WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP FOR DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATION

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STRATEGIZING FOR DEMOCRACY:
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE MENA REGION

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ABOUT THE WOMEN'S LEARNING PARTNERSHIP FOR RIGHTS, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE

A partnership of twenty autonomous organizations, Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) trains and supports women in the Global South, primarily in Muslim-majority countries, to become leaders and advocates for a just, peaceful world. WLP creates culture-specific leadership trainings on democratic participation, and it partners with local organizations to help women gain the skills they need to fulfill greater leadership roles at the family, community and national levels. Over the past decade, WLP has developed curricula and educational resources that encourage women's leadership and rights, and bolster their capacities as agents for change toward the establishment of free, fair and democratic societies. Since the 2001 publication of *Leading to Choices*, a training manual for participatory, democratic leadership by women, WLP has published several learning tools, among them *Leading to Action* on political participation. These tools have been translated into 20 languages and adapted for use in 40 countries. To date, WLP's programs and training materials have reached tens of thousands of women and men, strengthening local organizations to become strong and vibrant, empowering women's movements around the globe. WLP's partners are:

- **Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL)**, www.afghaninstituteoflearning.org
- **All Women's Action Society (AWAM)**, Malaysia, www.awam.org.my
- **Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM)**, Morocco, www.adfm.ma
- **Association des Femmes Chefs de Famille (AFCF)**, Mauritania, www.afcf.fr.gd/
- **Aurat Foundation**, Pakistan, www.af.org.pk
- **BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights (BAOBAB)**, Nigeria, www.baobabwomen.org
- **Be-Free Center/Bahrain Women's Association (BFC/BWA)**, www.bahrainws.org
- **Cidadania, Estudo, Pesquisa, Informaçao e Açao (Cepia)**, Brazil, www.cepia.org.br
- **Collective for Research & Training on Development-Action (CRTD-A)**, Lebanon, www.crtda.org.lb/en
- **Fondo de Desarrollo para la Mujer (Fodem)**, Nicaragua, www.fodem.org.ni
- **Forum for Women in Development (FWID)**, Egypt
- **Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (FSWW)**, Turkey, www.kedv.org.tr
- **Human Rights Center/Citizens against Corruption (CAC)**, Kyrgyzstan, www.anticorruption.kg/
- **Iran:** WLP works with local activists and scholars to develop Persian training manuals and multimedia curriculum.
- **Shymkent Women's Resource Center (SWRC)**, Kazakhstan, www.swrc.kz/eng
- **Sisterhood Is Global Institute/Jordan (SIGI/J)**, www.sigi-jordan.org/pages
- **Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC)**, Palestine, www.watcpal.org
- **Women and Youth Development Institute of Indonesia (WYDII),** www.wydii.org/

- **Women's Self-Promotion Movement (WSPM),** Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION—THE START OF A PROCESS OF STRATEGIZING

On 2 March 2012, activists and experts from across the world convened by the Women's Learning Partnership For Rights, Development and Peace (WLP), met in New York City to discuss the causes, consequences and other aspects of the revolutions sweeping the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) during the last year and a half. As longstanding dictatorships collapsed, what had appeared as the promise of democratization, an "Arab Spring," seemed to be turning into the perils of chaos, civil war and resurgent authoritarianism, whether secularist-nationalist or Islamist in character.

This meeting was a key component of WLP's ongoing initiative on transitions to democracy. It represents both a beginning and the continuation of a process of strategizing for gender-inclusive democracy in the region. This kind of full democracy extends beyond the government's procedural and institutional mechanisms, such as regularly scheduled elections based on the principle of "one person, one vote" and the separation of executive, legislative and judicial power wielded by distinct structures and officials.

The importance of these mechanisms should not be underestimated. However, the meeting participants examined the prospects for creating democracies that: value females and males equally, promote a culture of human rights, espouse an ethos of accountability among government officials to all citizens and encourage civility in political debates as epitomized by the expression "agreeing to disagree." The activists and experts concurred: where the appropriate procedural and institutional mechanisms exist alongside the spirit of inclusion, willingness to compromise and participation by all groups in society, gender-inclusive democracy can take root and eventually flourish.

