone revisions to promote gender equity (Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Morocco) in the area of family law. In October 2004, Egypt introduced specialist family courts to expedite resolutions to protracted divorce cases. Also, the National Council for Women in Egypt now has an ombudsman who offers free assistance to women who are otherwise unable to prosecute husbands who refuse to pay divorce maintenance costs. To encourage divorced women to demand their full legal rights, the Government of Morocco in the 1998/9 Financial Code stipulated that divorced women are exempted from all taxes and fees for personal status suits brought by them before the courts. But much more remains to be done. Women and men need to become aware of their legal rights and their ability to claim their entitlements.

See References, page 48.



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91 per cent of women can read and write, compared to 94 per cent of men, while Qatar has achieved gender parity in adult literacy rates, at 89 per cent for both sexes.⁷

Traditional education imbalances between wives and husbands are changing, however, with the rise in educational opportunities for girls. For instance, in countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, as well as among the Palestinians, between 20 per cent and 36 per cent of recent marriages have an education gap in favour of women.⁸

Where women have a fair say, children benefit

Compared to men, women generally place a higher premium on welfare-related goals and are more likely to use their influence and the resources they control to fulfil children's needs.⁹ Children's rate of survival, nutritional status and school attendance can improve substantially when women are empowered to influence household decisions.¹⁰

Women prioritize nutrition

Research shows a direct correlation between a woman's household decision-making power and her nutritional status. Decision-making power can also have a positive effect if a woman becomes pregnant or a mother, leading to better prenatal and birthing care, timely initiation of breastfeeding and reduced

incidence of underweight children aged 1–3. Evidence also shows that women who control household income or assets allocate a higher percentage of household resources to children's nutrition.¹¹

Women prioritize family health care

As the primary caregivers for children, women tend to be the first to recognize and seek treatment for children's illnesses. The overall health of family members improves when women have freedom of mobility, knowledge of healthy care practices and the means to access health services.

Women prioritize education

Empirical research on the links between women's decision-making power in the household and children's education is in its infancy. The global evidence available suggests, however, a positive correlation between women's influence on household decisions and education for children. In particular, women tend to prioritize girls' education, with positive outcomes that span generations. Women with some formal education are more likely to delay marriage and childbirth, ensure their children are immunized, be better informed about their nutritional requirements and adopt improved family planning practices. As a result, their children have higher survival rates and tend to be healthier and better nourished.¹² Moreover, educated women are likely to promote the education of their own children. Each additional year of formal education completed by a mother translates into her children remaining in school for an additional one-third to one-half year.¹³

Female-headed households

Females head an estimated 13 per cent of households in the Middle East and North Africa.¹⁴ Changing social patterns and a slowdown in economic growth have prompted a rise in the number of female-headed households, especially in Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia, where it is estimated that between 8.5 per cent and 20.6 per cent of educated and uneducated women aged 30 to 39 choose to remain single.¹⁵

Female-headed households do not fit neatly within any one social category or income bracket. For

instance, in Algeria and Egypt, the majority of female-headed households are in urban areas, while in Sudan and Yemen they are more prevalent in rural areas.¹⁶ In some cases, wives become de facto household heads when husbands migrate for work. The situation may also result from personal or economic circumstances that are beyond the woman's control, as is the case for many widows and abandoned wives.

Research on the welfare of children living in female-headed households in the Middle East and North Africa is scarce, but recent research from Latin America and South Asia indicates that children benefit from the fact that the female household head has full control over the allocation

of household resources.^{17, 18} Whereas men often reserve a substantial proportion of household income for personal expenditures, women are widely noted as surrendering all or the bulk of their earnings to household use.¹⁹

Legal systems that refuse to acknowledge women as independent decision makers penalize female-headed households and deprive children of the benefits that might otherwise accrue from women's decision-making power. Single mothers bear the burden of proof to establish their status as heads of household, legal guardians of their children, or deserted wives, and they often struggle to gain access to social security payments, property and credit.

UNICEF in action: Supporting women and families

Egypt: Women learn new skills to protect their own and their children's health

Community development associations in Upper Egypt are working to reduce mortality rates among mothers and children in the Qena and Assiut Governorates by providing vital health messages, including the need for check-ups during pregnancy, the importance of safe and clean delivery, breastfeeding, healthy nutrition for children and routine vaccinations. Community workers go door to door, raising mothers' awareness of common illnesses such as diarrhoea and chest infections, and providing them with essential information about other conditions requiring medical advice and the availability of health services in the villages.

Tunisia: Fighting women's illiteracy and protecting children

Tunisia first began its literacy programme in the 1960s, with the aim of reducing the illiteracy rate, which in 1956 was estimated to be 84.7 per cent (96 per cent for females). The Government of Tunisia intensified its efforts following the Dakar Education for All Forum in 2000 by turning the literacy programme into an adult education programme that imparts literacy skills and practical childcare skills. Approximately 4,500 university-educated teachers were installed in 4,300 learning centres across the country. UNICEF supported this expansion by providing audio-visual learning materials on early childhood development. From 2000 to 2006, 300,000 adult learners obtained their 'Social Education' certificate (nearly 16 per cent of the total illiterate population).

Nearly 80 per cent of the programme's graduates are female, 40 per cent are under 30 years of age and 58 per cent are from rural areas. The government aims to reduce illiteracy to 10 per cent by 2009.

Jordan: Promoting better parenting

A UNICEF survey conducted in Jordan reveals that most fathers see their role in early childhood development as that of providing control, guidance and direction. Men perceived mothers as 'care-givers', especially during the early months of a child's life, and fathers as 'providers'. The study also shows, however, that most men are actually willing to participate more in their child's life from the beginning. Because of work schedules and the traditional idea that early childcare is women's domain, traditional programmes aimed at early childhood development fail to attract male participants. Aware that fathers can also benefit from these programmes, UNICEF and its partners from the government, the NGO sector and the mosques modified the early childhood programme to provide men with skills and encouragement that will enable them to increase their involvement in the physical, emotional and intellectual development of young children. The programme reaches men through the mosques, an important and credible source of information, in Friday sermons, which are attended by almost all men in the community. Religious leaders worked closely with UNICEF to develop a curriculum based on the Holy Qur'an that promotes men's role in early childhood. Sermons delivered by the imam encourage men to increase their involvement in family life and outline practical steps that fathers can take to improve the quality of time spent with young children.

See References, page 49.

The challenges associated with discriminatory bureaucracy are compounded by the poverty and illiteracy that characterizes many female-headed households in the region.²⁰ Unmarried and childless women who lack education and economic opportunities are forced to rely on their natal families for economic and social support. Without family support, the risk of destitution can be acute, especially in old age.²¹

Men play a key role in promoting women's empowerment

Men have a key role to play in promoting egalitarian decision-making processes in households and communities. From the decisions they make about resource allocation to the care and support they give women and children, men can have a positive impact on the growth and development of families.

The emergence of new demographic patterns of marriage across the region is deeply affecting the traditional family structure. The average age of marriage for both men and women has risen in recent years, largely as the result of changing economic and social trends, including the spread of education, urbanization, industrialization, the high cost of marriage, elevated unemployment rates among young adults and a declining fertility rate.²² Against this backdrop, educated young women are increasingly likely to earn paid salaries outside the household, challenging stereotypes about men's and women's role in the home and society. Whereas the traditional family unit is described as extended and patriarchal, with the father having sole authority and responsibility for the family's material well-being, contemporary family units are more likely to be characterized by cooperation between men and women, with spouses sharing household duties and decision-making responsibilities.²³

Rising living costs in many parts of the region, particularly urban centres, and the growing number of educated women are transforming social dynamics within and beyond the family.²⁴ For example, where as the 1980s saw university-educated Saudi males shy away from the prospect of marrying university-educated career women, recent research indicates a renewed appreciation of wives who can assist with the high costs of urban living. Moreover, Saudi wives who share the responsibility for family expenses have a greater say in household decisions.²⁵

Households in general and children in particular thrive when the decision-making process between parents is cooperative, meaning that men and women share equal responsibility for providing the resources that each family member requires. Achieving equality and partnership within the family, and setting positive examples for sons and daughters, is imperative for combating gender discrimination in society at large.

Women take the lead in challenging discriminatory social attitudes and customs

While the patriarchal family structure implies that men are the primary decision makers in families and communities, women are not completely powerless or totally deprived of influence and resources. Though women are often under-represented in community councils and other formal public institutions, they are more likely than men to participate in social groups or networks. Women interact with each other outside the home, pool their economic and human resources, and decide collectively how those resources will be used or invested. Informal and formal women's groups provide their members with food, water, childcare, health supplies or labour for farming – often beyond the purview of the men who control the formal decision-making processes.

But the impact of women's networks goes beyond merely helping their own female memberships. By challenging the status quo, these networks and organizations are also proving to be powerful agents of social change. Women who band together at the community level to challenge and defy discriminatory attitudes can have a dramatic impact on the communities in which they live.²⁶

In Egypt, for instance, the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Affairs (CEWLA) offers legal assistance to women who are barred by poverty or powerlessness from accessing their legal rights, and lobbies government to implement the social protection mechanisms offered by CEDAW. In Morocco, in 2004, the advocacy efforts of women's rights activists associated with the 'Printemps de l'Égalité' helped to persuade government leaders such as H.M. King Mohammed VI and Prime



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Minister Abderrahmane Yousoufi to support a landmark family law consistent with the tolerant spirit of Islam, ‘lifting the iniquity imposed on women, protecting children’s rights, and safeguarding men’s dignity.’²⁷ The new law supports women’s equality and grants husband and wife equal responsibility for the family; the wife is no longer legally obliged to obey her husband.

Including women in decision-making

The exorbitant social and economic costs of gender inequality in the region’s households demand immediate policy action aimed at reversing the social attitudes that lie at its root. While international agencies, governments, civil society organizations and women themselves have made some progress in promoting a more egalitarian legal framework, much remains to be done, particularly in the area of building a social consensus that will support changes in the personal status codes and other aspects of family law. Some key areas that urgently require attention include:

- **Increasing women’s employment and income opportunities:** Ownership or control over household assets and income is an important indicator of household bargaining power.

