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**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)**

**WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY  
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**DISCUSSING THE PROPOSED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS  
WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION**



United Nations  
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Note: The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Secretariat.

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## Executive summary

The proposed sustainable development goals, issued in June 2014, are a departure from the reductionist approach of the Millennium Development Goals that do not cover the wider policy framework for gender equality and women's empowerment. The sustainable development goals are an attempt to tackle structural issues, including inequality within and among countries.

Goal 5 of the sustainable development goals, on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, captures some of the major demands of women's groups presented during the development discussions held in the 1990s, which were not included in the Millennium Development Goals. Overall, goal 5 of the sustainable development goals, together with gender-focused dimensions covered under other goals, is broader and touches on more structural dimensions compared to the narrow approach to gender equality reflected in the Millennium Development Goals.

However, the sustainable development goals do not go further than the set of commitments undertaken by States during the 1990s in development conferences and under human rights conventions; they lack real ambition for urgent transformational change. One of their major shortcomings is the limitations of their proposed targets and their accompanying means of implementation with regard to addressing structural changes needed to realize substantive equality between men and women, including in the areas of employment, the reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work and women's control over assets.

Compared to other regions, significant gaps remain in the Arab region between women and men in education, the economy and political empowerment. Women's conditions in the region are highly influenced by deep-rooted and diverse de jure discrimination, patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes.

Development in the Arab region has been curtailed by discrimination against women and deficits in women's empowerment. Overall, growth in the Arab region over the last three decades has not benefited women and other marginalized social groups. Women's situation in the region has also been affected, directly or indirectly, by conflict, occupation and the implications of religious fundamentalism.

The recent popular uprisings in several Arab countries have not offered opportunities to address the challenges that women have traditionally struggled against, and many past challenges are threatening to re-emerge. Nevertheless, the will and influence of citizens, reflected in the popular uprisings, have undoubtedly created more platforms for the struggle against patriarchal norms and religious fundamentalism, thus paving the way towards women's rights and equality.

When finalizing the sustainable development goals, regressive steps must be avoided (which might water down the principles and commitments previously undertaken by States in the area of women's rights); the political will to achieve progress on these goals must be reaffirmed and the human rights agenda in the design of the goals must be actively re-enforced.

Within this context, achieving women's rights, gender equality and justice in the region requires a dynamic structural transformation of development models and multifaceted intervention at the economic, social and political levels, as well as at the national and global levels.

Central to this discussion is the role of the State in designing dynamic economic, social and environmental policy tools, mobilizing development-focused institutions and reforming legislative frameworks.

The added value of the sustainable development goals depends, to a large extent, on operationalizing their means of implementation, including commitments on financing for sustainable development at the

global and national levels. In the national context, effectively reflecting gender considerations in financing for development policies requires a gender-conscious design of tax policies and national budgets.

Overall, developing effective accountability mechanisms for the sustainable development goals requires looking beyond simple indicators. It entails extending the monitoring task to cover economic and social policies implemented under the goals.

The present report has been prepared for the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) as a background paper for the Arab Sustainable Development Report. It focuses on gender equality as a core element for achieving sustainable development and tackles gender mainstreaming as a strategy to overcome gender inequalities. Broad consensus has emerged on the notion that addressing poverty should be interlinked with tackling inequalities, particularly gender inequality, within an integrated and transformative framework rooted in a commitment to human security and environmental protection. In the outcome document of the United Nations Conference of Sustainable Development, the international community emphasized that gender equality and the participation of women were important for effective action on all aspects of sustainable development. It also reaffirmed the vital role of women and the need for their full and equal participation and leadership in all areas of sustainable development, and underscored the collective decision to accelerate the implementation of respective commitments in that regard, as contained in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Agenda 21, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

The present paper focuses on discussing goal 5 and other proposed sustainable development goals that tackle the gender dimension, within the context of development in the Arab region. It reviews the situation of women's rights and gender equality in Arab countries and discusses the links between sustainable development, economic growth and inequalities from a gender-conscious perspective. It provides recommendations on specific policy changes needed in the Arab region to serve women's rights, gender equality, justice and the development process, specifically focusing on policies regarding productive sectors, wage and tax, social protection and trade and investment. These policy areas have been selected primarily because of the systemic implications on women's conditions and rights that would result if gender-focused reforms were implemented. Their selection also tackles the political dynamics of discussing the sustainable development goals and the way forward in the process of designing the post-2015 agenda. However, their selection does not undermine the importance of other policy considerations for women's conditions in the Arab region, including issues related to ecology and climate change and their implications on the agricultural sector (in which the majority of the women in the region are employed) and on food security, but the scope of the present report does not allow for a detailed analysis of this policy issue.

## I. OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN GENDER-RELATED OUTCOMES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCES

The discourse on women's rights and gender equality in sustainable development has evolved since the 1992 United Nations Summit on Environment and Development (Rio Summit) and subsequent United Nations development summits. Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development provides that "women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development".<sup>1</sup>

The fundamental principles that spearheaded the sustainable development agenda and that of women's rights and gender equality in sustainable development were established at the 1992 Earth Summit and reinforced at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio+10). These principles include the precautionary principle,<sup>2</sup> the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities<sup>3</sup> and free, prior and informed consent,<sup>4</sup> especially with regard to indigenous and women's communities and spaces.

### Towards substantive equality between men and women

Article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which entered into force in 1981, requires signatories to condemn all forms of discrimination against women and to take steps, by all appropriate means and without delay, to pursue a policy of eliminating this discrimination. Most Arab countries have ratified the Convention.<sup>a/</sup>

Article 2 of CEDAW also sets out steps that States parties must take to eliminate discrimination, including adopting appropriate legislative and other measures. Most Arab countries have put forward reservations to this article; they indicate a willingness to comply with the obligations provided they do not conflict with Sharia.<sup>b/</sup> Furthermore, article 4, paragraph 1 of CEDAW recognizes the legitimacy of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women.

States parties' obligations under CEDAW extend beyond ensuring the absence of discriminatory legal frameworks; policies must also not be discriminatory in effect. CEDAW requires that States achieve both substantive and formal equality, while recognizing that formal equality alone is insufficient for States to meet their affirmative obligations to achieve substantive equality between men and women.<sup>c/</sup>

<sup>a/</sup> Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen have ratified CEDAW (see [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en)).

<sup>b/</sup> For more details, see [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations-country.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations-country.htm).

<sup>c/</sup> See [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/) and [www.worldwewant2015.org](http://www.worldwewant2015.org). For further information on CEDAW, see Balakrishnan and Elson, 2008.

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> The precautionary approach appears in Principle 15 of the Rio declaration, which provides that "in order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation".

<sup>3</sup> The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities stems from the recognition of historical differences in the contributions of developed and developing States to global environmental problems. It recognizes the common responsibility to contribute to addressing these challenges, while acknowledging the differences in circumstances and capabilities of States. Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration provides that "States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command". This principle takes into consideration equity considerations and equity principles in international law.

<sup>4</sup> The principle of free, prior, and informed consent is embedded in the right to self-determination. It entitles communities to effectively determine the outcome of decision-making processes that affect them, rather than merely having a right to be involved in them.

Since the 1990s, women’s groups have stressed that women’s empowerment is essential for achieving equity between and within countries. Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 entitled “Global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development” presents a major stride in articulating global commitments towards advancing women’s rights and empowerment as part of the global sustainable development agenda.<sup>5</sup> It asserts the need for action to eliminate obstacles to women’s equal participation, particularly in decision-making.

The summits in table 1 were junctures for mobilizing networks of groups and activists that have continued to struggle to ensure that women’s voices and experiences impact policy in all forums, including the United Nations.

By 1985, women’s groups had begun promoting their role at the United Nations. Their mobilization at the Third World Conference on Women, held in Nairobi in 1985, resulted in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. Women organized regional and global preparatory conferences and lobbied for stronger gender language in the official documents of that conference and others.<sup>6</sup>

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, represented a major breakthrough in promoting women’s participation and a renewed global commitment to women’s empowerment. A total of 189 States, including most Arab States,<sup>7</sup> promised women equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making, and to review the differential impact of electoral systems on the political representation of women. They also pledged to set specific targets and implement measures to increase the number of women in all levels of government. Following the Conference, many States introduced quota systems, which led to a significant increase in the number of women being elected as city council officers and mayors. The Beijing Platform for Action also called for gender-sensitive budgets.<sup>8</sup>

TABLE 1. MAJOR CONFERENCES AND MILESTONES IN THE GLOBAL AGENDA ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS

Conference	Focus area
The United Nations Economic and Social Council established the Commission on the Status of Women in 1946	Ensuring the empowerment of women and gender equality, and providing recommendations to the Council on the obstacles relating to women’s rights in political, economic, civil, social and education fields
First World Conference on Women (Mexico City, 1975)	Adopted the first global plan for action that called upon Governments to develop strategies to ensure gender equality, eliminate gender discrimination and integrate women in development and peacebuilding
Second World Conference on the Status of Women (Copenhagen, 1980)	Focused on special actions needed in areas such as employment opportunities, adequate health-care services and education

<sup>5</sup> See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Before and during Rio+10, the Women’s Action Agenda for a Healthy and Peaceful Planet defined the new and emerging issues of the twenty-first century. It identified the growing evidence of climate change and the threat of increased militarism as perhaps two of the greatest challenges facing the planet, and recognized the need for women to add a new set of instruments to traditional advocacy and action to avoid reversing even the most modest gains that had been achieved since the 1992 Rio Summit.

<sup>7</sup> See [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Gender-sensitive budgets are the result of mainstreaming gender considerations in the design of public finance and national budget allocations. A gender-sensitive budget is one where policymakers take into consideration the requirements for fulfilling women’s rights and gender equality when designing sectoral budget allocations and investments; and clarify the proportion of national budgets earmarked for the achievement of gender equality and women’s rights.

TABLE 1 (*continued*)

Conference	Focus area
Third World Conference on Women (Nairobi, 1985)	Focused on equality in social and political participation and decision-making. The Conference recognized the necessity of women's participation in discussions in all areas, not only on gender equality. It resulted in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women
United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992)	Resulted in Agenda 21, including its chapter 24 entitled "Global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development"
Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995).	Unanimously adopted the Beijing Platform of Action that outlined 12 critical issues* that constitute barriers for the advancement of women, and identified a range of steps that Governments, the United Nations and civil society groups should take to make women's human rights a reality
Beijing Review Conferences: Beijing+5 (2000), Beijing+10 (2005) and Beijing+15 (2010).	<p>The 5-year review resulted in a political declaration and further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing commitments.</p> <p>The 10-year review adopted a declaration emphasizing that the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was essential to achieving internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration.</p> <p>The 15-year review adopted a declaration that welcomed the progress made towards achieving gender equality and pledged to undertake further action to ensure the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action</p>
Millennium Summit and adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (New York, 2000)	Adoption of MDG 3 entitled 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment'
Rio+20 Summit (2012).	The Rio+20 outcome document provides that gender equality and the effective participation of women are important for effective action on all aspects of sustainable development. It also reaffirms the vital role of women and the need for their full and equal participation and leadership in all areas of sustainable development, and underscores the collective decision to accelerate the implementation of respective commitments in this regard as contained in CEDAW, Agenda 21, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the United Nations Millennium Declaration

*Source:* Compiled by author.

\* The 12 areas are poverty of women, unequal access to education, lack and unequal access to health care systems, violence against women, vulnerabilities of women in armed conflict, inequality in economic structures, inequalities in power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms to improve the advancement of women, lack of respect and inadequate protection in human rights, under-representation of women in the media, inequalities in natural resource management and in the safeguarding of the environment, and the discrimination and violation of the girl child.

## A. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND INEQUALITIES FROM A GENDER-CONSCIOUS PERSPECTIVE

The Rio+20 Summit refocused the discussion on the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental policies. The Summit was held during a period when discussions on the role of the State and the importance of active policy interventions were re-emerging as major elements in a dynamic approach to sustainable development. To a significant extent, this was triggered by the implications of the financial and economic crises that the world has faced since 2008.