Yet democracy is not the inevitable outcome of revolutions. Once the public square is cleared of demonstrators, activists of diverse personal and professional backgrounds must consciously (re)build a government that meets the citizenry's practical needs and protects their roles and rights in the private, public and international domains—a tall order and one that does not happen in a revolutionary moment but rather requires time, patience and political will.

Danger looms that the revolutionary coalition will fracture. Liberal democrats, professional associations, feminists, nationalists and Islamists will be pitted against one another, and the most disciplined, ideologically coherent contestant for power will likely emerge victorious, at least in the short term. In Egypt, Libya and Tunisia

among other countries, that contestant has been the Islamist political parties and leaders espousing fundamentalist interpretations of the Quran and a jurisprudential tradition dating back several centuries. The Islamists' rise augurs setbacks for the human rights of women as well as religious and ethnic minorities.

Consequently, the meeting participants examined with a sense of urgency the impact of these Arab upheavals on the lives of women and girls, knowing full well based on recent history that Islamists are inclined to limit females' public roles; propose conservative family status laws; restrict their access to education, jobs and political posts; and tolerate, even perpetrate, gender-based violence. This dialogue thus marked the auspicious start of the strategizing process to confront the challenges posed to women by revolutions in the MENA with the future unclear.

However, this meeting also continued a strategizing process initiated a decade ago, following in a long line of similar forums organized by WLP and its partners to explore reforms that will improve the cultural, economic and political situations for women and girls. WLP has designed curriculum and implemented programs that engage citizens in Muslim-majority societies and in the broader Global South through education and training so they may be equipped to create change and claim their rightful place in society. The discussion at the Ford Foundation may have been the first to take on the Arab revolutions' causes and consequences, and it will not be the last. Yet this dialogue builds on WLP's previous meetings and activities which have cultivated constituencies ready to tackle the tasks and responsibilities associated with designing and sustaining their own democracies.

What follows here are highlights of the discussion that took place among the activists and experts, many from the Middle East and North Africa as well as other regions in the Global South. As the strategy meeting commenced, WLP's partners reported on what they have seen and experienced in the regional countries where they live and have worked for human rights and gender-inclusive democracies, often at great risk to their physical safety:

- ✓ **Lina Abou-Habib** offered her observations on Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. She cautioned that the rise of Islamists such as Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and among Syria's revolutionaries means women's rights activists will continue to confront a formidable adversary. In Lebanon, the positive spill-over effects of Arab revolutions have motivated youth to challenge political confessionalism, using new social media." In Bahrain, the ruling Sunni minority has suppressed the Shi`a majority with impunity and the complicity of Qatar and especially Saudi Arabia.

- ✓ **Asma Khader** provided first-hand accounts of the situations in Jordan and Libya, underscoring the prominence of Islamist groups in both societies while highlighting their differences. In Jordan, women's rights activists worked with King Abdullah II in the effort to reform the constitution—albeit with moderate success so far. The Muslim Brotherhood has sought to out-organize feminists, enlisting sympathetic women through workshops for them. As an investigator of human rights abuses in Libya, Khader has documented evidence of rape as a weapon by militias and forced suicides of victims as a new form of "honor killing" by their families due to the stigma associated with this violation.
- ✓ **Rabéa Naciri** compared the constitutional reform efforts in Tunisia and Morocco. Tunisia's Constituent Assembly, dominated by the Islamist party El Nahda, has amassed power without producing a constitution. In Morocco, by contrast, King Mohammed VI formally supported the movement for reform and women's rights activists had the opportunity to lobby for gender equality. The resulting constitution did not declare Shari`a as the basis for legislation, recognizing the diversity of Moroccan society and asserting equality between women and men in the cultural, political and socioeconomic realms. Most significantly, the constitution also stressed the primacy of international law. The challenge for activists will be how Islamist in parliament will implement the constitution.

In addition to the insights of WLP's partners, other activists and experts offered recommendations about how women may continue to play a leading role in defeating authoritarian governments and preventing new dictatorships from filing the power vacuums resulting from revolutionary chaos and civil strife: safety:

- ✓ **Ann Elizabeth Mayer** focused on the looming Islamist backlash to women's rights activists striving to build gender-inclusive democracies. She posited that they could enhance their appeal and legitimacy by associating themselves with a broader ideology enjoying popular support and, more importantly, connecting women's participation in society with progress in socio economic development as well as using international human rights instruments as leverage against Islamists who wish to appear in compliance with these laws.