Ensuring that women have opportunities to acquire land and earn income can help to strengthen women’s decision-making influence.

- **Reforming gender-biased family laws:** Governments must be encouraged to continue revising gender-biased family laws to protect the rights of women and children in accordance with both the CRC and CEDAW.
- **Involving men:** Persuading individuals to change their attitudes and behaviour is a slow and complex process. Through simple but direct and effective strategies, men are partnering with women to combat gender discrimination in households and communities.²⁸ By creating specific roles for men in advocacy programmes, governments and development agencies can also promote men’s involvement in child-friendly initiatives in parliament, schools and the workplace.
- **Supporting women’s organizations:** One of the most important and effective avenues for women’s empowerment is the dynamic of cooperation among women. Informal women’s collectives that organize around issues such as nutrition, food distribution, education and shelter help to improve the standard of living for women, their families and their communities.²⁹

3

Equality in employment

Ensuring that women and men have equal opportunities to generate and manage income, and own property and other assets is an important step towards realizing women's rights under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and towards enhancing their development, self-esteem and influence, both within the household and in society at large. Furthermore, children's rights are more likely to be realized when women fully enjoy their social and economic rights.

Increasing women's share of salaried employment in the non-agricultural sector is a Millennium Development Goal in its own right (MDG 3). It also pivotal to achieving the other Millennium Development Goals. Examples from across the developing world show that women's economic participation can contribute to reducing poverty and undernutrition, improving children's access to education – particularly for girls – reducing child and maternal mortality, increasing women's participation in decision-making and facilitating women's access to health and education services, especially where women's mobility is restricted by cultural norms.¹

Policymakers are becoming attuned to the reality that women have an important economic role in addressing the poverty experienced by children. The World Bank estimates that increasing women's participation in the formal economy could raise the annual growth of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in the Middle East and North Africa by approximately 0.7 per cent. If the region's statistics for female employment, education, fertility and age distribution continue to improve, household earnings could increase by as much as 25 per cent.²



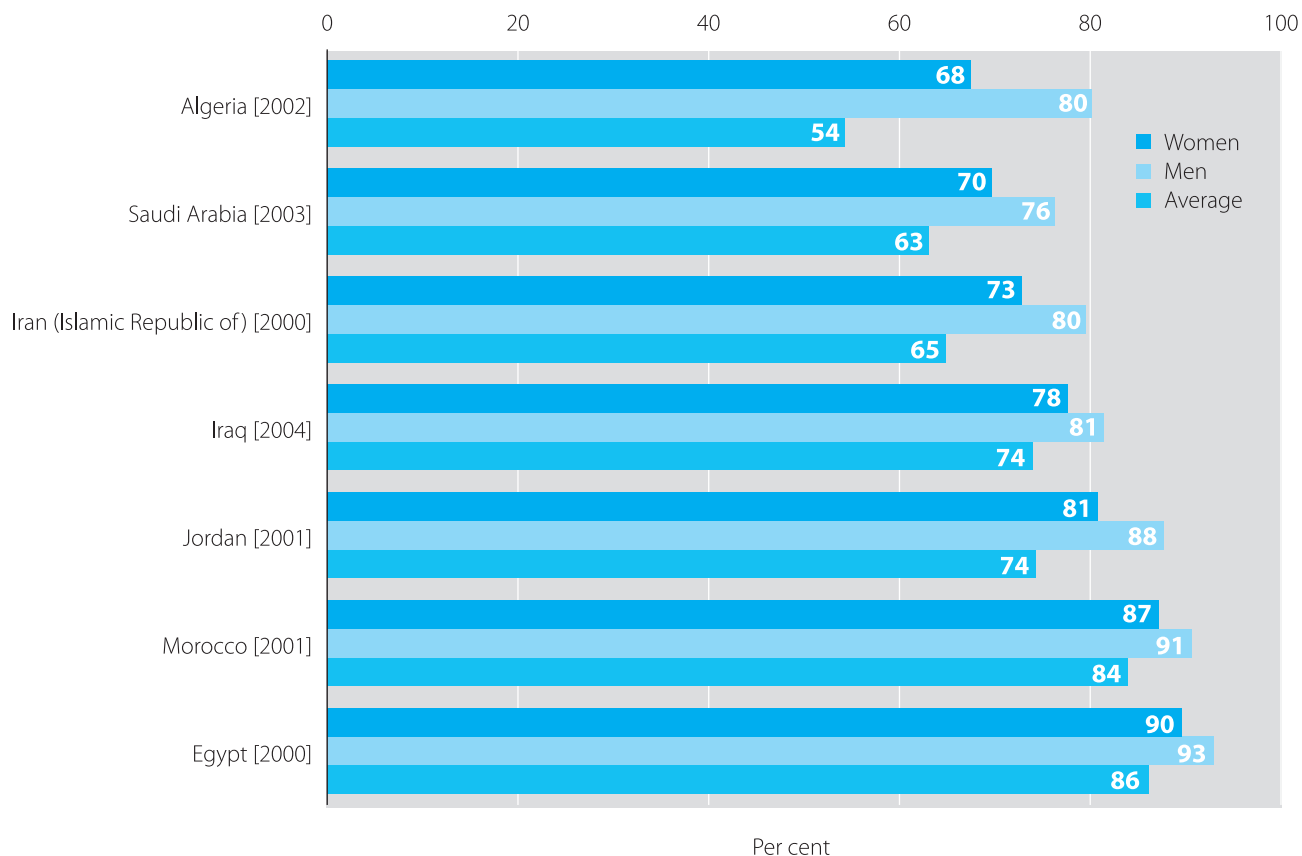
Working more but earning less than men

The tremendous gains made in girls' and women's education in recent years have contributed to an increase in the number of women in the Middle East and North Africa who work at all levels in the public sector, business, agriculture and industry. The share of women's participation in the formal labour force has increased steadily over the past three decades, from 13 per cent in 1975 to around 21 per cent in 1995.³ Participation rates have continued to rise in the past decade, reaching around 30 per cent by 2005. Notwithstanding

these gains, women's participation in the labour force is far lower than in any other region in the world, even though women make up 49 per cent of the population and, in some countries, account for almost two thirds of university students.⁴

Women in the Middle East and North Africa continue to face significant hurdles in the workplace. Throughout much of the region, barriers to women's participation in the economy are grounded in patriarchal attitudes towards gender. Men are viewed as breadwinners and women as homemakers. The gender division in the economic sphere is reinforced by personal status codes and

Figure 3.1 Across the seven countries surveyed in the Middle East and North Africa, a majority of the public agree that men should have priority in economic opportunities



UNICEF calculations based on data derived from the World Values Survey, Round 4 (1999-2004). Data for each country are for the latest year available in the period specified.

Source: World Values Survey, <www.worldvaluessurvey.org>, accessed June 2006.

Empowering women in business in the Syrian Arab Republic

There has been a recent increase in the number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) promoting the growth of small-sized enterprises run by women. MAWRED, a Syrian-based NGO founded in 2003, seeks to assist, empower and qualify women to set up their own enterprises by establishing business service incubators that provide counselling, guidance and networking services. Chambers of commerce and industry have sponsored the creation of Syrian Business Women Committees to represent Syrian businesswomen locally and abroad, provide training to start businesses and network with businesswomen's committees worldwide. These committees and NGOs have contributed to the re-evaluation of the role of the Agency for Combating Unemployment, the activation of the Women Empowerment Directorate for the state planning commission and the securing of an agreement on international funding for a microcredit programme.

See References, page 49.

a code of modesty that restricts interactions between men and women.⁵ The World Values Survey indicates that traditional stereotypes of women's economic participation prevail in the seven countries surveyed in the region, which included Algeria, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and Saudi Arabia. While there was nearly universal support for gender equality in education, there was considerably less support for equal employment opportunities, especially in Jordan and Morocco.⁶

Even when women work outside the home, they face the challenge of overcoming discriminatory practices and attitudes in their place of employment. The pervasive influence of male-dominated informal and personalized networks, discrimination on the basis of gender at the senior management level and a lack of adult education programmes targeted to women, especially in rural areas, are just

three factors that can restrict their employment opportunities and prospects.

Moreover, as in all other regions, women in the Middle East and North Africa retain the primary responsibility for housework and caregiving activities, even when they work outside the home.

While cultural attitudes towards women's roles in society play a large role in shaping the overall economic and social context of women's employment, other factors, such as education and access to credit, also influence employment opportunities at the individual level.

Access to education and skills training

There has been a notable increase in female enrolment in education throughout much of the region over the past four decades, with women's average years of schooling increasing from 0.5 in 1960 to 4.5 in 1999, and their average literacy rates rising from 16.6 per cent in 1970 to 52.5 per cent in 2000, and to 62 for the period 2000–2004.⁷ More than one in four girls across the region is enrolled in tertiary education, and women outnumber men in colleges and universities in several countries.⁸

Despite these advances, data on school completion show much higher dropout rates for girls at all levels – mainly due to early marriages⁹ – and the ratio of girls pursuing vocational and technical education remains very low.¹⁰ Moreover, gains in women's education have not been distributed evenly throughout the region. In 2002, there were more than 60 million illiterate adults in the region, the majority of them poor, rural women.¹¹

Inequalities in men's and women's opportunities for vocational training and upgrading skills limit women's professional pursuits. Regardless of the profession, women remain clustered in the administrative sections of organizations while men are more likely to hold managerial positions.¹²

Governments, development partners and women's organizations concerned with the economic empowerment of women must reinforce efforts to provide women in all sectors of the economy with skills-training and educational opportunities. The process of gender mainstreaming in the public sector is taking root in some countries. In Jordan,

for instance, the Jordanian National Commission for Women is working with the Civil Service Commission to strengthen the role of women and understanding of women's issues throughout the entire Civil Service.¹³

Wage and asset gaps

Women in some countries across the Middle East and North Africa earn as little as 40 per cent of men's income, with devastating consequences for women and their families.¹⁴ Low returns on women's employment undermine economic arguments in favour of girls' education and investments in women's skills training. They also deny women income that could be directed towards meeting the needs of children's expenses. A 2005 World Bank study in Jordan observes that if women were paid at a level commensurate with their education, their wages would rise by as much as 45 per cent in the private sector and 13 per cent in the public sector.¹⁵

Women's economic potential is also cut short by discriminatory rules that deny women the opportunity to secure credit for investments in agriculture or entrepreneurial activities. Until social attitudes and legal frameworks begin to recognize women as independent agents in commercial transactions, women will continue to be passed over for positions that demand such skills. Ensuring that the laws pertaining to credit, inheritance and ownership are gender-neutral and that women have knowledge of their rights as consumers is crucial to levelling the playing field for women and men.