Discussions on the State should include its role at the regulatory level and, more broadly, its active role in economic development, including its part in establishing well-functioning markets and development-focused institutions and its role as a social investor and proactive agent for long-term investments in the real economy. These various roles cover issues of process and institution-building (including establishing a legislative framework and function), and the deliberate design of policies to ensure equitable income distribution, social and gender equality and justice. The promotion of adequate forms of economic growth is also necessary to positively stimulate these roles.

According to Akyüx (2013), the prime responsibility for economic development, a major pillar of sustainable development, lies with the State. Success depends on effective design and implementation of industrial, macroeconomic and social policies, as well as an appropriate pace and pattern of integration into the global economic system.

To achieve sustainable development, countries need to have adequate policy space, which is often limited owing to multilateral and bilateral rules in the areas of trade, investment, finance and debt, in addition to environmental constraints resulting from global warming and increased instability of climatic conditions.<sup>9</sup> Gender equality and women's rights cannot be dealt with in isolation from these underlying constraints that the global economic system imposes.

To achieve sustainable development, it is necessary to determine how economic growth is generated and how trade, investment and finance dynamically interact with development objectives. The extent to which such policies drive equality and justice should form the basis for indicators to measure policy success or failure.

Embedded in such considerations of economic growth is the understanding that a trickle down approach to the economy will not effectively address sustainability and equality and, in turn, women's economic empowerment. It is necessary to assess what growth policies positively affect women's employment and their economic and social rights, and determine the gender-based positive discrimination measures and laws that can address legal and social gender discrimination.

Consequently, it is not enough to add on social and gender considerations to policies focused on market dynamics for growth objectives and on providing an enabling environment for the private sector.<sup>10</sup> Policymaking should result in progressive public policies, including in terms of productive capacities and industrialization, labour markets and wages.

As such, addressing women's rights, gender equality and justice requires women's representation and participation in institutions, policymaking and the economy. It also entails thinking beyond the market and the State to address other dynamic forms of economic, social and political interactions that are embedded in societal relations.

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<sup>9</sup> Akyüx, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> See Women's Major Group, 2013.

Women's civic, political, economic, social and cultural rights are closely interlinked. Gender-conscious economic policymaking, as discussed above, would contribute to breaking the cycle of political and personal rights repression that women often face. Addressing the distribution of economic resources and promoting economic inclusion and freedoms are closely intertwined with achieving more representation and participation in the public political and economic spheres and at the household level.

Such activist interventions are a prerequisite to sustainable development to ensure progress towards women's rights and gender equality and justice. Addressing such fundamental questions about the role of the State and the nature of economic growth, through gender-conscious approaches to representation and policymaking, is essential for sustainable development.

## B. STAKEHOLDERS' VIEWS ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

### 1. *Lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals*

Discussions on the sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development framework have resulted in States and other stakeholders recognizing that the Millennium Development Goals have fallen short of addressing policies necessary for their full achievement. The Goals are considered a dilution of the ambitions and vision of the Millennium Declaration.<sup>11</sup>

The Millennium Development Goals approach development from a poverty and aid perspective, which does not embrace a large segment of the population in developing countries, especially in middle-income countries.<sup>12</sup> According to Sen (2013), these Goals do not address the larger macroeconomic and development framework for policies and programmes on gender equality, or the extent to which this framework is conducive to gender equality.

Gender was narrowly defined within the Goals and they lacked a broader approach addressing women's rights and empowerment in the political, economic and social spheres. Beyond Goal 3 on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, there was a failure to address cross-cutting gender dimensions and dynamics between Goals, including those on poverty, environment, governance, education and global partnerships for development.<sup>13</sup>

Discussions on the sustainable development goals and post-2015 development framework have led States and civil society organizations to realize the importance of moving beyond addressing symptoms to dealing with the causes of global inequalities, and an enabling policy context to achieve sustainable development. The experience with the Millennium Development Goals has reinforced the necessity of addressing structural transformation, including in the economic models and policies underpinning the way resources are used, distribution and redistribution are organized, and production and job creation are pursued.

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<sup>11</sup> See Sen, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Akyüz, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Goal 3 on promoting gender equality and empowering women includes narrow indicators on political representation, employment and education, including the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector and the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. The target assigned to Goal 3 focuses on eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education by 2015. The relationship between the indicators and the target is unclear. For more information on this point, see Spiedloch, 2013; Baydas, 2014; and Sen (2013).

## *2. Reflections from international and regional governmental and non-governmental forums*

The Group of 77 and China, which includes Arab States, have stressed the importance of a genuine departure from the market-based policies of development fashioned on the so-called Washington Consensus to a new set of open macroeconomic policies that avoid the contractionary and unequal impact of the liberal approach, to maintain a reasonably stable macroeconomic environment, pursue long-term growth and employment and lower income inequality.<sup>14</sup>

From a regional perspective, the Arab High Level Forum on Sustainable Development, held in Amman in April 2014,<sup>15</sup> noted the importance of addressing inequalities while looking beyond income poverty to the quality of health and education services and employment. The Forum highlighted the need for progressive social policies and protection systems, including a universal social protection floor that covers all social groups. Participants agreed that the post-2015 development framework and sustainable development goals must explicitly consider the effects of global trade and financing at the global, regional, national, and local levels.

In a regional meeting organized by the Arab NGO Network for Development, in cooperation with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the League of Arab States,<sup>16</sup> participants stressed that a reliable post-2015 development agenda was not only about setting development goals and quantitative indicators. They said that a new development agenda must include transformative changes to global governance systems and national policy choices to achieve development, necessitating a shift towards a model centred on enhancing national productive sectors, which in turn required an enabling trade and investment architecture and a review of distribution policies.

On gender equality and women's empowerment, discussions among States and other stakeholders when designing the proposed sustainable development goals affirmed that gender equality was an end in itself and an essential means for sustainable development and poverty eradication, and that it was the most pervasive form of inequality in the world.<sup>17</sup>

The Women's Major Group, which was created at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, in 1992 and comprises over 500 women's human rights, environment and development organizations, including eight non-governmental organizations from the Arab region, activists and academics, very tellingly promoted the message that it would not be mainstreamed into a polluted stream. This message reflects the conviction that

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<sup>14</sup> In several statements during the sessions of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals, the Group of 77 and China also underlined the importance of improving global economic governance and strengthening the United Nations leadership role in promoting development. Regarding fulfilling the sustainable development goals, the Group added that developing countries should be supported by an enabling international environment, including a supportive and just economic and financial international system with fair, pro-development rules.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on the Forum, see [www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNUM=3315e](http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNUM=3315e).

<sup>16</sup> The meeting was held in Beirut in June 2014 and comprised around 130 participants, including representatives of non-governmental organizations from across the Arab region, labour unions, experts and academics. It was supported by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

<sup>17</sup> These discussions took place in the form of a 30-member Open Working Group of the General Assembly that was tasked with preparing a proposal on the sustainable development goals. Deliberations stressed that gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment in the goals should be aligned with CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the International Conference on Population and Development and the Rio+20 outcome document. Discussions also pointed to broad support for a number of priority actions, including preventing and eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls; empowering women legally and economically; strengthening women's voice, participation in decision-making and leadership in all areas of life; and the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work disproportionately borne by women and girls. The Working Group discussions touched on the need to respect and fulfil the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all individuals, including access to sexual and reproductive health information, education, and services. Material related to Working Group deliberations, including session reports and summary outcomes, is available from <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg8.html>.

achieving women's rights is inextricably linked to structural economic transformation and systemic change in the development model.<sup>18</sup>

In the same line, in February 2014, more than 340 women's groups from around the world, including from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and the Sudan, noted in a statement entitled "A feminist declaration for post-2015" the need for fundamental structural and transformational changes to the current development model. The statement highlighted the importance of redistributing unequal and unfair burdens on women and girls in sustaining societal well-being and economies, intensified in times of violence and conflict and during economic and ecological crisis. Such transformations, according to the statement, require reviewing the current security paradigm of investing heavily in militarization, reversing the model of overconsumption and overproduction, and ensuring a new ecological sustainability plan that respects planetary boundaries. The groups called for gender equality to be considered in a cross-cutting approach across all the goals, strategies and objectives, and as a stand-alone goal to fully achieve women's empowerment and human rights.

### *3. Reflections on the proposed sustainable development goals: Perspectives from women rights groups*

The proposed sustainable development goals are a departure from the reductionist approach of the Millennium Development Goals; they are an attempt to tackle structural issues, including inequality within and among countries.

The Women's Working Group welcomed goal 5 entitled "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". It also welcomed the inclusion of gender equality and women's rights under several other goals, including equal rights to education and life-long learning, decent work and equal pay for work of equal value (see table 2).<sup>19</sup> Another important target under goal 2, entitled "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture", relates to securing equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge and financial services.

Goal 5 of the sustainable development goals captures some of the major demands of women's groups and movements presented during the development discussions of the 1990s that were not covered by the Millennium Development Goals.<sup>20</sup> These include issues such as violence against women, which caused a major debate at the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993; the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994; and the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. These demands also cover the issue of care work and the relation of care work to the ability of women to participate in the labour force, which was the focus of discussions at the Fourth World Conference on Women.

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<sup>18</sup> Civil society groups have often noted the importance of reversing structural barriers, including access to decent work, unequal responsibility for unpaid care work, violence against women, decision-making over finances and resources and land rights, so that gender equality and inclusive growth go hand in hand (see Action Aid, 2012 and Spieldoch, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Women's Major Group, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> See Gita Sen at the High-level Round Table on Priority Theme: Challenges and Achievements in the Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for Women and Girls. Available from [www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Kyf7g-WZIU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Kyf7g-WZIU).

TABLE 2. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS, OTHER THAN GOAL 5, EXPLICITLY ADDRESSING WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER ISSUES

Goal	Reference to women's rights and gender issues
Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere	1.2. By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions. 1.b. Create sound policy frameworks, at national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions.
Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture	2.2. By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under five years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons. 2.3. By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets, and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.
Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all	4.3. By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university. 4.5. By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations. 4.7. By 2030, ensure all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. 4.a. Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.
Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all	6.2. By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.
Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all	8.5. By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value. 8.8. Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.
Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable	11.7. By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.
Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts	13.b. Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities.
Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development	17.18. By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

Source: United Nations, 2014b (A/68/970).

Nonetheless, the Women's Major Group has said that the sustainable development goals still lacked real ambition for the urgent transformational change needed to achieve gender equality, women's human rights, sustainable development in harmony with nature and end inequalities.<sup>21</sup> The Group also noted that the human rights framework was not fully integrated into goal 5.

The Beyond 2015 campaign, which includes over 1,000 civil society organizations from 130 countries, reiterated this point by noting that the proposed sustainable development goals did not properly frame goals and targets around existing human rights obligations; clear references to human rights would strengthen the goals by clarifying their objectives and answerability.<sup>22</sup>

The Women's Working Group has pointed to the lack of reference to the human right to food, water and sanitation; the right of women to decision-making on peace and security; the rights of indigenous peoples; and the right of women to control their sexuality free of coercion, discrimination and violence. The Rio+20 Summit, Governments recognized that the rights of women, men and young people to control all matters related to their sexuality were critical for sustainable development, but failed to reflect this in the sustainable development goals.<sup>23</sup>

The Women's Working Group has also noted that half of the goals lacked references to gender equality and women's human rights, particularly in the context of decision-making on climate, oceans, ecosystems, fisheries, water, energy and rural communities. The goals did not recognize the differential impacts of environmental threats on the lives of women and girls, or their distinctive role in contributing to sustainability and peacebuilding. Another shortcoming of the goals was the limitations of the proposed targets and their accompanying means of implementation, especially with regard to addressing the structural changes needed to realize substantive equality, such as in areas of employment, the reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work and women's control over assets.

Overall, goal 5, together with gender-focused dimensions covered under goals 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13 and 17, was broader and touched on more structural dimensions compared to the narrow approach to gender equality reflected in the Millennium Development Goals. However, it did not go further than the set of commitments undertaken by States at the development conferences held in the 1990s and those contained in human rights conventions.