- ✓ **Karima Bennoune** discussed another aspect of the Islamist push-back on women's rights. Examining the rise of El Nahda in Tunisia, she contested the party's claim to moderation and its promises to respect the hard won gains in gender equality achieved during the pre-revolutionary period. She also criticized international observers in academic, advocacy and policy making circles who contend that El Nahda's women leaders and members are more culturally authentic and thus better represent Tunisian women than those labeled Western-style, secularist feminists.
- ✓ **Jacqueline Pitanguy** spoke about her personal experience as an activist for democracy and women's rights who served as a leader in Brazil's constitutional reform movement during the 1970s and 1980s. She recalled in detail feminists' contributions to this movement and their efforts to ensure that gender equality would be enshrined in the constitution. As she affirmed, Brazil's experience and its 1988 constitution may offer insights to women's rights activists in the Middle East and North Africa.
- ✓ **Susan Markham** examined the role played by political parties in societies making the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. She explained how parties may become the principal and most direct mechanism through which women gain access to elected office and rise to positions of political leadership. She proposed recommendations that may be instructive as women's rights activists work along with men to build parties and thereby strengthen their voice in politics.
- ✓ **Habib Nassar** elaborated on the concept and practice of transitional justice as a set of judicial and non-judicial measures aimed at vindicating the human rights of abuse survivors, ensuring the accountability of governments and other actors perpetrating violations and precluding the crime's repetition. He proclaimed the need to bring a gendered perspective to transitional justice in the Middle East and North Africa so as to prevent activists and especially political officials from turning a blind eye to sexual and other violations of women's human rights.
- ✓ **Anne Nelson** looked at the use of Twitter in particular and mobile technology in general during the Arab revolutions. While elucidating the utility of new social media outlets, she contended that they brought to the forefront of international attention the activism and messages of groups within Arab society whose struggles for their rights and for democracy had previously gone unnoticed and under-report by legacy media—the print press, radio stations and television channels.

- ✓ Sawsan Gad explained the process of creating HarassMap, a reporting mechanism for women facing sexual harassment on Egypt's streets. She contended that HarassMap's reliance on cell phone technology illustrates new social media's potentialities for other democratic activism.
- ✓ Carolyn Kissane introduced the concepts associated with maximalist, gender-sensitive civic education. She insisted that civic education is essential to the creation of citizens prepared to be engaged in their communities and fully participate in their country's political life. She advocated for formal school-based and informal network-based civic education in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, proposing recommendations for how best to ensure that programming is inclusive of all segments of society and, most notably, of women.
- ✓ Lydia Alpizar-Durán discussed the importance of building movements and mobilizing civil society to the establishment of gender-inclusive democracies. She stressed the need to go beyond definitions of democracy that focus mostly on majority rule through elections. The ballot box is only one tool of democracy, and majority rule can perversely result in the validation of injustice and human rights violations. She argued that the concept and practice of any genuine democracy must be infused with the principles of human rights and socioeconomic justice.

This "white paper" compiles many of the insights presented during the strategy meeting. The recommendations from these activists and experts are based on their extensive experience advocating for human rights and working for their own societies to make transitions from authoritarianism to political systems that embrace pluralism, civility and compromise. In short, they aimed to ensure that the recent revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa follow the course that human rights advocates and ordinary citizens choose and are indeed entitled to—the creation and preservation of gender-inclusive democracies that may become exemplars throughout the Global South.

SNAPSHOTS FROM POLITICAL TRANSITIONS IN THE REGION

When Tunisian street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi set himself ablaze on 17 December 2010 to protest police harassment and lack of government accountability, few observers anticipated that this hard-working everyman's plight would galvanize his compatriots familiar with the sting of political insult and economic despair. Fewer still expected that persistent demonstrators would compel their president of 23 years, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, to flee the country a month later. Tunisia's exemplar inspired opponents of other dictatorships to take to the streets. Political transitions are now underway there and in Egypt and Libya, are stalled in Bahrain and Yemen, have erupted into civil war in Syria and may loom in other countries.