Professional experience and skills training is also important for women entrepreneurs. In Tunisia, where the number of businesswomen increased from 2,633 in 1990 to 10,000 in 2004, most of the women microentrepreneurs in the formal sector had some experience before starting up their businesses.¹⁶ Programmes designed to equip women with practical business skills are taking root across the region. In Jordan, for instance, the Jordanian National Commission for Women, in cooperation with the Professional and Business Women's Association, is sponsoring development centres and career counselling services to enhance women's leadership roles in business.¹⁷

Where women work matters for women and children

Economic participation typically benefits women and children by placing financial resources directly in the hands of women. But paid employment for women does not necessarily guarantee better outcomes for children. Factors such as the amount of time a woman spends working outside the household, the conditions under which she works and whether she controls her own income determine how the work a woman undertakes affects her own well-being and that of her children.

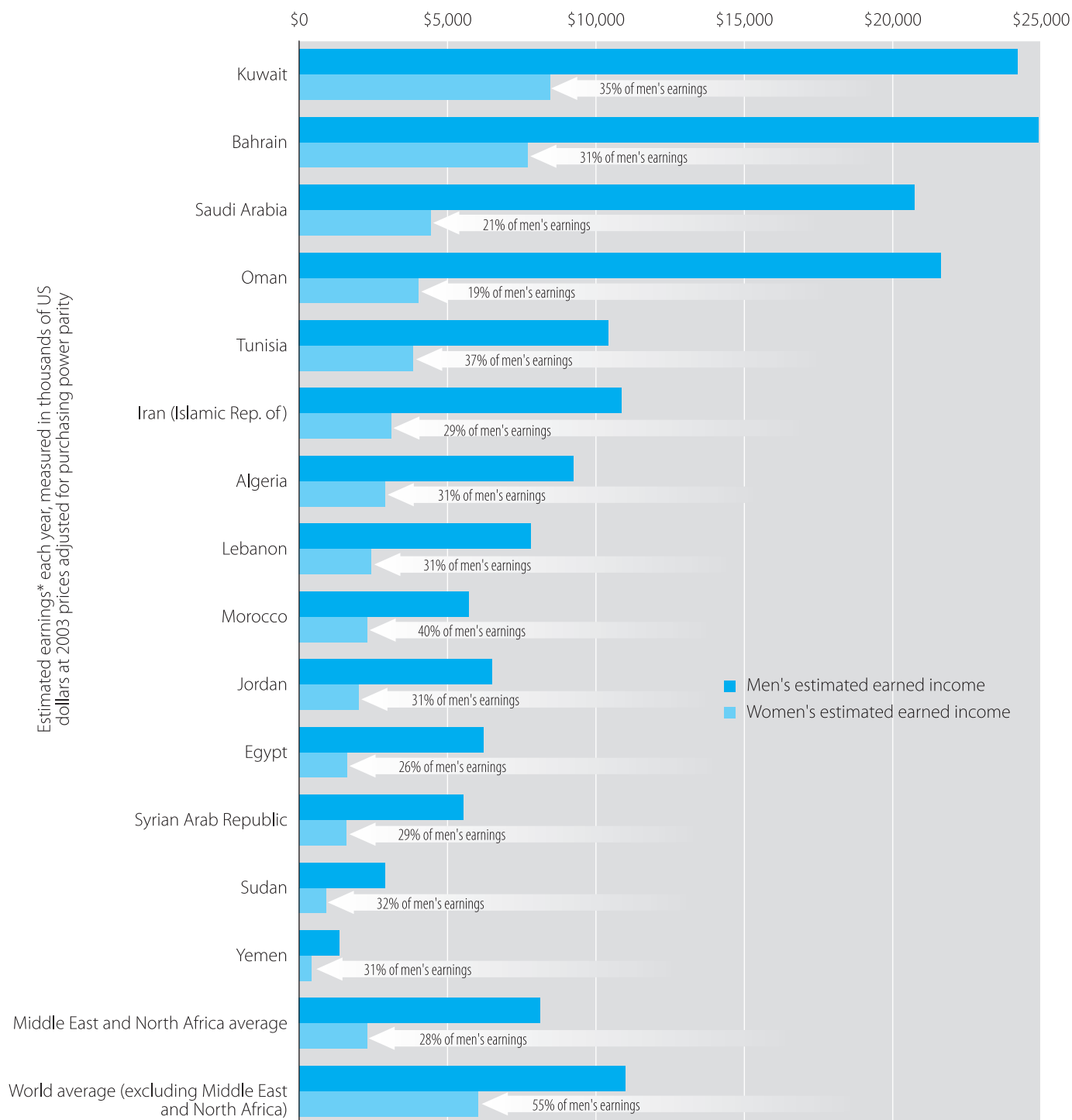
In the Middle East and North Africa, gender stereotypes influence not only the value assigned to women's work but also the type of work that women do. The average share of women employed outside the agricultural sector remains modest, not exceeding 20 per cent in most cases. Women's participation in non-agricultural formal employment is below 15 per cent in Algeria, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and as low as 7 per cent in Yemen.¹⁸

Disparities between male and female youth employment rates in the Middle East and North Africa

In parts of the Middle East and North Africa, investments in girls' education are not opening up better employment opportunities for young women. While a lethargic economy drives up unemployment rates among men and women alike, the decline in job opportunities has a harsher impact on women. According to one study, female unemployment was higher than the male unemployment rate in two thirds of Arab countries with data, and more than twice as high in half of the countries surveyed. Another factor impeding the ability of young, educated women to compete on equal footing with male colleagues is the persistent wage gap. Research from Jordan indicates that women university graduates earn 71 per cent of salaries earned by male university graduates. The wage gap widens to 50 per cent among women and men with only basic education.

See References, page 49.

Figure 3.2 Estimated earnings* for women in the Middle East and North Africa are substantially lower than for men



* Estimated earnings are based on adjusting gross domestic product (GDP) per capita to take into account differing economic activity rates between men and women as well as wage differentials.

Note: Regional and world averages are calculated according to UNICEF regions.

Source: United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2006*, pp. 367-370.

Throughout the region, the private sector is widely regarded as inhospitable to women because it is characterized by unequal hiring practices, insecurity and infrequent promotions.¹⁹ In Jordan, for example, men are entitled to family tax allowances regardless of whether their wives work, while women must demonstrate that their husbands are deceased or incapacitated to qualify for government benefit schemes. The refusal to acknowledge a woman's status as provider for dependents diminishes the value of women's work, with detrimental consequences for the welfare of their families.²⁰

Educated women who enter the formal workforce tend to gravitate towards female-dominated professions such as teaching, nursing and other occupations in the public sector.²¹ Studies from across the region confirm that women tend to prefer the public sector over the private sector even though, on average, wages there tend to be lower and the types of jobs women perform do not encourage professional advancement. Public-sector employment is viewed as preferable on account of job security, shorter work days and greater recognition of employee rights to maternity leave.²²

In a number of countries, jobs in the public sector have grown increasingly scarce over the past decade. Structural adjustment policies and government-led privatization programmes have decreased the number of public-sector jobs available. For women who are unable or unqualified to work in the public sector, employment in the industrial and informal sectors often becomes the only available option.²³

Women's formal employment and its impact on children

Across much of the Middle East and North Africa, the increase in the number of women joining the labour force has paralleled a rise in women's employment in the service sector, industry and family-owned enterprises. In Egypt, for instance, the proportion of women working in industry has tripled (from 3 per cent in 1980 to 10 per cent in 1990).²⁴ In Tunisia, over 30 per cent of economically active women were found in the manufacturing field in 2000, outnumbering women in the service sector.²⁵



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Data indicate that the majority of new jobs created in the new industrial sectors require basic levels of education and offer low remuneration. Employers in this sector prefer to hire women with little or no education, who are considered to be more flexible, more compliant and less expensive than male workers.²⁶

Women working in industry typically endure physically demanding working conditions and long hours. Moreover, low-wage jobs limit the potential of women to influence decisions related to production.²⁷ The lack of job security and benefits, such as paid sick leave and childcare provisions, raises the risks of poverty for women and their families.

The Jordan River Foundation: Providing economic opportunities for women

The Jordan River Foundation, a non-profit Jordanian NGO established in 1995 and chaired by H.M. Queen Rania Al-Abdullah, works diligently to support initiatives that enable communities to articulate their needs and contribute to their own economic development. One example is the Bani Hamida Women's Weaving Project. Located in the mountains of the Madaba Governorate in an impoverished area of the kingdom, the Bani Hamida Women's Weaving Project revived traditional weaving to maintain the social and demographic character of the Makawir area. Women in the community were eager to pass on rug-weaving techniques to younger generations, and today, women in 13 villages keep these traditions alive while significantly enhancing their families' quality of life. Over the years, this project has employed hundreds of women and currently provides approximately 450 women with part-time work spinning, weaving and dyeing.

See References, page 49.

The unpaid work of women and girls

For countless women, paid employment is only a part – and often not the primary focus – of their work activities. Whether they work in paid employment or not, girls and women shoulder their responsibilities as the primary caregivers of children and the sick, elderly and disabled, and typically bear the primary responsibility for household maintenance, including fields and crops.