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<sup>21</sup> Women's Major Group, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Beyond 2015, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> At the Open Working Group session, Ambassador Nozipho Mxakato-Diseko of South Africa reiterated a demand on behalf of 58 member States for three targets related to sexual and reproductive health and rights. He said that, to complete the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals and building on the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action and related agreements, the respect, promotion and protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all must be an essential foundation of a universally relevant, transformative, high-impact and cost-effective sustainable development agenda across its social, economic and environmental dimensions. He said that the following should be added to the goals: under the proposed goal on health, "achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, including quality, comprehensive, integrated and affordable sexual and reproductive health information, education and services that include modern methods of contraception"; under the proposed goal on gender equality, "ensure the respect, promotion and protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all"; and under the proposed goal on education, "achieve universal access to comprehensive sexuality education for all young people, in and out of school, consistent with their evolving capacities" (see Sengupta and others, 2014).

## II. ARAB COUNTRIES' PERFORMANCE ON GENDER-RELATED DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS AND OBLIGATIONS IN THE AREA OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

An ESCWA report on the region<sup>24</sup> concluded that the slow pace of progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals was largely determined by the deficits in gender equality and the empowerment of women, coupled with a lack of capacity and willingness to streamline gender concerns into goal-based national development plans and poverty reduction strategies. Previously, the Arab human development reports<sup>25</sup> had cited discrimination against women as one of the main deficiencies curtailing development in the Arab region.

Compared to other regions (e.g. Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa), the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region comes at the bottom of the Social Watch Gender Equity index, which measures the gap between women and men in education, the economy and political empowerment (see annex).

The following section sets out observations and data from a review of the Millennium Development Goals in the Arab region and of reports by the CEDAW Committee for selected Arab countries.<sup>26</sup> The concluding observations by the CEDAW Committee highlight some of the major shortcomings currently facing Arab countries in terms of policy, legislative frameworks, institutional structures, stereotypes and other harmful practices against women (for details on country cases, see the annex to the present report).

It is worth noting that, under the Universal Periodic Review process, the number of recommendations on women's rights as a proportion of the overall number of recommendations received by Arab countries have ranged between 15 per cent and 31 per cent (for more information, see annex).

### A. EDUCATION AND HEALTH

*The Arab Millennium Development Goals Report*<sup>27</sup> addresses progress towards gender parity in education in the Arab region. Arab countries are close to universal net primary enrolment rates, except the least developed ones. However, conflicts and crises in several countries, such as Iraq, Libya, Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, have a significant effect in the short and long terms. Furthermore, poverty remains one of the major factors affecting access to education.

The report notes that regional disparities exist at the tertiary education level. Countries with limited national wealth have significantly more men in tertiary education than women, unlike wealthier countries of

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<sup>24</sup> ESCWA, 2011.

<sup>25</sup> The Regional Bureau for Arab States of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) published a series of Arab human development reports, starting with a report entitled *Creating Opportunities for Future Generations* in 2002, followed by three reports entitled *Building a Knowledge Society* (2003), *Towards Freedom in the Arab World* (2004) and *Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World* (2005). A fifth report, entitled *Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries*, was published in 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Reports reviewed extend back to 2010, including Bahrain 2014, Iraq 2014, Qatar 2014, Algeria 2012, Kuwait 2011, Oman 2011, Egypt 2010 and Tunisia 2010. The areas of observation by the Committee reviewed for the purposes of the present report include constitutional framework and discriminatory laws; national machinery for the advancement of women; stereotypes and harmful practices; violence against women; participation in political and public life; nationality; education; employment; health; rural women; and marriage and family (for more information, see annex 2 to the present report).

<sup>27</sup> ESCWA, 2013a.

the region, including GCC countries where the Gender Parity Index, measuring relative access to tertiary education between men and women, is 1.58, compared to 1.22 in Arab Maghreb countries and 0.43 in least developed Arab countries. In Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, the enrolment of women in tertiary education is double that of men.<sup>28</sup>

Yet, access to tertiary education does not necessarily reflect access to the labour market or women's employment in these countries. Access to labour markets and women's economic contribution are often hindered by structural barriers in the labour market itself, especially in Arab middle-income countries, and by cultural stereotypes and barriers.

The CEDAW Committee has observed that, while enrolment levels have increased in Arab countries overall, there is often a lack of information regarding dropout rates. In some countries, students are segregated based on sex in public schools and universities. Women are concentrated in traditional feminized education areas and underrepresented in technical and vocational education, which affects their employment opportunities.

Concerning health, the report shows that much of the lack of progress on the Millennium Development Goals indicators and targets in some Arab countries is due to the lack of access to, or the poor quality of, health care. Achievements on some indicators, like access to antenatal care, differ between the richest and poorest quintiles in Arab countries, except Yemen, indicating the lack of adequate availability of public health services. The report states that the regional maternal mortality ratio decreased by 27 per cent between 1990 and 2010, although progress between 2000 and 2010 stalled compared to the 1990s. These aggregate numbers hide differences among Arab countries. Arab Mashreq and Maghreb countries registered a 60 per cent decline in maternal mortality between 1990 and 2010. GCC countries reached 15 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010, which is lower than the average in developed regions (16 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010). Regarding access to reproductive health, the number of births attended by skilled health personnel in Arab Mashreq countries has increased, while least developed Arab countries, like the Sudan and Yemen, have not made much progress on this front. At the regional level, the percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel increased from 52 per cent in 1990 to 69 per cent by 2010.<sup>29</sup>

The CEDAW Committee has noted the limited budget allocations to the health sector in several Arab countries, which has negatively affected the quality of health-care services. Furthermore, the special needs of women with disabilities have, overall, not been identified or addressed.

## B. EMPLOYMENT AND CONDITIONS OF RURAL WOMEN

Participation of women in the labour market in the Arab region reached 27 per cent in 2011; the lowest rate in the world<sup>30</sup> (figures I a and b). This is coupled with a high unemployment rate, which was around 20 per cent in 2012 and decreased to 17 per cent in 2013, compared to 8.5 per cent unemployment among men for the same period.<sup>31</sup> This limited decrease could in part be explained by readjustments in countries that witnessed transitions, such as Tunisia, where unemployment has increased in the light of the uprisings (figures II (a) and (b) and 3).

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

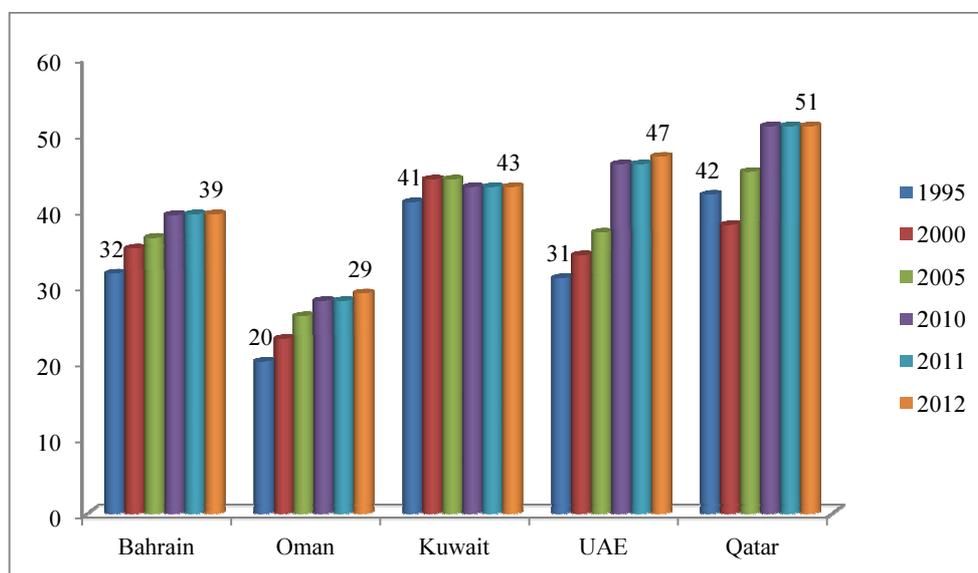
<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 30-32.

<sup>30</sup> World Bank statistics. The rate is 56 per cent in low and middle-income countries and 68 per cent in countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

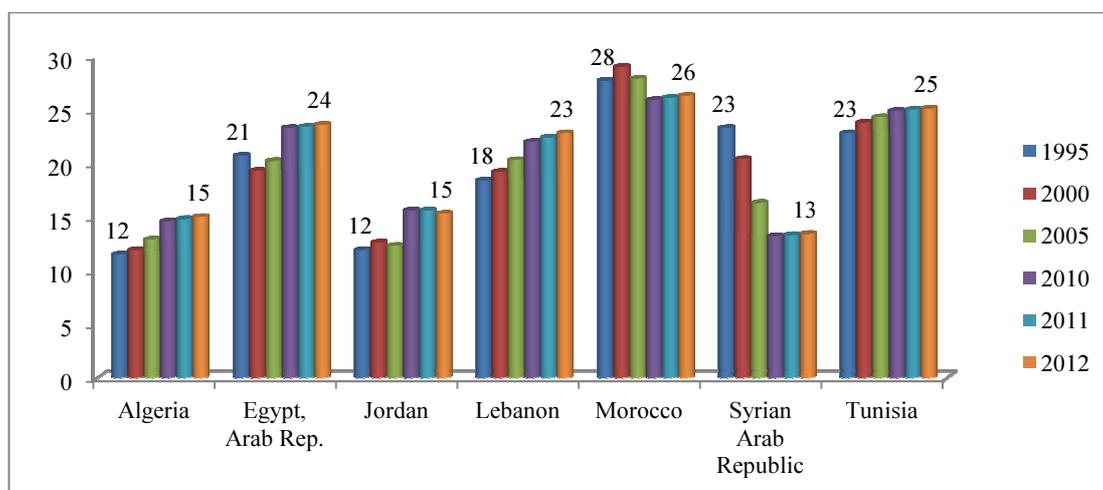
<sup>31</sup> ESCWA, 2014a, p. 67.

**Figures I. Women's participation rates in the labour force (ages 15+)**  
(Percentage)

(a)



(b)



Source: World Bank data, compiled by the Arab NGO Network for Development.

Note: Labour force participation rate is the proportion of the population aged 15 and older that is economically active for the production of goods and services over a specified period. The high rates registered in GCC countries reflect the high numbers of expatriate female workers.

The ESCWA gender lens report<sup>32</sup> indicates that women continue to hold less than 20 per cent of paid jobs outside the agricultural sector compared to double that rate in the global markets. In addition, women who find paid employment are, on average, paid less than men for the same work. Women's wages in manufacturing as a share of men's wages in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic are 66 per cent, 68 per cent, 50 per cent and 79 per cent, respectively (figure IV). Similarly, women's share in

<sup>32</sup> ESCWA, 2011.

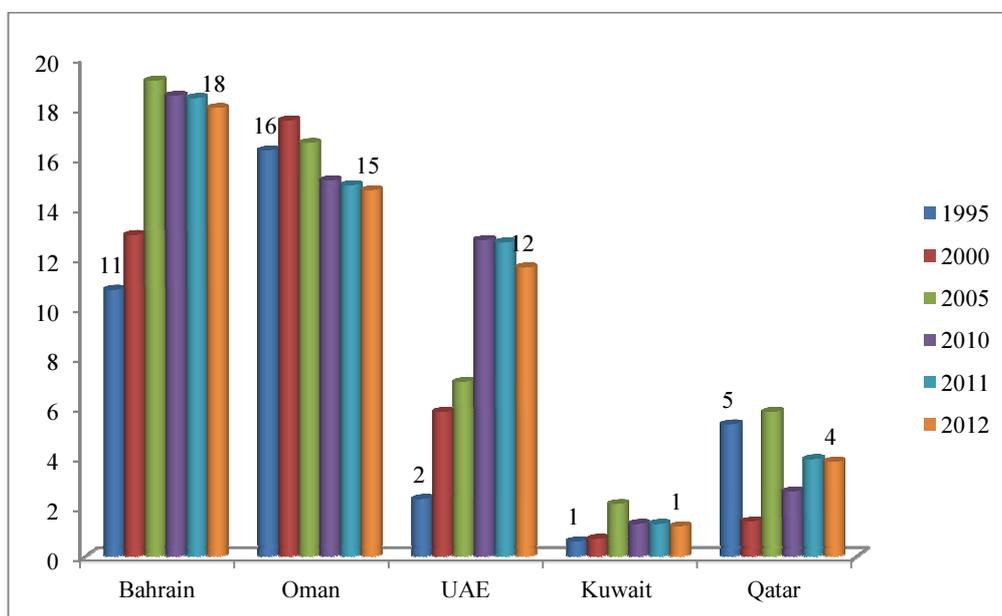
senior management positions, including as legislators, senior officials and managers, remains limited at around 10 per cent in most Arab countries, compared to 25 per cent globally.