Although many demonstrators protested in the name of respect for human rights, constitutional reform and democracy, the future is uncertain. Women have played an integral role in these revolutions, organizing and marching alongside men. As dictatorships have fallen, women are fighting to have their role and rights protected and advanced in their societies—to thwart emerging, Islamist authoritarian leaders who are likely to undermine hard won improvements in their situations throughout the MENA.

The United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a critical tool for women seeking to vindicate their rights in potentially democratizing Arab societies. Written in 1979, ratified by 187 states and entered into force in 1981 as the most comprehensive women's rights treaty, activists are using CEDAW to lobby their political leaders to execute meaningful policies that advance their rights and to pressure new governments to live up to their countries' international commitment and withdraw all reservations. While many governments have yet to abide by CEDAW's principles, activists continue to leverage officials' desires to appear in compliance with the treaty as a way to further the cause of women's rights.

A coalition of organizations based in the Middle East and North Africa is working to achieve CEDAW's full implementation. Feminists from across the region convened in Morocco in May 2011 to review the changes resulting from the Arab revolutions and to strategize about how to empower women in these political transitions. Closely monitoring regional developments, they are striving to ensure that constitutional reforms protect gender equality, legitimize women's political roles and provide mechanisms to fulfill these objectives.

Women's rights activists have underscored CEDAW's significance, noting that because the United States has not ratified the treaty, American policy makers cannot use this tool when advocating reforms. The United States has declared that successful democracies and economic development in the MENA are vital strategic interests. As women's empowerment is inextricably linked to democracy and development, ratification of CEDAW is a key element in preserving and enhancing US long-term strategic interests.

While activists fight for women's rights at the regional level, each country's experience of political transition has had certain distinct characteristics, creating particular challenges and opportunities for the establishment of a gender-inclusive democracy. A review of developments in Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Jordan illuminates the impact of changing and precarious circumstances on women and their fight for human rights. WLP's partners have been on the ground in these four as well as other countries undergoing both revolutionary and more peaceful transitions. These snapshots from the region thus reflect in large part the years of practical experience and insights of Rabéa Naciri, Asma Khader and Lina Abou-Habib.

- Tunisia

The first country to experience a revolution, Tunisia initially seemed to be on the path to ensuring women's inclusion in political life. Some observers even considered Tunisia a model for women's empowerment. On 11 April 2011, the transitional government passed a law stipulating full parity and compulsory alternation of male and female candidates on all lists for the October election of the Constituent Assembly charged with drafting the new constitution. Nevertheless, men were named first on more than 90 percent of the electoral lists.

On 16 August, after Minister of Women Lilia Laabidi submitted a draft decree, Tunisia withdrew all specific reservations to CEDAW which it signed in 1985, thus becoming the only regional country other than Morocco to do so. Yet to the dismay of women's groups such as the Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (ATFD), the transitional government stated that it would not enforce CEDAW provisions deemed contrary to Article 1 of the Constitution adopted in 1959, amended twice, and still in force until a new document is drafted. Article 1 declares Islam as the state religion. Seeking a retraction of this pronouncement and removal of all discriminatory provisions from Tunisia's legal codes, activists assert that this caveat undercuts the significance of removing reservations and is particularly worrisome with respect to family law.

In the country's 23 October elections, the first since President Ben Ali fled the country, the Islamist party El Nahda (meaning "the awakening") won a majority of votes. This victory reflected the party's organizational skills, funding and ideological coherence. Unlike smaller secularist parties, El Nahda opened hundreds of field offices in every corner of Tunisia where its local representatives dispensed social services and effectively articulated the party platform.

Throughout the campaign, El Nahda leaders, along with observers outside Tunisia, likened their agenda to that of Turkey's Justice and Development Party, or Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi. AKP is an Islamist-based, center-right party which, under Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his predecessor Abdullah Gül, has more or less respected the longstanding tradition of separating religion and state—though AKP's critics contend it is injecting Islam into politics in subtle and direct ways.

Women are now some 28 percent of Tunisia's parliamentarians, including almost half of El Nahda's law makers. The party has promised to uphold women's rights gained under Ben Ali, but activists worry that it will renege on this pledge, and with good reasons: the Constituent Assembly originally elected for a one-year term with three mandates—constitutional, legislative and executive—seems stalled. In the effort to draft a new constitution, El Nahda prefers a three-year term. In an ironic alliance with Islamists, radical leftist parties initially wanted the Constituent Assembly. They now regret their support for this body, believing it has too much power and is taking too long to draft a constitution.