In poor, rural communities, women and girls also form the backbone of the labour supply for informal and formal economic activities undertaken by the household. In the Syrian Arab Republic, for example, a large gender gap exists among unpaid family workers; 47 per cent of active women were unpaid family workers in 2000, compared to only 10 per cent of men. This gap is largely concentrated in the agricultural sector (75 per cent of women compared to 32.5 per cent of men).²⁸ In Sudan, 80 per cent of women are engaged in the agricultural sector.²⁹ Women often work on a seasonal basis for wages below the production values and have little say over the management of crops, especially in remote rural areas.

Most labour laws across the region are based on the principle of non-discrimination between the sexes and reflect the provisions for gender equality set out in International Labour Organization

(ILO) conventions and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.³⁰ In practice, however, such provisions are extremely difficult to implement. As noted above, the view that women bear the primary responsibility for childcare is deeply embedded in the social and legal context in which the family exists. As a result, the unpaid work of women and girls continues to be taken for granted and is often not a key priority for governments and policymakers.³¹

The low recognition of women's work decreases their influence in politics, the household and the community and the economic sphere. Improvements in the quantity and quality of women's education and employment opportunities are urgently needed to protect and promote women's rights to participate fully in the public sphere and to influence the decisions that affect their own future and that of their children.

Challenging attitudes towards women and work

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women guarantees women's equality before the law and establishes specific measures to eradicate discrimination against women in all areas of their lives, including education, health, employment, marriage and the



family. There are several measures that can help to ensure that discrimination does not bar women in the Middle East and North Africa from opportunities to work productively.

- **Transforming the workplace:** The workplace must be transformed to recognize the role that both parents play in raising and caring for children, as required by article 18 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Social policies and programmes should be promoted to enable women and men to reconcile their work and family responsibilities and to encourage men to share housework and childcare responsibilities. It is also important to implement policies to alter gender bias towards women at work and address underlying problems, such as sectoral and occupational segregation and lack of education and training.
- **Gender-responsive budgets:** A further step towards women's rights and greater public transparency and economic efficiency is the introduction of gender-responsive budgets. This mechanism introduces the gender perspective

Dowry inflation

Recent research indicates that dowry inflation may be a significant factor responsible for the increase in the numbers of single young women working in newly industrialized sectors, especially in rural areas. Against a backdrop of rising living costs and declining real wages, increasing dowry costs represent an additional economic burden placed on the families of young, unmarried girls. In Jordan, for example, where the number of unemployed males is increasing, and the pool of young men with dowries diminishing, unmarried daughters are seeking paid work as a means of supporting themselves and increasing household income. Studies from Morocco's textile manufacturing sector show that factory employment enables young girls to support themselves, and their families, for a period of time, and to delay marriage.

See References, page 49.

Domestic service in the Middle East and North Africa

In all of the countries that import high levels of female labour – the Gulf States and Jordan and Lebanon, albeit to a lesser extent – the domestic service sector is the biggest employer of female migrant workers. Although conditions vary from country to country, female migrant workers in the domestic service sector typically endure low wages, exclusion from local labour laws, unspecified working hours, severely restricted freedom of movement, as well as physical and sexual abuse and exploitation. The situation of non-Arab female migrant workers has received considerable attention from international human rights organizations and labour-exporting States in recent years, due mainly to the abuse of the rights of Asian and African women in the domestic labour sector.

See References, page 50.



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through the analysis of the impact of actual government expenditure and revenue on women and girls as distinct from men and boys. It does not require separate budgets for women, nor does it aim solely to increase spending on women-specific programmes. Instead, it helps governments decide how policies need to be adjusted and where resources need to be reallocated to address poverty and gender inequalities. Gender budget initiatives target national, provincial and municipal processes and may cover the overall budget or only selected parts of it. They can be carried out within government by the Ministry of Finance in conjunction with the Ministry of Women's Affairs or other spending ministries, or outside government by non-governmental organizations and/or independent researchers.³²

- **Education:** Ensuring that girls and boys will have equal income-earning opportunities as adults requires such measures as encouraging local school authorities and teachers to adopt flexible scheduling, allowing married adolescents and mothers to attend classes, making school facilities safe, ensuring that schools have separate latrines for girls, building schools close to girls' homes, recruiting more female teachers and encouraging parents and community leaders to take an active involvement in school management. In addition, the school curriculum itself must impress upon students the importance of gender equality.
- **Eliminating gender disparities in legislation:** Critical measures to eliminate gender discrimination in women's land and property rights must include, but should not be limited to, bringing national legislation in line with international human rights standards; reforming land and property rights; involving international agencies and non-governmental organizations in tracking and exposing violations of women's property rights; and monitoring government compliance with international human rights treaties. In addition to legal reform, effective implementation of new legislations designed to eliminate gender bias is essential to advance gender equality in the Middle East and North Africa.



- **The role of government in supporting working families:** Governments should undertake administrative, financial and legislative measures to create a strong and enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship and participation in the labour market, including improved employment conditions, career development opportunities, maternity and other paid leave, elimination of pay gaps based solely on gender, and safe and high-quality childcare arrangements.
- **Better data and analysis:** Although there are sufficient data to show that women tend to work more and earn less than men and to illustrate the consequent negative impact on societies, a lack of sex-disaggregated statistics precludes a more detailed analysis of work disparities. Better data on employment and income, disaggregated by sex, could significantly improve the analysis of policies and programmes – with benefits to women, children, families and communities.

Gender-responsive budgeting in Morocco

For the first time ever, the Moroccan national budget for the year 2006 included a special annex on how it will tackle gender equality. Issued by the government, the gender report summarized the implications of the national or local budget on gender equity using gender-responsive budget analysis tools, and mapped specific targets for gender equality. Developed with support from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the European Commission and the Government of Belgium, Morocco's gender-responsive budget is closely integrated with the Ministries of Finance, Education, Health, Agriculture and Rural Development at the national and local levels. This initiative is a direct response to the vital need to promote the status and rights of women as part of the broader strategy for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the country.

See References, page 50.

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Equality in politics and government

Children are powerfully affected by the outcome of political decisions. When invited to participate in political debate and forums, adolescents and young people have repeatedly proved to be strong advocates on their own behalf. The ability to influence policy is often limited, however, by their inability to vote or directly represent their own interests in governing bodies. The advocates who speak on their behalf – if there is anyone to do so – can make a vast difference to the fulfillment of children's rights to survival, development and protection.

A growing body of evidence indicates that women in politics are particularly effective advocates for children. Equal participation of women and men in government and politics is essential to genuine democracy, making it more receptive to the concerns of all citizens, including children.

Compared to other regions, the pace of women's advancement in political life in the Middle East and North Africa has been relatively slow and uneven. As of October 2006, the regional average of female legislators in lower houses was 8.8 per cent – half of the global average, but nonetheless double the rate of eight years ago, when it was less than 4 per cent.¹

Among the countries of the region, the Syrian Arab Republic has one of the highest rates of women's political participation in national legislatures; there has been a gradual increase in female membership of the country's People's Assembly during successive legislative sessions, reaching most recently 12 per cent (women hold 30 out of the 250 seats). The number of female members of local councils also increased from 27 in 1975 to 797 in 2003, and a woman was appointed chairperson of the Homs City Council for the first time in 2005.² Much of this progress is the result of legislative reforms that recognize



women's right to participate in politics on equal footing with men. But legislation alone cannot rectify the most significant barriers to women's political participation – the pervasive influence of male-dominated, informal and personalized networks in the legal, economic and political realms; the miniscule number of women members of political parties; and women's lack of experience with the political process.

Women's participation in politics

The path to women's political empowerment remains uncertain and complicated throughout much of the Middle East and North Africa. Notwithstanding great strides in the area of women's education, discriminatory attitudes, laws and customs continue to uphold men as the gatekeepers for political participation, demoting women to the status of second-class citizens in their own countries.

Deep-seated gender discrimination results in women being routinely eclipsed in the nomination of candidates for political parties and movements, and denied their right to mobilize support among politically influential groups. Even where quotas and other legislative reforms have enabled a small minority of women to access parliament, as in Djibouti, Jordan, Iraq, Morocco and Tunisia, for instance, they remain virtually excluded from the highest positions of state, including executive positions and presiding officers of parliament.

A Freedom House survey of 17 countries and territories in the region concludes that most governments still do not feel accountable towards their female citizens. Women were found to be at a profound disadvantage in practically every institution of society, including the criminal justice system, economy, education, health care and the media. Only three countries, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, scored above average in some areas of women's rights, while Saudi Arabia received the lowest score.³

As the Millennium Development Goals emphasize, genuine political empowerment for women and a firm commitment to fulfilling the rights of children require the removal of all barriers to women's participation in political life. Efforts to encourage women's political participation have intensified in recent years, and governmental structures have been established to address women's issues – both at the regional level, with the establishment of the Arab Women's Organization, and at the national level, with the founding of national councils and commissions on the status of women.⁴

Women in national and local politics

The impact of women in formal national politics in the Middle East and North Africa is difficult to assess, given their hitherto low level of participation and a shortage of studies on their impact. There is, however, greater evidence that their increased political participation at the local level is contributing to a process of social and political change, with important implications for children and young people.