Concerning employment, the CEDAW Committee has observed the very low participation of women in the formal labour force in Arab countries, especially in the private sector. In many Arab countries, the legal framework does not guarantee equality between women and men employees; it does not prohibit direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds enumerated under the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions. Specific legislation that defines and prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace is often absent. Several countries lack information concerning the levels of remuneration disaggregated by sex. In some countries, women are required to present a letter of consent from their male guardians to obtain employment. Furthermore, in several Arab countries, there are serious concerns regarding harassment of migrant domestic women workers.

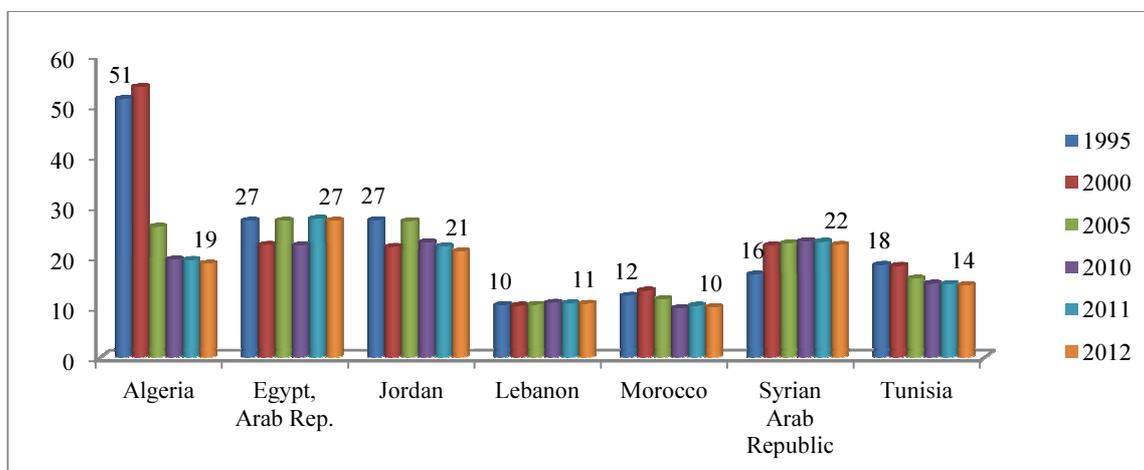
### Figures II. Women's unemployment

(Percentage)

(a)



(b)



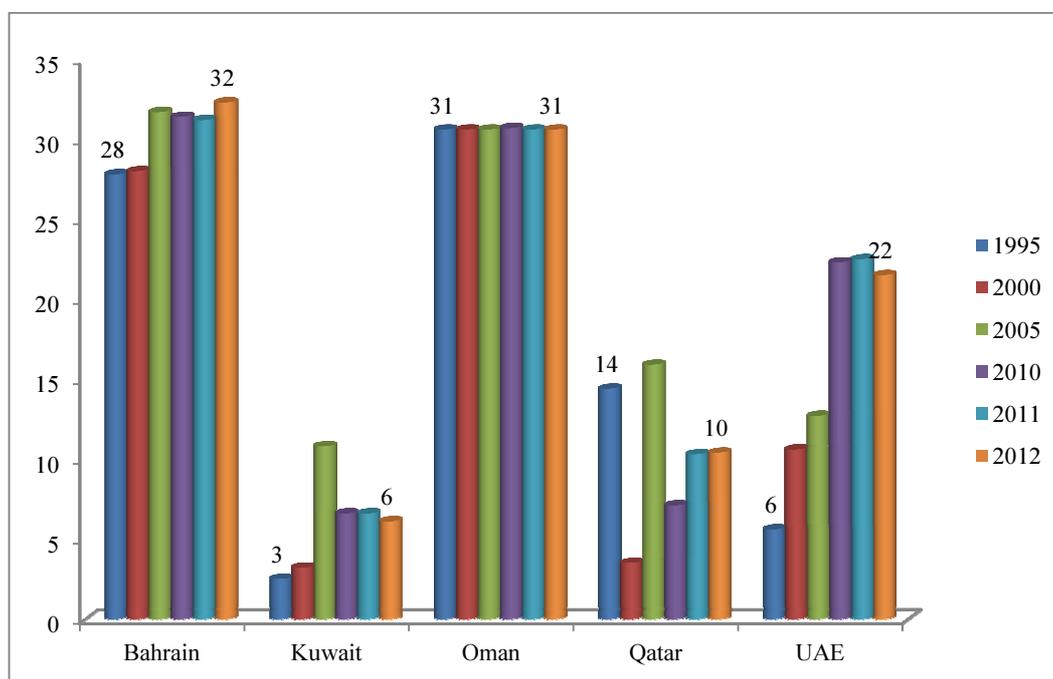
*Source:* World Bank data, compiled by the Arab NGO Network for Development.

*Note:* Unemployment rates refer to the share of the labour force that is without work but available for and seeking employment.

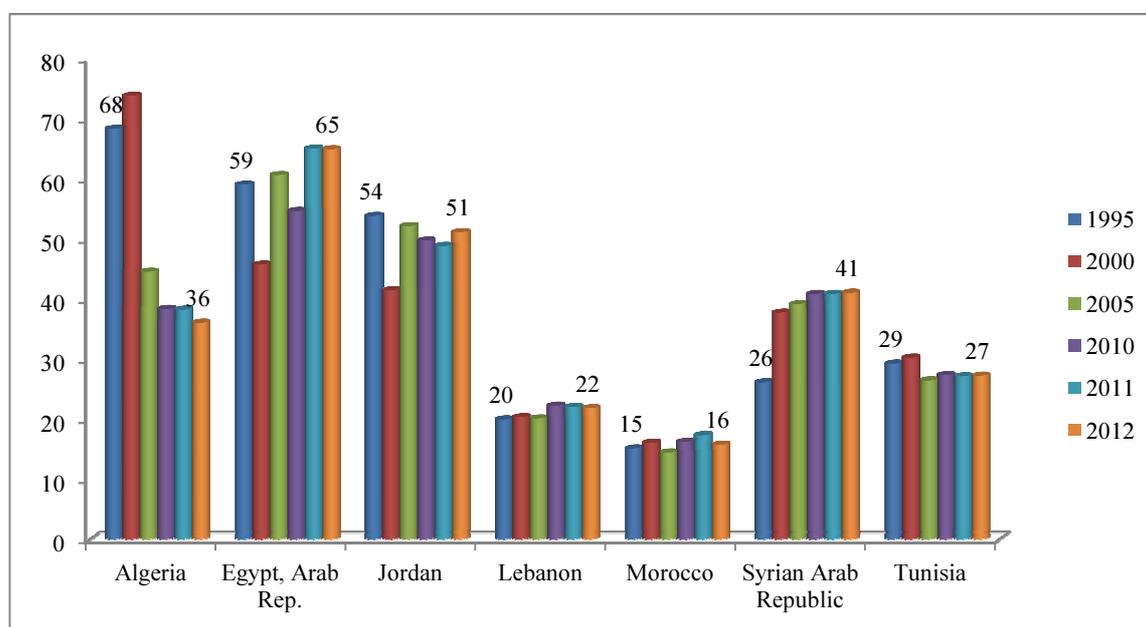
**Figure III. Unemployment among young females (aged 15-24)**

(Percentage)

(a)



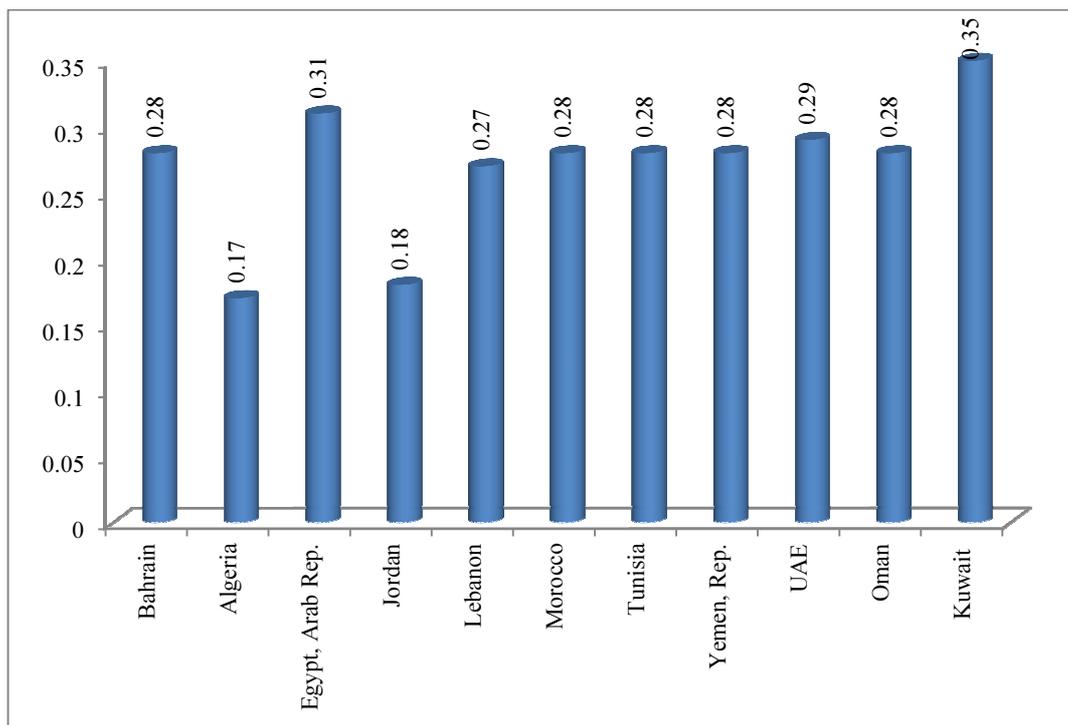
(b)



Source: World Bank data, compiled by the Arab NGO Network for Development.

Note: Youth unemployment refers to the share of the labour force aged 15-24 without work but available for and seeking employment.

**Figure IV. Estimated earned income (female to male ratio)**



Source: World Economic Forum, 2014.

Choices of women on the economic front are limited by a combination of factors emerging from the economic structural constraints, legislative gaps and cultural and social norms.<sup>33</sup> The influence of these factors on the situation of women varies across Arab countries.

Some of the main areas for action in support of advancing women's rights in the region include empowering rural women. It is worth noting that the rural populations in Arab countries make up about 43 per cent of the overall population.<sup>34</sup>

The CEDAW Committee has observed the difficulties that rural women face in several Arab countries in gaining access to health care, social services and education, and participating in decision-making. They also have limited access to credit and property/land, often resulting from prevalent traditional practices, and are particularly exposed to poverty and early marriage.

Some Arab countries have taken steps towards developing national strategies and integrated development programmes, in addition to establishing observatories, special funds, and centres to offer services and build capacities in the area of women's employment.<sup>35</sup>

#### C. DE JURE DISCRIMINATION

<sup>33</sup> ESCWA, 2014a, p. 63.

<sup>34</sup> World Bank 2013 data on rural population as a percentage of total population. Available from <http://data.worldbank.org/topic/agriculture-and-rural-development> (accessed April 2015).