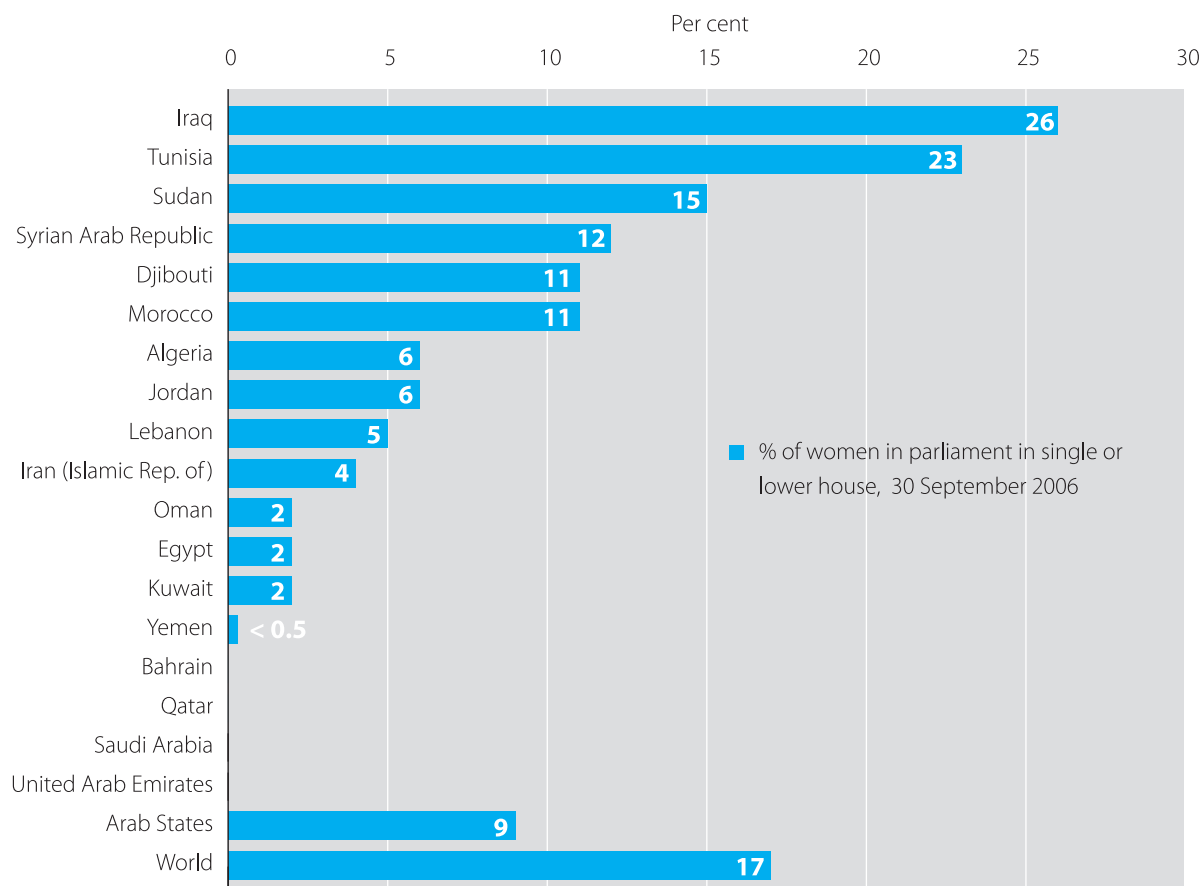
Evidence of women's support for family-friendly issues

Evidence shows that women are more likely than men to prioritize policy issues that directly affect the protection and well-being of women and children. A study undertaken in Kuwait, where women represent 57 per cent of registered voters, showed that in the 2006 elections, 56 per cent of women (compared to 49 per cent of men) considered citizenship laws the highest priority; 50 per cent of women (against 41 per cent of men) prioritized divorce laws; and 55 per cent of women (compared to 41 per cent of men) said that custody was a major issue in the election.⁵

The impact of women's organizations

Evidence also shows that women's groups operating through informal political processes can have

Figure 4.1 Women's participation in parliament varies across the Middle East and North Africa



Source: Data are drawn from the Inter-Parliamentary Union database on 'Women in national parliaments', <<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>>, accessed October 2006. 'Arab States' refers to IPU's regional classifications.

a direct and powerful impact on legislation. In Morocco, for example, women's groups were instrumental in promoting a new Family Code, and securing political support for a new Penal Code and a law on abandoned children.⁶ The new Penal Code introduces two new offences, notably the sale of children and forced child labour, and the new law of *kafala* brings improvements to the legal granting of guardianship, as well as social benefits to children.

Women's groups can also have a direct influence on the formal electoral process. For instance, in the run up to the 2002 elections, the Jordanian National Commission for Women launched a campaign to mobilize women candidates and voters. Workshops for female voters, candidates and campaign managers were held to raise awareness about the

importance of having women representatives in the legislature and to increase the number of female voters in the elections.⁷

Quotas can make a difference for women

Another initiative that is reshaping political life across the region is the introduction of quotas and other legislative reforms designed to increase women's profile in politics. While there is some way to go before women represent over 30 per cent of parliamentarians in the Middle East and North Africa – the benchmark widely regarded for women's participation to have a decisive influence on policy debates in government – the ever increasing presence of women in public life is challenging patriarchal norms and their dominance in politics.

In Jordan, Morocco, Oman and Qatar, quota systems are helping break down the barriers to women's political participation. In Iraq, the adoption of candidate quotas by the interim administration in 2004 – which required political parties to nominate women to at least 30 per cent of their positions on candidate lists – helped women secure 31.5 per cent of contested parliamentary seats.⁸ Following the election, nine women ministers were appointed to the new cabinet.

Quota systems are not without controversy, however. Some have argued that women who get into parliament on account of quotas lack the skills needed to serve in government. Others argue that quota systems invalidate women's claims to popular political support. Both arguments demonstrate that quotas, or political reservations, will not succeed unless they are part of a much broader initiative aimed at building a social consensus that supports women's political rights. Dialogue among politicians, civil society and constituencies must aim to sensitize all actors to the benefits of women's participation in the public sector, and to promote understanding of what is required to ensure that women have the skills and opportunities to run for office.

Debates on enfranchisement in the Gulf

In the Gulf States, women's rights activists and progressive policymakers continue to lobby governments for universal suffrage. Although women in Saudi Arabia are still denied the right to vote in that country's limited suffrage, and neither men nor women have voting rights in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwaiti women finally gained full political rights when the all-male Kuwaiti parliament granted women the right to vote and stand for elections in May 2005. It is estimated that this will result in a majority female electorate for the 2007 polls.⁹ In Bahrain, where no women sit in the lower house, 10 women have been appointed to the upper chamber. In Kuwait, a woman, Dr. Masouma al-Mubarak, was sworn into office as Minister of Planning and Administrative Development Affairs in June 2005. She is an ex-officio member of parliament, making her the only woman in parliament, albeit not directly elected.¹⁰

One positive, and highly visible, source of inspiration for women in the Middle East and North Africa in general, and in the Gulf States in particular is Sheikha Haya bint Rashid Al Khalifa, a Baharani lawyer who made history as the first

Gender mainstreaming in the Jordanian Economic and Social Development Plan (1999-2003)

Gender mainstreaming is a process whereby the different interests and rights of men and women are considered and taken into account in planning and implementing policies and programmes. In 1998, the Government of Jordan decided to integrate gender mainstreaming into its five-year Economic and Social Development Plan. The Plan's underlying framework emphasized that women's issues must be addressed within each sector rather than in isolation. Headed by the Secretary-General of the Jordanian National Commission for Women, and with support from the Prime Minister and Ministry of Planning, a technical committee nominated female technical experts, referred to as Gender Focal Points, to highlight gender issues within each sector of the development plan. Consequently, the 1999–2003 Economic and Social Development Plan had the highest representation of women (51), compared to earlier Plans.

Despite some resistance to the gender-mainstreaming approach, the technical committee achieved unprecedented successes. The Plan contained several provisions for equal opportunities and the promotion of women's rights, as well as specific macro-level goals to address gender inequalities. It also emphasized the need for reliable and disaggregated data on gender to enhance the effectiveness of the National Strategy for Women. These preliminary achievements have opened the door to increasing women's participation in the national development planning process.

See References, page 50.

Shirin Ebadi: A Nobel inspiration to women in the Middle East and North Africa

In 2003, Iranian human rights activists Dr. Shirin Ebadi received the Nobel Peace Prize. A champion of the rights of women, children and political prisoners in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Dr. Ebadi is the first Muslim woman to receive this distinguished prize.

One of the first female judges in the country, and the first woman to achieve the status of chief justice, Dr. Ebadi has had a distinguished career as a magistrate, scholar and pioneer of women's rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. After being dismissed from her judgeship, along with other female judges, following the Islamic Revolution in February 1979, Dr. Ebadi set up a private practice as a lawyer, defending the rights of political dissidents when few others would dare to do so. For her involvement in these controversial court cases, Dr. Ebadi was arrested on several occasions. Undaunted by intimidation, Dr. Ebadi continued to be an outspoken advocate of human rights, establishing several Iranian non-governmental organizations that actively promote and protect the rights of women and children.

See References, page 50.

Arab woman to preside over the United Nations General Assembly. Sheikha Haya, who was elected in June 2006, is only the third woman to hold the post, following Lakshmi Pandit of India, who held the post in 1953, and Angie Vijaya Brooks of Liberia, in 1969.¹¹

Women as peacemakers

The impact of conflict on women and children is devastating – they account for around 80 per cent of civilian casualties of war. In many instances, women and girls run the risk of gender-based violence, which is often used deliberately as an

instrument of war to humiliate and degrade them, their families and their communities.

In October 2000, the UN Security Council unanimously passed resolution 1325, which specifically addresses the impact of war on women, and women's contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. The resolution is a watershed political framework that recognizes a long history of women's contributions to conflict mediation and resolution and post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction.

Yet women's role in peace processes remains, at best, informal. While governments and other political actors appear content to encourage engagement between women's groups that often cut across conflict lines, women rarely make it to the peace table. On the few occasions that they do, their voices are rarely heard.¹²

Women at the negotiating table

There are several important arguments for including women's perspectives at the peace table. Women and girls represent half of the population. As the primary civilian victims of conflicts, women and children have a moral claim to compensation for the material and physical losses they suffered. And as former combatants, they have as much of a right as men to participate in negotiating the peace. Furthermore, as an increasing body of evidence demonstrates, peace agreements that take a gendered perspective into account are likely to be more stable, and therefore more successful, because they reflect a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the conflict and therefore of the possibilities for reconciliation.¹³

In the few instances when women have participated in peace processes, there has been a notable difference in the motivations of male and female negotiators and in their respective understanding of the purposes of peace talks. While men emphasized the division of resources, women, in the words of one peace negotiator, looked at peace-making "as a set of issues dealing with life and death."¹⁴ As a result, women overwhelmingly favoured pragmatic solutions and an emphasis on the future over the more hard-line positions adopted by men.



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Challenging attitudes towards women in the public sphere

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) guarantees women's equality before the law and establishes specific measures to eradicate discrimination against them in all areas of their lives – including education, health, employment, marriage and the family. Several specific initiatives can help to realize women's rights in the political sphere.

- **Education:** As previous chapters have underscored, a girl who is denied the right to go to school is denied much more than the knowledge she would have gained in the classroom. She is deprived of the opportunity to develop to her full potential in every area of life, including the right to political participation.
- **The involvement and support of men (in voting and in parliament):** While women's presence and active participation in politics is critical to advancing gender equality, gender initiatives require the involvement and support

of men, especially male parliamentarians and political leaders.

- **Quotas:** The introduction of quotas has led to dramatic changes in women's political participation in several countries of the Middle East and North Africa.
- **Skills training on political participation:** The creation of specific programmes to educate women about the importance of asserting their rights to participation in both policy and decision-making is crucial. Eliminating entry barriers to national and local legislatures is not enough to increase women's representation. Even when political spaces and processes have opened up, the number of women in decision-making positions has not automatically increased. Educating women about the rules and procedures involved in political decision-making and policymaking, training them in public speaking, lobbying, advocacy, negotiation and debate, and increasing their awareness of the difficulties involved in working in a predominantly male environment will help raise the ability of these women to work towards improving women's rights.

A brief history of women's movements in the Middle East and North Africa

Women's movements in the Middle East and North Africa region are diverse. Although marked by specific historical and subregional trajectories the various movements share three features: links to national movements, attention to development processes and tensions between secular and religious (and/or customary) positions.

The late 19th century and early 20th century: The movement awakes

The early history of the women's movement in the region is closely linked to the development of the modern State in the late 19th and 20th centuries. The first generation of activists fought for equal rights in the emergent modern political order and participation in new modes of public and private life. The women's movement in Egypt, for example, encouraged public debate on social issues such as family life, work, education and women's rights through publications such as Hind Nawafal's 1892 *Al-Fatah* (The Young Woman), Nabawiyya Musa's 1902 *al-Ayat al-Bbayyina fi Tarbiyat al-Banat* (A Treatise on Girls' Education), Malak Hifni Nasif's 1910 *al-Nisa'iyyat* (Feminist Discourse), Huda Sha'rawi's journal *L'Égyptienne* (established in 1925) and the liberal print media at large.

The first half of the 20th century fostered vibrant public debates on the changing demands on, and roles of, women, men, children and families at large. Accompanied by the creation of a dense pan-Arab network of women's associations, the Arab Girls' Awakening Society (1914) in Beirut, the Women's Literary Club (1920) founded by Nazik 'Abid in Damascus, and the Egyptian Feminist Union (1923), to name a few, brought a range of women's issues, from demands to reform the personal status code to political rights to educational and professional opportunities, to the centre of public debate. Despite the different positions held on a wide spectrum of issues, access to modern education for girls and women was seen as essential for inclusion into a modern political and social order. Committed to the building of independent nation-states, the women's movements forcefully argued that a successful national project demanded legal, social and economic equality between men and women.

The 1950s-1970s: Women's participation in nation building and economic life

The nation-building period that marked the 1950s to 1970s institutionalized many of these visions and demands. With regional exceptions, the period of 'state-feminism' was aimed at women across class lines within the emergent state building economies and societies. Having by and large been granted the right to vote following independence (the Gulf subregion was the exception), the public life of women was largely viewed by the State in terms of their economic participation. Egypt's Labour Law 91 (1954) and Iraq's Free Education Law (1975) encouraged large numbers of women to enter higher education and the labour market. The coming to power of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in Yemen in 1967 signalled the State's perception

of the link between women and development. The NLF's family law reform, for example, established the principle of free-choice marriage, raised the legal marriage age of girls to 16, virtually abolished polygamy, reduced the dowry, ended unilateral divorce, stipulated that both spouses must bear the cost of supporting the family, and increased divorced women's rights to custody of their children. Across the region, state-driven initiatives were setting priorities for women by defining them as the needs of the State. The promotion of social mobility, for instance, often empowered local 'customary' or 'reactive' gender contracts. In the case of Algeria, for example, the 1962 constitution guaranteed gender equality, and lawyers such as Fatima Khemisti were able to draft significant legislation concerning women. At the same time, however, the Government of Algeria's industrial strategy and family-oriented social policy of the constrained women's participation in the labour market.

Post 1975: An uncertain future of development and rights

The post-1975 period marks the third and current phase of modern women's movements in the region. It is characterized by the decline of all encompassing social visions of States, economic globalization, the redefinition of the landscape of the women's movement within non-governmental organizations, the development of international benchmarks articulated in UN conferences and statutes (for example, CEDAW) and the institutionalization of indicators of women's and children's rights. This period is furthermore marked by an intensification of secularist and religious positions on the rights of women, including within regional women's movements themselves.

The multiple focuses of the woman's movements can be loosely divided into rights-based and development-based agendas. The struggle for greater participation in political decision-making remains an important priority. This includes the belated struggle for women's suffrage in the Gulf countries. It ranges from vibrant debates on the appointment of women judges such as the 2003 nomination of Tahany el-Gebaly as Egypt's first woman judge, to the feminization of the judiciary in post-civil war Algeria (where 25 per cent of all judgeships are held by women), to the continuing public deliberations on quotas for women political candidates across the Arab world. In Morocco, the Centre pour le Leadership Féminin was established by the Association Démocratique des Femmes Marocaines to identify and remove obstacles to women's political participation. As a specific target of women's activism, formal political participation remains among the more successful interventions of contemporary women's movements.

Reforming personal status codes

Secularists within the region's women's movement view personal status codes as the ultimate and essential stumbling block to women's democratic citizenship. The revision of the codes in Morocco in 2003 has definitively marked a watershed for the women's movement in its struggle to create legal frameworks of equality within the family. Slowly, reforms of the personal status codes are

taking place across the region, largely due to years of work on the part of women's movements. In December 2001, the Jordanian Cabinet approved several amendments to the Civil Status Law. The legal age for marriage was raised from 15 for women and 16 for men to 18 for both, and Jordanian women were given legal recourse to divorce. New restrictions on polygamy require a man to inform his first wife of plans to marry again and to submit evidence of his financial ability to support more than one wife.

In Egypt, feminist and Islamist activists in cooperation with lawyer Mona Zulficar have worked to introduce a new Islamic marriage contract (modelled on the Iranian marriage contract) that enables women to stipulate their rights and conditions. In 1999, they secured the reversal of article 291, which exonerated rapists who married their victims. In 2006 the highly publicized custody case of Hind al-Hinnawi resulted in a parliamentary bill granting greater rights for children born out of formal wedlock and made DNA testing mandatory in paternity disputes. In Lebanon, the Permanent Arab Court to Resist Violence Against Women along with the Feminine Rights Campaign continues to focus on gender equality in divorce. Finally, women's right to retain their own nationality and pass it on to their children marks a victory of the new millennium.

Eliminating impunity for violence against women

Building upon campaigns against female genital mutilation/ cutting and in favour of sexual rights for women of the 1980s and 1990s, the criminalization of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, including honour crimes, marks the third major rights-based intervention in contemporary women's movements. In Jordan, Asma Khader, a lawyer, and Rana Hussein, a journalist, have been successful in bringing attention to this issue, leading to an amendment to the country's penal code whereby perpetrators of honour crimes are no longer exempt from the death penalty. A successful campaign was launched in Yemen against the house of obedience law, which forces women back to the matrimonial home if they leave. Women's rights activists such as Amal Basha are working towards the reinstatement of equality clause into the Yemeni constitution after its removal four years after the 1990 unification of the country, the criminalization of honour killing and the decriminalization of sexual misconduct of women (e.g., 90 per cent of women prisoners are charged with adultery or similar sexual misconduct). Khalida Messaoudi, one of the Algerian leaders of the anti-government women's campaign in the early 1980s and the anti-fundamentalist women's campaign in the late 1980s and early 1990s, was appointed adviser to President Bouteflika after he assumed office in summer 1999. Although the Government of Algeria subsequently issued an amnesty to several thousands who had been jailed for participation in violence during the Algerian civil war, it agreed to demands that those guilty of rape be exempt from the pardon.

Human progress constitutes an important set of concerns for contemporary women's movements in the Middle East and North Africa region. A more detailed analysis would acknowledge distinct phases over the past 30 years. Generally speaking, the shift from 'women in development' approaches of an earlier era to contemporary concerns with 'empowerment' share one core set of assumptions, that is, the imperative of modern education. Modern education

here is understood as providing the basic toolkit through which women can have equal opportunities and rights.

International social and economic indicators of human progress have been essential guideposts for defining the directions of women's movements in this era. The uneven impact of economic globalization, combined with state retrenchment from social services, have negatively affected the lives of the working poor throughout the region. Through international agencies and local non-governmental organizations, women's movements and activists have created a broad and diverse institutional grid that addresses the feminization of poverty (and its concomitant effects). Girls' education, women's literacy, economic empowerment through microcredit initiatives and education for women's health are the main areas of intervention to promote the economic and social development of women in the region. In Egypt, for example, this includes Iman Bibars' pioneering microcredit initiative (Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women) and the identity card campaign of the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights to enable poor women to access social and welfare services. In Yemen, years of activism have led to increased government investment in girls' education in collaboration with UNIFEM in Morocco and within the context of the Social Fund.

The double dividend of gender equality

The impact of the women's movement on the rights and well-being of children has been manifest. Reforms to personal status laws seek not only to create equal rights for women within the family system, but also to ensure economic survival of women and children in event of a marital breakdown. Research indicates that the impoverishment of women and children often increases following divorce. With female-headed households on the rise throughout the region, the well-being of children within such households is of utmost concern. Children of female-headed households with little recourse to economic resources or remunerated employment may suffer in terms of health and literacy, and run a higher risk of becoming engaged in child labour. The rights-based work of women's movements and their quest to empower women within their families has benefited children through the empowerment of women to take responsibility for children's health, education and overall development.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have brought new energies and focus to the understanding of the complex linkages between gender and poverty. The attention given to issues of empowerment, especially girls' education and medical literacy, has been influential in establishing benchmarks for sustainable human development. The MDGs have authorized a vision that has been at the core of women's movements for more than a century: the imperative of protecting the rights and well-being of all members of society – children, women and men – if human security and progress are to be guaranteed.