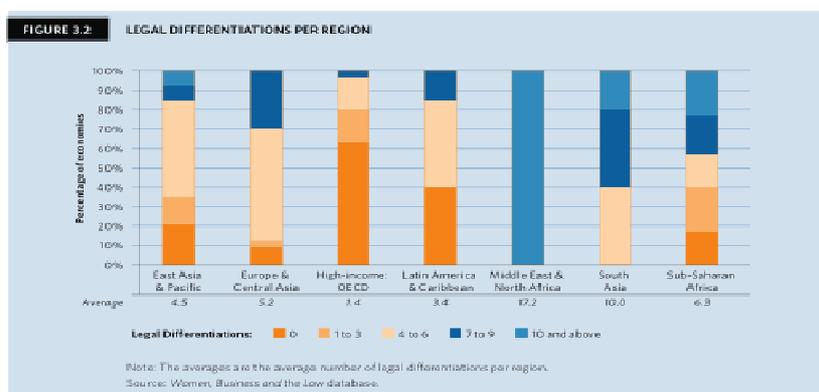
<sup>35</sup> See ESCWA, 2014b.

In terms of de jure discrimination, 14 countries in the Arab region are found to have 10 or more gender differences in formal laws and institutions in areas covered by a report entitled *Women, Business and the Law*.<sup>36</sup> Compared to other regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and the Pacific and South Asia, the Arab region has the highest number of countries whose laws discriminate on the basis of gender. According to the report, greater lack of parity is associated with lower women's labour force participation.

Regarding marriage and family, the CEDAW Committee has documented several discriminatory laws for women, including laws related to inheritance, child custody, guardianship and divorce, in addition to the requirement of a matrimonial guardian as a condition for adult women to marry and the permissibility of polygamy. Concerning nationality, several Arab countries deny women the right to transmit their nationality to their children or do so on a case-by-case basis.<sup>37</sup>

The Committee has repeatedly observed that most Arab countries lack comprehensive civil and criminal law provisions defining and prohibiting discrimination and violence against women, contrary to their obligations under CEDAW. Discriminatory laws and provisions are evident in nationality codes, penal codes, personal status codes and criminal codes and, in some countries, they extend to prison, education and private sector labour acts.

**Figure V. Legal differentiation among men and women**



Source: World Bank and International Finance Corporation, 2011, p. 14.

#### D. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

There is a high prevalence of domestic violence against women and girls in Arab countries, especially against women migrant domestic workers. Such challenges are amplified given the significant increase in the number of displaced women and refugee communities across the Arab region.

Yet, one of the main shortcomings in addressing violence against women is a lack of comprehensive laws that combine victim prevention, protection and compensation and criminalize violence.<sup>38</sup> The CEDAW Committee has noted the lack of specific laws on violence against women in most Arab countries, including on domestic violence and marital rape. In many Arab countries, statistics, research and documentation on violence against women are often lacking and there is an absence of policy requiring medical personnel to monitor and report cases of domestic violence against women.

<sup>36</sup> World Bank and International Finance Corporation, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Such as the cases of divorce, death or statelessness of the father of the child in Kuwait.

<sup>38</sup> ESCWA, 2014b.

ESCWA research indicates the limitations of criminal law systems in the region, including on the principle of due diligence.<sup>39</sup> It also points to the absence of referral systems in the majority of Arab countries, leaving victims of violence unprotected.

In many Arab countries, penal codes exempt male rapists and kidnappers from punishment if they subsequently marry their victims. The CEDAW Committee has often noted its concern about the impunity that is too often enjoyed by perpetrators of such acts, as demonstrated by the high number of withdrawn complaints. Furthermore, the Committee has expressed concern about the prevailing mentality in many Arab countries that family relations trump the protection of women and the suppression of violence against them.

Some Governments in the region have taken steps towards developing national strategies, preparing draft bills on domestic violence and legislation prohibiting trafficking in women, and establishing referral systems for victims and monitoring and follow-up centres, including complaint centres and shelters.<sup>40</sup> Some countries have established specialized police units to tackle violence against women.

#### E. PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE

The Inter-Parliamentary Union has indicated a slight improvement in women's participation rates in Arab parliaments, increasing from 13.8 per cent in 2013 to 15.9 per cent in 2014. However, the Arab region ranks lowest in this regard compared to other regions.<sup>41</sup>

These results also hide discrepancies among Arab countries (figure VI). For example, in Tunisia, three additional parliamentary seats were occupied by women in 2014, but in Egypt, women's share of parliamentary seats dropped from 12 per cent before the uprisings to 2 per cent afterwards, following the abolishment of the quota system and the enactment of a new electoral law.<sup>42</sup>

Regarding participation in political and public life, the CEDAW Committee has observed that women are largely underrepresented, often because of patriarchal attitudes towards their role. Some Arab States have instituted a quota system; however, the participation of women in governmental legislative bodies, the judiciary, public organizations, diplomatic corps and local government bodies is still limited.<sup>43</sup> The Committee has noted its concern that women's representation in trade unions and managerial and decision-making positions and on boards of directors in the private sector continues to be low.

Some Arab States have taken steps to mainstream gender in public policymaking, including developing plans to integrate gender perspectives at all levels within public institutions and priority sectors for women, and establishing gender units and networks to build staff capacities in these areas. Tools include gender mainstreaming in national and sectoral surveys, studies and public budgets, and the establishment of sex-disaggregated statistical databases and gender-sensitive budgets.<sup>44</sup> Some Arab States have also enacted the quota system in representative councils, especially local and provincial councils and parliaments, as a means to promote women's participation in decision-making.

Yet, national machineries for the advancement of women, as observed by the CEDAW Committee, is often underresourced or is not fully independent. In most countries, there is a lack of clarity about the effect of these machineries on gender equality.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

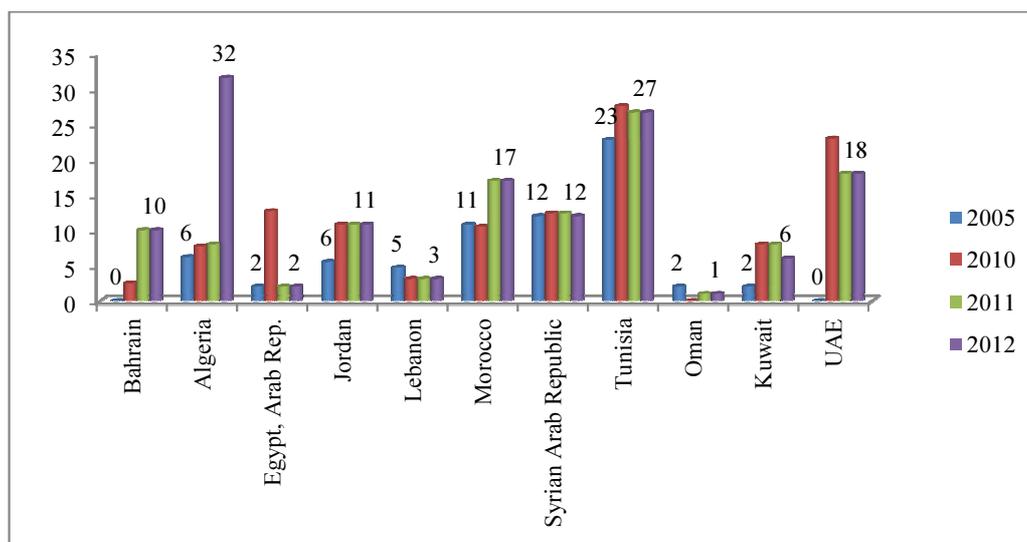
<sup>41</sup> ESCWA, 2014a.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>43</sup> In some countries, like Jordan, progress has been achieved in women's participation in the diplomatic corps, which increased from 3.8 per cent in 2000 to 17.9 per cent in 2013. The proportion of female judges increased from 1.2 per cent to 15.5 per cent over the same period (ESCWA, 2014a, p. 64).

<sup>44</sup> ESCWA, 2014b.

**Figure VI. Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (Percentage)**



Source: World Bank data, compiled by the Arab NGO Network for Development.

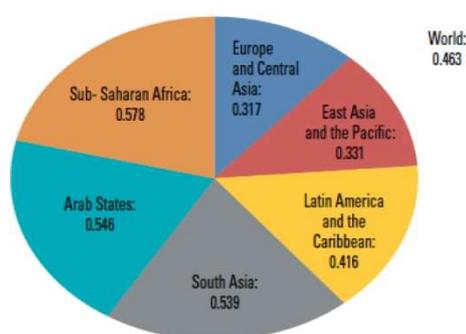
Note: The number of women in parliaments is expressed as a percentage of parliamentary seats occupied by women in a single or lower chamber.

#### F. STEREOTYPES AND PATRIARCHAL ATTITUDES

The CEDAW Committee has observed pervasive patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the responsibilities of men and women in all reviewed countries, which overemphasize the roles of women as wives and mothers. It has also noted the resurgence of adverse cultural norms and traditions in several Arab countries, which have perpetuated discrimination against women and girls, reflected in disadvantageous and unequal status in employment, decision-making, marriage and family relations, and violence against women.

It is worth noting that, in 2013, the Arab region ranked fifth from six regions in the world on the Gender Inequality Index, reflecting the severity of inequalities in the area of reproductive health, empowerment and labour market participation (figure VII).

**Figure VII. Gender Inequality Index 2013**



Source: Data from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2014.

Note: The gender inequality index 2013 is one of the human development indicators reported annually by UNDP, which reflects gender-based inequalities. It captures the loss of achievements in a country owing to gender inequality, focusing on the following three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and labour market participation.

## G. ADDRESSING GENDER EQUALITY IN A CONTEXT OF RECURRING CONFLICTS, STATE CRISES AND RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

Arab societies are influenced, directly or indirectly, by State crises and the recurrence of conflicts, occupation and the implications of religious fundamentalism. While the repercussions on people's rights and broader political, social and economic realities differ between countries, they all leave women susceptible to various forms of violence and exclusion. It is unlikely that these problems will be resolved in the short term.

The following four major vulnerability categories can be found in the Arab region: women living under military occupation; women living in areas controlled by radical fundamentalists and armed groups; women refugees; and internally displaced women, including those who have been forcibly displaced by occupation forces. Women victims of these realities are often not included in statistics, and policies may overlook their specific situations and needs. Consequently, discussing the sustainable development goals in the Arab region requires reflection on the specific nature of complex realities resulting from these contexts and the required interventions.

The situation of women in refugee camps, especially that of Syrian refugees, represents a dramatic setback in the struggle against discrimination and violence against women. Various reports have surfaced on cases of rape, early marriage, violence and an increase in the number of households whose livelihoods depend on single women.

In its general recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, the CEDAW Committee underlines the importance of ensuring that immediate humanitarian assistance and protection are complemented with long-term strategies in support of the socioeconomic rights and livelihood opportunities of returnee, internally displaced and refugee women, and enhanced leadership and participation, with a view to empowering women to choose durable solutions that suit their needs. It also stresses the obligations of States parties to CEDAW to protect persons within their effective control, even if not situated within their territory, and that States parties are responsible for all their actions affecting human rights, regardless of whether the affected persons are within their territory.

## H. CHANGES IN THE LIGHT OF UPRISINGS IN ARAB COUNTRIES

Women in their multiple roles as activists, students, protestors at the industry level and with labour groups, intellectuals, teachers, mothers, civil society mobilizers, among other capacities, have played various parts in making the uprisings a reality in the Arab region, which have raised complex questions regarding the links between political governance, social and economic policies and peoples' right to development. The uprisings and transitions have made it clear that the sustainability of democratic practice cannot be ensured without citizens actively practising full citizenship, in its economic, social, political and cultural dimensions, including the fulfilment of women's rights and gender equality and justice in all these areas.

Although hopes for change swept across the region, the threat of a backlash against women's rights quickly emerged after the fall of regimes in several Arab countries, including Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, and various political developments have limited the platforms for demanding women's rights and gender equality.<sup>45</sup>

The backlash against women's rights and women's groups was the start of a broader backlash against change in the region. Islamist political parties that came to power following the uprisings and military

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<sup>45</sup> For more information, see Mohamadieh, 2012.

regimes struggling to maintain power clamped down on attempts to place women's rights at the core of democratic transitions; a phenomenon reflected in public assaults on women activists.<sup>46</sup>

In the first round of elections following the uprisings, Islamist political parties won a majority in Egypt and Tunisia. Women were not fairly represented in most national parliaments.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, religion began playing a greater part in defining women's roles and political, economic and social statuses.