This panel was prepared for the Middle East and North Africa Edition of The State of the World's Children 2007 by Martina Riecker of the American University in Cairo (AUC), Egypt. Dr Riecker is Director, Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women Studies and also Associate Dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences at AUC.

All commentaries contained within the panel and the sources used to derive it are the responsibility of the author.

5

Reaping the double dividend of gender equality

Although there are continued advances in promoting gender equality in the Middle East and North Africa, for many women and children the promises of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child have not materialized.

Honouring our commitments to all the women and children of the region will require concerted and deliberate action by all sectors of the region's society. To create an enabling environment that realizes the human rights of all people in the Middle East and North Africa – women and men, boys and girls alike – donors and international organizations must fully integrate the gender perspective into their activities through equitable policies on aid, development and trade. Governments – the primary duty-bearers in realizing the rights of women and children – have a pivotal role in mainstreaming the gender perspective into the design, implementation and monitoring of all policies and programmes, as emphasized in the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as by taking specific measures aimed at eliminating gender inequality.

Achieving Millennium Development Goal 3 – promoting gender equality and empowering women – also requires that men and boys, husbands and fathers, voters, teachers, religious and civic leaders, the media, the private sector and women and girls themselves examine gender discrimination openly and honestly and commit to eliminating it in their attitudes, behaviours and practices.

This final chapter brings together a number of key recommendations in several crucial areas that can address this challenge and make an unprecedented difference to the lives of women and children. These areas include education, research, legislation, financing and advocacy.



Education: attacking gender discrimination at its root

Recent trends in girls' education provide grounds for cautious optimism that the Millennium target of gender parity in primary and secondary education can be achieved in the Middle East and North Africa by 2015. But while the gender gap in education has undoubtedly narrowed in several countries, much remains to be done. Gender disparities at the primary and secondary levels, which have been discussed in previous chapters, result in an even wider gap at the tertiary level, where a mere 5 to 10 per cent of students in low-income countries are female.¹

Encouraging parents and communities to invest in girls' education

Even where school fees are not an issue, encouraging poor families to invest in their daughters' education may require incentives. Income supplements, school meals, subsidies and other types of income-support schemes can provide effective incentives for girls' education. One increasingly popular subsidy mechanism, conditional cash transfers, provides poor families with food and compensates parents

for the opportunity costs associated with child labour on the condition that parents send their children to school and take them to health clinics for regular vaccinations and check-ups. Scholarship programmes and cash transfer programmes designed to encourage poor parents to send their children to school should strive to target girls wherever possible. This is particularly important in poor and marginalized communities, where girls' school enrolment remains exceptionally low.

Girl-friendly schools: safe and without bias

For some parents in the region, the main obstacle to sending their children to school is safety. Children who are not in school tend to come from the poorest and most marginalized households and often live in remote rural areas.² Parents may object to sending daughters to school because they feel the school itself is unsafe or that the long journey to school exposes girls to the risk of sexual assault or other forms of violence.³

Governments, parents and international donors must work together to ensure that schools are 'girl-friendly.' Parents and community leaders

Promoting girl-friendly schools in Egypt

In 1993, the Egyptian Ministry of Education, in collaboration with UNICEF, reached 3,000 schools with the One-Classroom School programme. Efforts to improve girls' access to education received a boost in 2000, with the launch of the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), which aims to eradicate gender disparities in all aspects of the education system by 2015. With support from the Government of Egypt, local and national NGOs, UNICEF and six other agencies, UNGEI in Egypt is being led by the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood.

In addition to raising awareness of the importance of girls' education, UNGEI is promoting the development of 'girl-friendly' schools. To be girl-friendly, schools must be constructed close to girls' homes, provide safe water and separate and clean sanitation facilities, and be staffed by teachers who can create and sustain a gender-sensitive and stimulating learning environment. To encourage an increase in the numbers of female educators, UNGEI is training unemployed women to become teachers and is encouraging other members of the community to volunteer their time to support school activities. At its inception, UNGEI concentrated its efforts on primary schoolgirls aged 6 to 12 years old in the deprived hamlets of Sohag, Assiut, Menia, Bani-Suef, Guiza, Fayoum and Beheira. The partnership has pledged to establish 1,203 girl-friendly schools by the end of 2007 to allow the enrolment of 36,090 students, with girls making up 75 per cent. UNICEF estimates that 14,500 children have been reached to date.

See References, page 51.



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should be encouraged to take an active role in all aspects of the design and management of community schools. They need to work together to promote flexible scheduling, increase the safety of school facilities, ensure that schools have latrines for girls and build schools close to students' homes. In addition, teacher training and supervision, as well as monitoring mechanisms and school curricula, must include a gender perspective. By involving a wide range of stakeholders in the design of education systems, governments will be able to construct creative strategies for making schools accessible to all children.

Focusing more resources on achieving gender equality

Assessing the cost of achieving MDG 3 has proved difficult, as gender equality cuts across all the other Goals. However, estimates by the UN Millennium Project using a more rigorous methodology have now been extended to take these issues into

account. According to the Millennium Project's estimate, from US\$40 to US\$60 per capita (measured in constant 2003 US dollars) would be needed annually to achieve gender equality and empower women. The majority of this money was already identified in overall MDG cost estimates, with an additional US\$10-US\$15 per capita (in 2003 US dollars) needed for gender equality specifically. Overall, and given the fact that governments currently earmark fewer resources for gender equality than other MDG areas, low-income countries would need about an additional US\$28 billion (measured in constant 2003 US dollars) in 2006 from donor countries, rising to US\$73 billion in 2015.⁴

Getting the financing right is clearly only the first step, but it is among the most important. It is vital that the money be put to the right uses, integrated with existing government budgets and plans and aligned with poverty reduction strategy papers and other planning processes in which all stakeholders participate. The road to gender equality can be long

and complex, but without sufficient resources the destination will be impossible to reach.

Levelling the playing field in national legislation

Legislative reform can be a powerful strategy for empowering women and girls and safeguarding their rights. Although increasing women's participation in politics at all levels is helping to change legislation that discriminates against women, in many countries of the region women still lack equal access to justice and to legal protection, and in some countries powerful legal obstacles continue to undermine their rights in key areas. Two areas of particular concern in the Middle East and North Africa are domestic violence and property and inheritance rights.

Domestic violence

Combating domestic violence against women and children requires a strong commitment on behalf of policymakers, the judiciary, law enforcement and, in some cases, the international community, to develop comprehensive safeguards and bring perpetrators to justice. Specific legislation is needed to address domestic violence. Worldwide, at least 45 countries have specific legislation against domestic violence, 21 more are drafting more laws, and many countries have amended criminal assault laws to include domestic violence.⁵ But the gap between the laws on the books and their implementation remains often as wide as it is deadly, and important regional differences prevail.

Property and inheritance rights

Reform measures to eliminate gender bias in property and inheritance rights can make a big difference to women's economic empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa. Changing discriminatory patterns of land ownership, however, is often very challenging, especially in countries where women's land and property rights are caught between formal legal systems and customary laws.

Encouraging women's participation in politics

Women make up only one out of 6 national parliamentarians in the world, and in 18 countries they are fewer than one in 10. Quotas are a proven method of addressing the attitudes and social practices that are constraining women's political participation.

The introduction of quotas has led to dramatic changes in women's political participation throughout the world. Of the 20 countries in the world with the most women in parliament, 17 employ some form of quota system.

While potentially effective, however, quotas are no panacea. To be effective, quotas have to match the electoral system of a country. Unless they do, and unless commitments are reinforced by a political system in which rules matter and failure to comply carries consequences, the role of quotas is merely symbolic.⁶

Promoting legal reform in Jordan

The Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW), established by a Cabinet decision in 1992 as a semi-governmental body, is the authority on women's issues and activities for Jordan's public sector. Chaired by H.R.H. Princess Basma, the JNCW works to narrow the gap between the formal acknowledgement of women's rights as detailed by legislation and social attitudes towards women. The JNCW undertook a major achievement in mid-2006, when the Jordanian Cabinet endorsed the updated National Strategy for Jordanian Women. The revised strategy reflects Islamic Sharia and Jordanian values, as well as the government's commitment to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The updated strategy outlines practical steps that will enhance the status of women in legislation, the economy, public life and the media and provide increased social protection.

See References, page 51.

Women empowering women

One of the most important and effective avenues for women's empowerment is the dynamic of cooperation among women. Informal women's collectives that organize around issues such as nutrition, food distribution, education and shelter help to improve the standard of living for women, their families and communities.⁷ Although women's social networks tend to be wider than those of men, they also tend to command fewer economic resources.⁸ National and local governments and international development agencies must encourage and support the ongoing efforts of community-level women's organizations.

Policies that promote women's involvement in community organizations are an important step towards increasing the quality and quantity of women's participation in decision-making processes. But to be truly effective, they require complementary strategies aimed at increasing women's representation in political forums. Moreover, women themselves need to play an active role, participating directly in the redrafting of constitutions and legal codes. Reversing the discriminatory social attitudes and cultural practices that constrain women's roles as decision makers represents a decisive first step towards fulfilling the social, political and economic rights of women and raising the overall health, nutrition,

The Girls' Education Movement in southern Sudan

Following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan in 2005, there is a growing sense of renewal in southern Sudan, with communities focusing on rebuilding for the future. One key aspect of this renewal is the development of education and the role being played by communities themselves in the growth of learning. The Girls' Education Movement (GEM) was established in April 2006 as part of a strategy to promote gender mainstreaming in education, increase girls' participation and improve access to quality primary education for both girls and boys. GEM empowers both girls and boys to take action in matters that affect them. Girls, who always make up the majority of local group members, are encouraged to develop leadership skills, with boys acting in a supportive manner as strategic allies, through drawing on the wisdom of adults.