Even positive developments were manipulated, such as the establishment of the quota system at the party lists level for the October 2011 National Constituent Assembly election in Tunisia. Many parties ignored the spirit of the law requiring the inclusion of women on party lists by offering them the lowest positions on the lists.<sup>48</sup>

It is worth noting that the narrative in support of overcoming the schism between religious and secular approaches to women's rights was appropriated by some Islamists groups that had come to power in the region.<sup>49</sup> Women's rights became part of the political game and were used as a tool for gaining a liberal image or for responding to the political ideology of the opposition without integrating gender equality and women's rights in practices and work programmes.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the backlash against women's rights, women actively took part in constitutional debates in Egypt and Tunisia, which represented a struggle for women's rights and equality. In the aftermath of the 2011 uprising in Yemen, women actively participated in the National Dialogue Conference and the Constitutional Drafting Commission, where a proposal was endorsed to include an article in the constitution guaranteeing that 30 per cent of those serving in the Government would be women.<sup>51</sup>

Overall, for women in the Arab region, the uprisings did not result in opportunities to address traditional contentious issues. On the contrary, old struggles are threatening to re-emerge, which stresses the need to focus on developing platforms for women to publicly express their demands. Moreover, the threat of relegating women to the margins of political, economic and social life is evident; such trends can be seen in the history of women's role in revolutions and political change in the region. In the case of the Algerian War of Independence (1954 to 1962), although women were on the front lines of the revolution, they were quickly sidelined from political forums.

Yet, the significant citizen power that manifested itself during the uprisings will undoubtedly lead to more platforms for launching struggles against patriarchal norms and religious fundamentalism, thus paving the way towards women's rights and equality. This can be actively pursued through citizens' empowerment, various forms of activism and enhancing the role of women in unions.

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<sup>46</sup> Examples include the "blue bra" incident in Cairo, an assault on women's groups marching on 8 March Day in Cairo, the assassination of a female political activist in Libya, the harassment faced by female protesters in Yemen and the widespread political arrest and imprisonment of women activists in the Syrian Arab Republic.

<sup>47</sup> See ESCWA, 2014a, table 9, p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> Charrad and Zarrugh, 2013.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> See Mohamadieh, 2012.

<sup>51</sup> The presidentially appointed group assigned to write the constitution was one member short of reaching the minimum margin of 30 per cent; it comprised only 4 women sitting on the 17-member panel (Al Jazeera, 2014).

### III. MOBILIZING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN PURSUIT OF GENDER EQUALITY AND JUSTICE IN THE ARAB REGION

As mentioned above, addressing women's rights and gender equality and justice in the Arab region cannot be detached from reforming development models, including rethinking economic, social and sustainable development policies in Arab countries.

The growth achieved in the Arab region over the last three decades has not benefited women, boosted equality, or improved the situation of other vulnerable social groups. Despite economic growth and labour productivity gains in many Arab countries, the wage share of national incomes has either stagnated or declined. Wage depression has been associated with the labour market flexibilities adopted in the region and the prioritization of competitiveness in export-oriented sectors. Consequently, countries have achieved economic growth while poverty, unemployment and inequalities remained on the rise. Inequalities, reflected in wage depression, high unemployment and overall social vulnerabilities, have increased between regions; men and women; and the young and older populations.<sup>52</sup>

Within this context, addressing women's rights cannot be undertaken through a piecemeal approach that focuses on specific indicators and marginalizes the broader policy context. Systemic revisions of policies addressing women's rights and gender equality and justice should be integrated into overall policy reform and interventions aimed at building the productive sectors, eradicating poverty, creating decent employment, pursuing redistribution, reforming education and setting comprehensive social protection policies.

Rethinking development models necessitates rethinking a variety of economic policy tools, including trade, investment, finance tax and budget allocations, which need to be redesigned in support of nationally identified long-term dynamic development processes and within a sequence aligned with achieved levels of development and targeted development objectives. Moreover, rethinking development models entails a revision of regulatory frameworks and a revamp of the mandates of public institutions.

This process requires an assessment of environmental constraints on economic growth and development, given the instability of climatic conditions resulting from centuries of industrial development in advanced economies and unsustainable production and consumption patterns. Women's vulnerability to the fallout from climate change is heightened given the challenging economic, social and cultural contexts they face. Attending to women's livelihoods in various areas of development policymaking, especially women involved in the agricultural sector, is essential. This includes designing climate change policies and initiatives and decision-making with a gender responsive approach.

Central to this discussion is the role of the State. As noted in previous sections, discussions on the role of the State have resurfaced in the light of the global financial and economic crises. In the Arab region, this discussion was also driven by the changes foreseen in view of the popular uprisings in several Arab countries.

Often, States in the Arab region have adopted a passive strategy, as opposed to an activist and idealistic role,<sup>53</sup> promoting hands-off liberalization policies and a shrinking State—the dominant approach since the 1980s. The uprisings in the Arab region were an opportunity to consider possibilities for

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<sup>52</sup> Mohamadieh, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

new economic models and societal contracts in the Arab countries, with the aim of rethinking the role of the State.<sup>54</sup>

Although the proposed sustainable development goals currently lack detail on several systemic issues that are essential to achieving structural transformation in developing countries, including Arab countries, they provide important targets whose achievement could make a difference in women's lives across the region. The following sections will review selected areas essential for sustainable development through gender-conscious structural transformation in the Arab region. Some are well addressed by the proposed sustainable development goals, but others ought to be strengthened, including by broadening and clarifying gender-focused dimensions.

#### A. PRODUCTIVE CAPACITIES

Arab economies have generally witnessed a decline in productive sectors, reflected in stagnating shares of agriculture and manufacturing as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) and a rapid expansion in low value-added service activities, combined with a drop in the contribution of productivity to employment.<sup>55</sup>

Resolving the unemployment challenge in the Arab region is directly linked to reviving productive capacities and breaking away from low added-value productivity and low job generation. Consequently, addressing women's right to work requires broader policies that tackle structural barriers facing the industrialization and revitalization of productive sectors and employment generation in the region.

Reforming productive policies in the areas of agriculture, industry and services necessitates structural transformations through a deliberate and dynamic policy framework under which trade, investment and finance support and expand policy space, rather than burden it.<sup>56</sup> Such policies must not be gender neutral given that they do not have the same implications for men and women. States must monitor this differentiated impact and design gender-conscious policies that avoid structural discrimination and redress existing biases and inequalities.

Reviewing the conditions facing rural women from a human rights lens reveals the challenges they face in gaining access to health care, social services, education and participating in decision-making. They also have limited access to credit and property/land and are particularly exposed to poverty and early marriage. Agricultural policies could highly influence opportunities for enhancing women's participation in the sector, including strengthening their status and ensuring that their work is paid and decent. In a broader context, the agricultural sector is central to food security in the region and women's well-being.

Redressing the decline in the agricultural sector, given its social and economic contributions, cannot be undertaken without the State actively clarifying a long-term policy for developing the sector, including a legal framework to support productive investments that is respectful of the rights of rural communities and empowers small-scale farmers who form a majority in Arab countries, and among whom women's participation is concentrated.

Goal 2 of the sustainable development goals, entitled "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture" includes as targets doubling the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family

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<sup>54</sup> See ESCWA, 2013b; and 2014، *نعمه*.

<sup>55</sup> Arnim and others, 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Mohamadieh, 2012.

farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment. This is a priority area for women's rights and equal opportunities in the Arab region.

Goal 2 should initiate the review of agricultural policies in Arab countries, including investment and trade rules related to agricultural policies and the role of the State as a public investment provider and a supporter of services essential to the enhancement of women's role in this sector.

## B. WAGE AND TAX POLICIES

The draft sustainable development goals have underlined the importance of full and productive employment and decent work for all women, including young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value (see proposed target 8.5, listed in table 2). Unemployment is concentrated among women and young persons in the Arab region (figures II and III).

Monitoring women's conditions in the region reveals very low participation in the formal labour sector, as mentioned in previous sections. The CEDAW Committee has noted the lack of guarantees in legal frameworks to ensure equality between women and men employees, as provided for in ILO conventions.

Women also suffer from a deep wage gap, rising to over 50 per cent in some cases. An employment and wage-led development strategy is therefore essential to addressing women's rights and equality, entailing active distribution and income policies, including minimum wage legislation, strengthening social security systems and union operations.<sup>57</sup>

Goal 5 of the sustainable development goals includes a target to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate. This reflects a realization that economic dynamics depend on the availability of care work. Yet, the unfair social organization of care (maintaining it as the domain of households and women) is the foundation of persistent gender inequalities. Recognizing and valuing care and domestic work requires legislative and policy changes throughout State systems.<sup>58</sup> Beyond its economic impact, fulfilling such a target would positively affect restrictive social norms that impede women in the Arab region.

Fiscal policies, including revenue-raising tax policies and expenditure, are an essential tool for States to meet their human rights commitments, combat poverty and fulfil their obligation to use available resources to realize economic, social and cultural rights.<sup>59</sup>

Tax systems across the Arab region share similar facets, including low proportions of tax revenues as a percentage of GDP, which range between 10 per cent and 17 per cent, and a focus on reducing State deficit compared to a more comprehensive development approach to investing in economic and social progress.<sup>60</sup>

One of the most significant faults shared by tax systems in Arab countries is the focus on indirect

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<sup>57</sup> Women's Major Group Contribution, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> See The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 2; and Human Rights Council, 2014.

<sup>60</sup> See [www.annnd.org](http://www.annnd.org) for more information, especially on results of the regional strategy meeting on taxation and social justice in the Arab region, organized by the Arab NGO Network for Development (Beirut, 21-22 March 2014).

regressive taxes, such as general sales taxes on all basic and luxury goods without differentiation. This negatively affects poor families by increasing the tax burden on these households. Tax systems in the region are also characterized by absent or limited taxes on wealth and discrepancies in tax brackets between individuals and corporations, whereby the latter benefit from significant exemptions.

The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights has noted that low levels of revenue collection have a disproportionate impact on the poorest segments of the population, particularly for people who experience multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage. For example, women are more likely to be directly dependent on social protection and health systems at some period in their lives because of their sexual and reproductive health and maternity-related needs. Women also serve as unpaid alternative care providers when public services are not adequately funded, thus limiting their opportunities to engage in paid work, education, training or leisure, while also negatively affecting their enjoyment of rights such as health, education, participation and social security.<sup>61</sup>

In her analysis, the Special Rapporteur noted that, to redress structural inequalities, including gender inequalities, States should evaluate the differential impact of existing and proposed fiscal policies on different groups, in particular those who suffered from structural discrimination. For example, certain tax arrangements that directly or indirectly disincentivized women's participation in the labour force or promoted the male bread-winner family model could threaten women's enjoyment of human rights. Furthermore, it was important to review tax structures, codes and instruments to remove explicit and implicit gender bias and ensure that they do not reinforce existing gender inequalities, including through their impact on unpaid care work.

She added that progressive tax systems, in particular direct taxes, were one of the most important tools available to Governments for addressing income inequality, especially personal income tax. Indirect taxes, such as those based on consumption (value-added or sales taxes) were typically regressive, because they generally constituted a larger proportion of the income of people living in poverty. Transferring and redistributing wealth through taxation could redress systemic discrimination, including that based on gender, and spur progress towards substantive equality.<sup>62</sup>

Under the proposed goal 10, entitled "Reduce inequality within and among countries", target 10.4 calls for adopting policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality. Goal 17, entitled "Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development", calls for strengthening domestic resource mobilization, including through international support to developing countries, to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection. These goals should integrate a gender-conscious approach.

Feminist economists have argued that a gender analysis of taxation must go beyond the principle of sameness to recognize that different treatment might be required to achieve substantive equality, which would not necessarily result in bias. For example, tax policy could play an important role in incentivizing the transfer of property to women.<sup>63</sup> Tax systems could be developed with the conscious target of advancing agriculture and agricultural production to contribute to food security. Furthermore, assessing and correcting gender biases implicit in tax policy implies, for instance, implementing fiscal mechanisms for compensation of discrimination, such as tax exemption for people living in poverty because of gender identity.<sup>64</sup>

To fulfil the CEDAW obligations, such as article 5 to "modify social and cultural patterns of men and

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<sup>61</sup> Human Rights Council, 2014.

<sup>62</sup> Saiz, 2013.

<sup>63</sup> See Christian Aid, 2014. The report documents the experience of Nepal where a tax exemption was used to incentivize transfer of property assets to women, resulting in a threefold increase in women's land ownership between 2001 and 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Human Rights Council, 2014.

women to eliminate practices based on the idea of sex stereotyping or the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes”, States should design tax systems with the objective of transforming gender roles that are inequitable.<sup>65</sup>

For those purposes, it is important to analyse the impact of national tax policies on women and the kind of gender roles and relations that tax policy re-enforces. States should conduct human rights assessments of fiscal policy periodically and with broad public participation, including analysis of the distributional consequences and tax burdens borne by different income sectors and disadvantaged groups.

### C. COMPREHENSIVE RIGHTS-BASED AND GENDER-CONSCIOUS SOCIAL PROTECTION POLICIES

Social protection is addressed under several of the proposed sustainable development goals. Goal 1 sets a target for implementing nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030, achieving substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable. Target 5.4 of goal 5 calls for recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate. Target 10.4 of goal 10 addresses the importance of adopting policies especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieving greater equality.

These targets address broader social protection policies and social protection systems and measures, including social protection floors, thus reflecting the fact that social protection policies should extend beyond social protection floors and be designed through a comprehensive approach that benefits all.

According to ILO, the majority of social security programmes are formal, employment-based and contributory. Within this context, women often face two related difficulties in accessing such programmes. Firstly, women often earn less than men when employed, work in the informal economy or are unemployed. They are also highly represented in sectors that tend to be poorly protected by labour and social security legislation, such as the agricultural sector. This is the case in the Arab region, as stated in previous sections of the present report. Secondly, the care and domestic work undertaken by women is still not formally recognized, which often renders them ineligible to benefit from social protection programmes. Thus, many women are not in a position to contribute to, and therefore benefit from, social insurance schemes.<sup>66</sup>

Women in the Arab region participate less in the labour force and have higher levels of unemployment compared to men, and are heavily concentrated in the informal economy. Consequently, they tend to be excluded from social security schemes<sup>67</sup> and fall outside the remit of social protection schemes. For example, in Lebanon, households headed by women account for around 120,000 persons, who are vulnerable because of the weakness of social protection policies and schemes. In Morocco, only 30 per cent of women benefit from social insurance schemes, compared to 70 per cent of men.<sup>68</sup>

Social protection systems operate differently across Arab countries.<sup>69</sup> Most middle-income oil-importing Arab countries have been under fiscal stress, where Governments have focused their policy on

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<sup>65</sup> Christian Aid, 2014.

<sup>66</sup> ILO, 2013; and Tessier and others, 2013.

<sup>67</sup> Tessier and others, 2013.

<sup>68</sup> شبكة المنظمات العربية غير الحكومية للتنمية، 2014.

<sup>69</sup> The twenty-sixth conference of the Arab Labour Organization (1999) set the Arab Strategy for Social Insurance and the thirty-ninth conference of the Arab Labour Organization (2012) focused on social protection as a means of securing social justice and

a fiscal consolidation of social protection schemes and less on developing comprehensive schemes that include preventive interventions. Some countries, including Algeria, Iraq, Mauritania and Tunisia, have widened their social protection budgets to offset some of the implications of economic liberalization.<sup>70</sup>

The approach is also different in countries that have suffered from lack of security, conflict and occupation, such as Iraq, Libya, Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Challenges in these countries range between weak institutional structures to a lack of resources. There are also countries that have refrained from undertaking comprehensive rights-based reforms despite the availability of resources.

The ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation aims to ensure universal access to essential health care and basic income security throughout a person's life.<sup>71</sup> It is one of the approaches that could be mobilized to close the coverage gaps in social security systems, which affect many women.<sup>72</sup> Such national social protection floors should be part of a broader social protection system, designed within a broader framework of economic and social policies oriented towards redressing inequalities and achieving sustainable development.<sup>73</sup>

The Cairo Declaration,<sup>74</sup> resulting from the High Level Meeting on Millennium Development Goals for Women and Girls, Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in the Arab Region (February 2014), stresses the importance of working towards the implementation of social justice policies, poverty eradication and health coverage, and recognizing their impact on the status of women. It also acknowledges the importance of developing protection and social security policies in both the formal, public and private, and non-formal sectors, including social insurance and universal health coverage that include compensation in the event of sickness, and maternity benefits, paid vacations, benefits for pensions and disability, compensation for work injuries, unemployment benefits and family allowances, and to ensure universal health coverage, especially for persons working in the informal sector. Participants at the Arab High Level Forum on Sustainable Development (Amman, April 2014) noted that a minimum social protection floor was affordable in most Arab countries.

In the Arab region, it is important to extend the scope of social protection programmes beyond citizens to cover residents. This is especially relevant given the high rate of movement across the region, including migrants and refugees. The discussion on social protection policies should address possible cooperation at the regional level, especially with regard to the availability of resources and schemes that balance the burdens that countries hosting refugees are facing.

Designing social protection policies in Arab countries should extend beyond the social security provisions and social services offered through tax systems, since women often do not participate in the formal labour market and thus remain marginalized from these systems. Non-contributory pension schemes could cover part of the protection gap for women. Furthermore, active integration of incentives that promote a more equal share of unpaid care work could instigate change. Examples of interventions that could help in

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security for future generations. Besides international legal frameworks that enshrine the right to social security, article 36 of the Arab Charter for Human Rights, adopted in 2004, provides for the right of each citizen to social protection, including social insurance.

<sup>70</sup> شبكة المنظمات العربية غير الحكومية للتنمية، 2014.

<sup>71</sup> ILO, 2012.

<sup>72</sup> ILO documents some of these non-contributory social protection programmes, such as social pension programmes in Bolivia, Namibia, Nepal and South Africa; conditional and non-conditional cash transfers in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Nicaragua and South Africa; employment guarantee schemes in Ethiopia and India; and enhanced access to social health protection in Rwanda and Thailand (see Tessier and others, 2013).

<sup>73</sup> Tessier and others, 2013.

<sup>74</sup> Available from <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/58/csw58-declaration-cairo-en%20pdf.ashx>.

this regard include paternity leave and incentives for a more equitable share of parental responsibilities, and measures to recognize and calculate care work in pension entitlements.

#### D. INVESTMENT AND TRADE POLICIES AND COMMITMENTS

Designing development-focused trade and investment policies is central to developing an enabling environment for the proposed sustainable development goals and their related means of implementation. It is also essential for creating policy space at the national level, defined by the ability of Governments to use macroeconomic and other policy tools, including trade, investment and redistributive policies, in different and dynamic ways to achieve their specific development goals.

Achieving this presupposes an active role by the State and its institutions in dynamically designing, implementing, monitoring and revising trade and investment policies in line with development needs, which includes aligning policies with building productive sectors and advancing industrialization capacities, closely correlated with addressing employment generation needs and redressing inequalities, including gender inequalities.

When discussing investment policy and foreign direct investment, policymakers in the Arab region and international financial institutions have often focused on the need to establish an enabling environment to attract investment and improve the business climate. This approach often entails promoting more investment zones where investors enjoy lower regulation and taxation, and strengthening investor rights, relaxing labour market regulations and signing investment protection and trade liberalization agreements (the latter sometimes include chapters on investment and investor protection rules).<sup>75</sup> Investment rules established through international investment agreements have severely affected the regulatory space and capacities of developing countries<sup>76</sup> and remained blind to the gender differentiated impacts of investment policies.

For example, several countries in the Arab region have considered establishing qualified industrial zones as tools to attract foreign direct investment; Egypt and Jordan have established several of these zones.<sup>77</sup> Data have shown that women's employment was significant among the local labour employed in these zones. In Jordan, around 60 per cent of Jordanians working in such zones are young women, aged between 18 and 30, mostly single with secondary school education and little or no previous work experience.<sup>78</sup> However, the zones have been associated with serious violations of workers' rights, including extended working hours, no pay, physical and sexual abuse and deprivation of other basic human and labour rights.<sup>79</sup> Some analysts present high women's participation in the zones as a positive aspect; however, it is essential to question the kinds of jobs women are being offered and whether these trends of increased employment for women reflect improvements on the equality and justice front, or re-enforce discrimination and violation of women's rights.

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<sup>75</sup> While bilateral investment treaties and free trade agreements have not been empirically linked to attracting higher levels of foreign direct investment, the rules established through these agreements have often hinged on national policy space and limited the policy tools that tighten the linkages between investment and development.

<sup>76</sup> One example of such constraints is the system of investor privileges and investor-State dispute settlement rules that ignore the responsibilities of investors and marginalize the primacy of international human rights law. States have been increasingly realizing the importance of revising such international investment rules to remove obstacles to the "right to regulate" in the public interest and to prioritize the realization of human rights and development over private profit-focused interests.

<sup>77</sup> Ghoneim and Awad, 2009, p. 3. Qualified industrial zones are a United States trade initiative to promote the political goal of effective normalization between Israel and its Arab neighbours, namely Egypt and Jordan. They were created in 1996, following the amendment of the United States-Israel Free Trade Agreement to extend preferential duty free treatment for products of Israeli origin in the United States market to also cover exports from geographically designated areas in Egypt and Jordan, in accordance with specific rules of origin requirements.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 20. Ghoneim and Awad indicate that these numbers can be explained by the fact that "activities are concentrated in garment and apparel sector, which is apparently better suited for female skills and or deemed less desired by Jordanian males".

<sup>79</sup> IRIN, 2006.

The experiences of developing countries, including Arab countries, reveal that it is not the quantity of foreign investment that matters for development purposes, but it is the ability of Governments to steer investment policy and the investment legal framework to address national development priorities and needs. The Arab High Level Forum on Sustainable Development addressed the shortcomings of foreign direct investment in the Arab region, where the largest shares go into real estate and mining, rather than manufacturing or services, with very low returns in terms of job creation.

It is imperative that investment policy frameworks in Arab countries be revised from a gender perspective to deepen the understanding of how national investment policies and foreign direct investment affect women's roles at home and in the labour market, and how gender affects foreign investment and its contributions to development.<sup>80</sup>

Overall, the discussion around the linkages between investment and trade policies and development should not remain gender blind, especially in a context where development challenges and inequalities are disproportionately concentrated among women. It is important to monitor the gender differential impacts of trade and investment policies, which should be subject to *ex-ante* and *ex-post facto* gender, human rights and environmental impact assessments.

Furthermore, linking investment and trade policies to a development strategy that gives due consideration to women's rights, gender equality and justice necessitates reorienting the management of foreign trade and investment to support such processes, including investing in sectors that are core to women's economic empowerment. It requires rethinking the various roles of public and private investments, differentiating between productive and unproductive investments, and reassessing regulatory frameworks and related institutions in support of broader gender-conscious development goals.

The post-2015 development framework should be the scene for questioning and evaluating trade and investment policies, both nationally and on a multilateral level, based on their contribution to the proposed development goals, gender equality and justice. Currently, the proposed sustainable development goals and their related targets do not reflect such an approach.

#### *Government procurement as a public investment policy*

According to the World Bank, public procurement in MENA countries account for 15-20 per cent of GDP.<sup>81</sup> Government procurement policies are important development and industrialization tools, through which the State can support the growth of local producers and economic actors. Developing countries often use this market to give opportunities to domestic industries, small and medium sized enterprises and other small producers and marginalized groups, such as women producers.<sup>82</sup>

There have been multiple attempts to liberalize this sector, opening it up to foreign providers and multinational companies, through rules established under the umbrella of the World Trade Organization and free trade agreements. Target 12.7 under goal 12 provides for promoting public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> See Braunstein, 2006.

<sup>81</sup> Krause, 2014.

<sup>82</sup> See Sengupta and others, 2014.

<sup>83</sup> This target caused conflict and controversy throughout the negotiations. In the zero draft, target 12.11 read: "by 2030, increase the share of sustainable products and services in public procurement, including through competitive and transparent procurement processes" (Sengupta and others, 2014).