GEM builds upon the concept of 'creative facilitation' – using local knowledge, music, drama, dance, demonstrations and games, children are encouraged to develop methods for effectively mobilizing their peers into attending school. Local workshops are organized to find creative ways of identifying out-of-school children and bringing them back to school through peer support and passing on messages about the importance of education, particularly for girls, to the community at large. Once in classes, children develop their own strategies for mentoring their peers and ensuring that they attend school regularly. GEM clubs are being formed to make sure that homework is completed in after-school settings and that children also support each other by walking together to and from school. Underlying the concept of creative facilitation is meaningful, non-threatening child participation. It is the children themselves who decide which strategies and approaches work best in their community.

GEM is expanding quickly and already showing results. In 2006, six out of the 10 states in southern Sudan will have active GEM networks. Young people are already developing outreach programmes and taking over management of activities that bring more children into the process. For example, in the town of Rumbek, in Lakes state, 22 schoolchildren and 10 teachers established their GEM network in April; it has now grown to include 66 active participants. These children are now expanding the programme to rural areas outside the town. In the same state, 15 young people trained as peer facilitators have run workshops for more than 200 potential peer supporters. The same process is being seen in action across southern Sudan, as children – especially girls – take the lead in building a groundswell of active support for education.

See References, page 51.

protection (for example, through improved legislation) and education of children.

Women's groups need to be recognized as important agents for women's empowerment and development. Governments and development agencies must involve these groups in poverty-reduction strategies and nurture long-term partnerships. By working together with women's organizations at the community level and targeting development resources through these organizations, international development agencies can help to increase the likelihood that resources will be channelled to the most vulnerable members of poor communities – women and children.

Engaging men and boys

Men have a crucial role to play in eliminating gender discrimination. Throughout the Middle East and North Africa, men continue to dominate decision-making processes in households, economies and governments, as this report has shown. By making child-friendly choices and supporting women in their capacity as decision makers, men can be powerful allies in the struggle for women's equality. Policymakers need to encourage men, starting while they are still boys and young men. Evidence shows that men are more likely to be active, hands-on fathers when they feel positive about themselves and their relationship with the child's mother, and when they have support for active involvement from wives, extended families and employers.⁹

Research indicates that men modify their behaviours according to their understanding of what society expects of them as men and fathers.¹⁰ Advocacy programmes designed to educate men and women on the benefits of gender equality and joint decision making can help to nurture a more cooperative relationship between men and women. For instance, research shows that fathers are more likely to stop abusive treatment of mothers if they have been exposed to information about how gender-based violence adversely affects children.¹¹



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Men and parenting in Tunisia

Under the coordination of the National Committee for Family Empowerment in the Ministry of Childhood, UNICEF and other governmental agencies are raising men's awareness of gender issues in Tunisia. This strategy, dubbed 'communication for behaviour change', aims to promote men's involvement in early childhood development, raise awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding and complementary feeding, and encourage positive attitudes towards adolescent girls' education and health care, especially in rural areas. Results from the programme are still inconclusive, but the early signs are promising.

See References, page 51.

Partnering to enhance gender-disaggregated data and training in the Middle East and North Africa

Gender-disaggregated statistics indicate the status of women relative to men and provide powerful tools for measuring women's participation and empowerment in society. Enhancing the quality of analysis available on the situation of women in the region is the first step in promoting policies that will advance women and society as a whole.

To improve national capabilities in the production, analysis and dissemination of gender statistics in the region, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, in cooperation with UNDP, UNICEF, the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR), the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND) and the International Development Research Centre, launched the Development of National Gender Statistics Programmes in the Arab Countries. Over the past decade, the National Gender Statistics Programmes have generated data and analysis on the situation of women in 12 Arab countries and territories, including Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Qatar, Tunisia, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

In June 2006, several United Nations agencies established the Development of National Gender Statistics in Iraq Project, which aims to institutionalize gender mainstreaming in the entire national statistical system. Funded by the United Nations Development Group Iraq Trust Fund, and implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation, the Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology, UNDP and UNIFEM, the 18-month project aims to raise awareness on the importance of gender statistics in policy formulation and monitoring, and to improve national capacities to produce, analyse and disseminate quality gender statistics and indicators that are consistent with Iraqi national needs and development priorities.

Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR)

The Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) is a resource centre that promotes the views of Arab women in the process of social change across the region. Established in 1993, with the support of AGFUND, UNDP and the Government of Tunisia, CAWTAR is fostering local capacity in research, training and networking on issues related to women, families and development. Over the past 11 years, the centre has enhanced the data available on women in the region through the production and dissemination of its Arab Women Development Reports, the creation of the Arab Network for Gender and Development, and the development of strategic partnerships with local, regional and international organizations. Using its disaggregated gender statistics and detailed analysis on the situation of women in the region, CAWTAR engages in high-level advocacy and networking, providing evidence-based policy recommendations for government planners and development agencies in the region.

Enhancing the data and analysis on the situation of Palestinian women

In the years since the Oslo Accords, a number of efforts have been launched to promote gender mainstreaming in data collection among Palestinian communities. Within the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Northern Triangle region of Israel, for instance, organizations such as the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, the Women's Studies Centre, Bir Zeit Institute of Women's Studies, Mashriqiyat, and the Women's Affairs Centre conduct and publish research, monitor the status of women and hold a variety of training initiatives. In 1996, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics established a gender statistics programme that generates gender-disaggregated data and contributes to the increasingly rich repository of research, training programmes and documentation on Palestinian women and their families and communities.

See References, page 51.



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Improved research and data on the situation of women and girls

In many of the key areas important to women's rights, there is a dire lack of gender-disaggregated statistics. A lack of statistics can result in scant or weak research on the issues that affect women and children. While this report has shown that there are sufficient data and research on women and girls in the Middle East and North Africa to outline where their rights are violated and illustrate the negative impacts these violations can have on children, much more needs to be known about the human tragedy that unfolds in many of the most important aspects of their lives.

Better statistics, particularly in low-income countries, are required to fully assess the extent of gender discrimination and its impact on society. In these situations, international agencies are essential for increasing statistical capacity, but also, as in the case of financial statistics, for working with governments to ensure key data are collected.

Where there is a lack of data, often a lack of research follows. A lack of detailed research

greatly hampers our ability to understand exactly what is happening where, and why.

The time is now

The progress that has been made fighting gender discrimination in the Middle East and North Africa is noteworthy. Girls are catching up with boys in school attendance and performance and in some areas have surpassed them; more women are economically active and at higher levels than ever before; and the number of women in parliament is increasing year by year. But in showing how far the Middle East and North Africa region has come, the assessment of this report also demonstrates the distance yet to be travelled.

Eliminating discrimination will bring a double dividend, not only fulfilling the rights of women but also going a long way to meet those of children as well. With concerted efforts by effective partnerships, real progress can be made. In some aspects, eliminating gender discrimination may be a long and daunting process; in others, faster results are possible. In both cases, for women, and for children, the time to refocus our efforts is now.

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MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

INDICATOR	REGION	WORLD	IINDICATOR	REGION	WORLD
Demographic indicators			Economic indicators		
Total population (2005)	378,532,000	6,449,371,000	GNI per capita (US\$, 2005)	2,627	7,002
Population under 18 (2005)	154,130,000	2,183,143,000	Percentage of population living on less than \$1 a day (1994-2004*)	4	21
Population under 5 (2005)	44,711,000	616,219,000	Percentage share of central government expenditure (1994-2004*) allocated to:		
Survival			Health	5	13
Life expectancy at birth (2005)	69	68	Education	14	6
Neonatal mortality rate (under 28 days), per 1,000 live births (2000)	26	30	Defence	17	12
Infant mortality rate (under 1), per 1,000 live births (2005)	43	52	Percentage share of household income (1994-2004*):		
Under-5 mortality rate, per 1,000 live births (2005)	54	76	Lowest 40 per cent	16	20
Under-5 mortality rate, average annual rate of reduction (1990-2005)	2.7	1.5	Highest 20 per cent	47	42
Maternal mortality ratio, per 100,000 live births (2000, adjusted)	220	400	HIV/AIDS		
Health and nutrition			Adult prevalence rate (15+ years, end- 2005)	0.2	1.0
Percentage of infants with low birthweight (1998-2005*)	15	15	Estimated number of people (all ages) living with HIV (2005)	510,000	38,600,000
Percentage of children who are exclusively breastfed (< 6 months, 1996-2005*)	30	36	Estimated number of children (0-14 years) living with HIV (2005)	33,000	2,300,000
Percentage of under-5s who are moderately or severely underweight (1996-2005*)	16	25	Estimated number of children (0-17 years) orphaned by AIDS (2005)	-	15,200,000
Percentage of population using improved drinking water sources (2004)	88	83	Child protection		
Urban	95	95	Birth registration (1999-2005 [†])	-	-
Rural	78	73	Urban	-	-
Percentage of population using adequate sanitation facilities (2004)	74	59	Rural	-	-
Percentage of 1-year-old children immunized (2005) against:			Child marriage (1987-2005 [†])	-	-
Tuberculosis (BCG)	89	83	Urban	-	-
Diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT1)	96	88	Rural	-	-
Diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT3)	89	78	Child labour (5-14 years, 1999-2005*)	10	-
Polio (polio3)	90	78	Male	12	-
Measles	89	77	Female	9	-
Hepatitis B (hepB3)	88	55	Women		
<i>Haemophilus influenzae</i> (Hib3)	-	-	Adult literacy parity rate (females as a percentage of males, 2000-2004 [†])	77	86
Education			Antenatal care coverage (percentage, 1997-2005 [†])	70	71
Percentage of primary school entrants reaching grade 5 (administrative data; 2000-2004*)	91	83	Skilled attendant at delivery (percentage, 1997-2005 [†])	76	63
Net primary school attendance ratio (1996-2005*)			Lifetime risk of maternal death (2000) 1 in...	100	74
Male	83	78	NOTES:		
Female	77	75	* Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified.		
Net secondary school attendance ratio (1996-2005*)			** Excludes China.		
Male	50	46 **	- Data not available.		
Female	44	43 **			
Adult literacy rate (2000-2004*)	72	80			
Male	81	86			
Female	62	74			