For the purposes of serving women's rights and gender equality and justice, government procurement ought to be addressed as a development policy area that should be consciously designed to offer opportunities for women economic actors and support their integration in domestic economic cycles. Accordingly, government procurement ought to remain an active policy tool in the hands of Governments, which can be utilized as a form of public investment intervention.

#### IV. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Achieving women's rights and gender equality and justice in the Arab region is essential to the process of realizing democracy and economic and social justice.

When finalizing the sustainable development goals, regressive steps that might water down the principles and commitments previously undertaken by States in the area of women's rights must be avoided. The political will to achieve progress on these goals must be reaffirmed to align development policies and efforts with these commitments. Furthermore, the post-2015 development framework should serve towards actively re-enforcing the human rights agenda and strengthening mechanisms to progressively achieve human rights obligations.

The rights-focused approach and language of the goals provide a context and a framework, invoke States' legal obligations, underscore that certain values are non-negotiable, bring a degree of normative certainty and makes use of the agreed interpretations of rights that have emerged from decades of reflection, discussion and adjudication.<sup>84</sup> Most importantly, rights-focused language recognizes the dignity of all individuals and is intentionally empowering.

Moreover, half of the proposed goals currently lack references to gender equality and women's human rights. Integrating a crosscutting approach to women's rights throughout the goals would be a complementary re-enforcement of goal 5.

The added value of the goals' agenda depends, to a large extent, on operationalizing the means of implementation associated with the goals, including commitments on financing for sustainable development that should emerge from the third International Conference on Financing for Development Summit, to be held in Addis Ababa in July 2015.<sup>85</sup> These negotiations should be conscious of the gender differentiated dimensions and impacts of global and national policies central to financing for development, including trade and investment policies.

In principle, achieving sustainable progress on the women's-rights and gender-equality fronts requires embedding the goals in a broader framework of structural transformation at the economic, social, cultural and political levels. States and other stakeholders should recognize and act upon the interconnected nature of risks and opportunities in the post-2015 development framework and the need for a multifaceted intervention at the economic, social and political levels, as well as at the national and global levels.

Furthermore, given the occupation, conflicts, and State crises in several Arab countries, States should ensure that humanitarian assistance to cover immediate needs and protection requirements is complemented with long-term strategies in support of the socioeconomic rights and livelihood opportunities of women affected by these conditions.

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<sup>84</sup> Alston, 2014.

<sup>85</sup> For more information, see A/69/315\*; and Rightingfinance, 2014.

The role of the State is essential in preserving and adequately utilizing policy space through dynamic design of national economic, social and environmental policy tools. This is closely interlinked with the capacity to rethink the role of existing national institutions. It is vital to consider the place of institutions within development policies and with regard to the fulfilment of women's rights.

Discussions on the role of institutions with regard to women's rights for sustainable development should extend beyond focusing on indicators of good governance, such as the rule of law, quality of business regulation, efficiency, corruption, transparency and participation. Successful public institutions require clear mandates that are development-focused, capable of operationalizing gender-conscious policies and subject to accountability.

Concerning gender equality and women's rights, one of the main institutional tasks is collecting sex-disaggregated data; a pre-requisite for defining and implementing gender-conscious policies and programmatic interventions. This should be mainstreamed within national statistical offices to establish a gender-conscious approach to national planning systems and improve national reporting on policies and sustainability.

Moreover, States should undertake active roles at the global level, within international institutions such as the international financial institutions, the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, to seek adequate and enabling rules and policy approaches.

One of the fundamental tasks for Arab States is reforming legislative frameworks, including constitutions. This requires political will and commitment to women's rights and gender justice as fundamental elements in a democratic developmental State. This task should be undertaken with a view to reflecting the commitments undertaken by Governments in the area of women's rights and gender equality, redressing *de jure* discrimination against women and instituting positive interventions that help address discrimination resulting from gendered social, cultural, and religious norms.

Effectively reflecting gender considerations in national policies requires a gender-conscious approach to the design of tax policies and national budgets. Tax policy and structures could play a role in terms of redistributing resources and facilitating women's access to them. Budget allocations could boost opportunities for fulfilling women's rights and gender equality, including through investing in social protection policies that expand women's coverage and in sectors where women's employment is concentrated.

#### *Looking beyond simplified indicators*

Overall, developing effective accountability mechanisms for the sustainable development goals requires looking beyond simple indicators. It entails extending the monitoring task to cover economic and social policies implemented under the goals.

Establishing women's rights and gender equality and justice as core elements in policymaking requires reviewing the indicators and pillars through which policy and related processes are evaluated. It also entails addressing issues of global governance through a framework that questions global economic governance structures from a rights-focused perspective. The goals and post-2015 development framework should actively monitor and question global policy issues that are vital to shaping an enabling environment for achieving gender-conscious development goals.

Such an approach to monitoring the goals requires thinking beyond numerical indicators and developing a framework to monitor, capture and redress contradictions between the goals and policies adopted nationally and globally. A hybrid approach capturing quantitative trends and qualitative analysis is required to capture contradictions between the policy framework and the targeted goals. Monitoring each of the goals should include monitoring international aspects and policies, including economic and financial governance, which could influence or hinder the process of achieving that goal.

Furthermore, it is important to incorporate the human rights approach as a framework to monitor and evaluate the goals. This includes establishing linkages with existing human rights accountability

mechanisms at the global level, such as the Universal Periodic Review, and strengthening them as oversight tools for national and international economic policymaking.

Complementary accountability mechanisms could be developed at the regional level, including using the Arab High Level Forum and the Arab Economic and Social Summits for review of progress on the goals' agenda.

Pursuing and monitoring the goals requires cooperation among various ministries at the national level and mechanisms that allow civil society organizations to play an active role, including women's groups and women labour unionists.

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## Annex

### **A. SOCIAL WATCH GENDER EQUALITY INDEX**

Social Watch computes a value for the gender gap in three areas, namely education, empowerment and economic activity, on a scale from 0 (where, for example, no woman is educated at all and all men are) to 100 (perfect equality). The Gender Equality Index, in turn, is the simple average of these three dimensions. In education, the index looks at the gender gap in enrolment at all levels and in literacy. Economic participation computes gaps in income and employment. Empowerment measures gaps in highly qualified jobs and parliamentary and senior executive positions.

The East Asia and Pacific region is third in the list, with an average Index value of 69. Closely behind are the regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, with an average of 68, and Central Asia with an average of 64. Sub-Saharan Africa comes next with an average 52. At the bottom of the list is the MENA region with an average of 43, and South Asia with an average of 39.

TABLE A1. GENDER EQUALITY INDEX BY REGION, 2012

Region	Education	Empowerment	Economic activity	Gender equality index
Central Asia	0.91	0.24	0.74	0.63
East Asia and the Pacific	0.95	0.42	0.70	0.69
Europe	0.98	0.48	0.73	0.73
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.98	0.40	0.66	0.68
Middle East and North Africa	0.56	0.14	0.23	0.31
North America	1.00	0.448	0.71	0.73
South Asia	0.67	0.14	0.36	0.39
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.64	0.29	0.62	0.52
Global average	0.82	0.28	0.57	0.56

Source: <http://www.socialwatch.org/node/14368>.

**B. RECOMMENDATIONS RECEIVED ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS AS PART OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEWS OF ARAB COUNTRIES**

TABLE A.2. NUMBER OF RECOMMENDATIONS RECEIVED ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS AS A PROPORTION OF THE OVERALL NUMBER OF RECOMMENDATIONS RECEIVED (*PERCENTAGE*)

Reviewed countries	Number of recommendations received on women’s rights as a proportion of the overall number of recommendations received	Percentage
Algeria	53/206 (1st and 2nd cycle) Ranks first issue	25.73
Bahrain	30/188 (1st and 2nd cycle) Ranks third issue	19.68
Egypt	25/171 recommendations ranks second issue after international instruments)	14.62
Iraq	29/179 (1st cycle only) Ranks first issue	16.2
Jordan	91/291 (1st and 2nd cycle) Ranks first issue	31.27
Lebanon	24/147 recommendations (ranks second issue after international instruments)	16.33
Morocco	43/176 (1st and 2nd cycle together) Ranks first issue	24.43
Qatar	32/112 (1st cycle only) Ranks first issue	28.57
Saudi Arabia	96/348 Ranks first issue	27.59
Tunisia	34/193 (1st and 2nd cycle) ranks second issue after international instruments	17.62
Yemen	94/344 (1st and 2nd cycle) Ranks first issue	27.33

*Source:* Compiled by the Arab NGO Network for Development using information available from [www.upr-info.org](http://www.upr-info.org).

TABLE A.3. UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW PROCESS

Country	Issue raised in relation to women’s rights	Recommendations accepted by the country
Lebanon	Women’s rights institutional mechanisms	Continue endowing its National Commission for Women Affairs with public policymaking and decision-making powers
Egypt	Women’s rights institutional mechanisms	Consider strengthening the Complaints Office of the National Council for Women and the helpline of the National Council for Children, building on past experience, with a view to strengthening the role and effectiveness of these two institutions throughout the country
Lebanon	Legislative amendments	Amend the personal status laws in line with CEDAW to ensure that women are treated in the same way as men in issues related to child custody, inheritance and divorce

TABLE A.3 (continued)

Country	Issue raised in relation to women's rights	Recommendations accepted by the country
Egypt	Legislative amendments	Amend the Personal Status Law and Penal Code to guarantee equal rights for women and provide guarantees that domestic violence will be effectively prosecuted
Tunisia	Adoption of a strategy/national plan of action	Put in place a comprehensive strategy to eliminate patriarchal attitudes and negative stereotypes of women in Tunisian society and eliminate discrimination against women in national legislation, in particular concerning marriage, child custody, guardianship and effective and equal access to justice
Saudi Arabia	National Plan of Action	Develop a comprehensive national action plan for the promotion of gender equality, with a view to addressing key challenges facing women
Jordan	Trafficking in women	Pay attention to trafficking in women and children for sexual and other exploitative purposes and preventing and combating such trafficking by means of including in the Human Trafficking Act a definition of trafficking and ensuring that trafficked women and girls have access to quality medical care, counselling and shelter
Morocco	Trafficking in women	Undertake efforts to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and trafficking in women and children, including by ensuring that all allegations of trafficking and sexual abuses are investigated and the perpetrators are brought to justice and punished
Jordan	Honour crimes	Amend the Penal Code to ensure that perpetrators of honour crimes do not benefit from reduced penalties and that these crimes are treated as other violent crimes with regard to investigation and prosecution
Iraq	Honour crimes	Consider legal reforms to effectively address so-called honour killings or crimes
Morocco	Maternal mortality rate	Continue, with assistance from relevant international organizations, such as the World Health Organization, to enhance access to health care for women and further reduce the maternal mortality rate, especially in rural areas
Iraq	Maternal mortality rate	Strengthen efforts in the area of development and the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, especially concerning enrolment at all levels of education, realizing the right to food and decreasing maternal and child mortality rates
Bahrain	Awareness-raising campaigns on women's rights	Carry out awareness raising campaigns on the importance of adopting a unified law on the family and increasing the minimum age for marriage
Algeria	Awareness-raising campaigns on women's rights	Introduce efficient legislative and policy measures that promote gender equality and eliminate gender-based discrimination, including conducting appropriate awareness-raising campaigns to combat traditional negative stereotypes and attitudes on the role of women in society, with particular focus on rural areas
Yemen	Equality	Continue efforts to ensure gender equality, including with regard to women's representation in society and politics, their access to education and their treatment before the law

TABLE A.3 (continued)

Country	Issue raised in relation to women's rights	Recommendations accepted by the country
Bahrain	Equality	Continue efforts to empower women economically, politically and socially, and to take all necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women
Saudi Arabia	Male guardianship	Proceed with the promulgation of the necessary laws to abolish the male guardianship system while, in parallel, remedying the stereotypes affecting women's enjoyment of their rights, including their personal status law
Oman	Male guardianship	Intensify efforts to amend relevant legal provisions that establish subordination to male guardianship, adopt a comprehensive gender policy and conduct awareness campaigns aimed at all social groups and public administration

Source: Compiled by the Arab NGO Network for Development using information available from [www.upr-info.org](http://www.upr-info.org).