Arguably, Tunisian women's situation under the previous government was better than in neighboring countries. Amid threats to women in the Middle East and North Africa, Tunisia's relatively strong position vis-à-vis gender equality during the pre-revolutionary period may offer reasons for cautious optimism; rolling back gains from this era in one fell swoop will be tough, if not impossible. Yet as in Egypt and other regional countries, many conservatives associate women's rights with the ancien régime. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, El Nahda has yet to prove its willingness to ensure gender equality. Tunisian women's activists will need to work in concert with other proponents of democracy to protect and advocate for their rights.

- **Morocco**

As the impact of Arab revolutions reverberated across the region, Morocco's activists launched protests appealing for democratic reforms. King Mohammed VI responded by calling for a Consultative Commission to review the constitution and deliver recommendations for reform. Women were five of the 18 commission

members. Women's rights organizations, including the Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM), played an integral role in advocating reforms to establish women's rights.

On 18 April 2011, after years of advocacy by ADFM and other women's rights organizations, Morocco formally withdrew its reservations to CEDAW. Then, following efforts formally launched by the king, Moroccans voted on 1 July to accept constitutional reforms aimed at improving women's situation—among them:

- ✓ recognition in the preamble of women's and men's equal status as citizens;
- ✓ a prohibition on and the duty to fight discrimination including by gender;
- ✓ government's commitment to advance all citizens' "freedom and equality ... [and] participation in the political, economic, cultural and social spheres;"
- ✓ creation of the Authority for Equality and the Fight Against all Forms of Discrimination for the purpose of achieving gender equality;
- ✓ identification of the need for a legal provision promoting equal access for women and men to elected positions; and
- ✓ acknowledgement of the need to bring national laws into agreement with the country's international commitments.

Although Moroccan women still confront significant discrimination in practice, proponents of women's rights and empowerment now have authority under the national constitution to cite all of CEDAW's provisions as leverage to hold the government to its commitment to move towards full gender equality.

Of equal importance, Morocco's constitution, unlike others in the MENA, does not refer to Islamic law, Shari`a, as the basis for legislation. Consequently, the test of whether the constitution will be implemented is how the new Islamist-led parliament behaves. The Justice and Development Party (PJD) won 107 of 398 seats in the November 2011 election. Yet the self-declared moderate Islamist party did not receive a majority and thus forged a coalition with such secularists as the Party of Progress and Socialism and the liberal Popular Movement.

Since 10 March 2012, a tragic incident has brought the issues of women's rights and gender equality to the forefront of public attention. The death of 16-year-old rape victim Amina Filali has highlighted the gap between official commitments under the national constitution and CEDAW on the one hand and the reality of laws

currently enforced on the other. She was forced to marry the man who raped her. The penal code allows the “kidnapper” of a minor to marry her, which removes his culpability for the crime. Amina’s husband and his family inflicted further emotional torment and physical abuse on her. Seeing no other escape from her plight, she allegedly committed suicide by drinking rat poison—although Amina’s parents have accused her husband’s family of murdering their daughter.

Women’s rights activists reacted to this tragedy by demonstrating for reforms in Morocco’s discriminatory penal codes. Women of various political strips have come together to oppose the law compelling victims to marry their rapists, and more than 800,000 people have signed a petition demanding its repeal.

A leading PJD member, Minister of Justice El Mostafa Ramid may have reflected his party’s stance when he affirmed his belief that Amina was not raped but rather engaged in consensual sex. The only female cabinet officer, also a PJD member, Minister of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development Bassima Hakkaoui called for reform of penal code provisions allowing rapists who marry their victim to avoid prison and for a debate on the law permitting judges to sanction underage marriage on a case-by-case basis. So far, activists have found the government’s half-hearted response to the circumstances of Amina’s death disappointing.

Although King Mohammed VI himself formally supported and legitimized the effort to reform the constitution, resulting in a document that is quite advanced within the regional context, women cannot rest assured that their rights will be protected even in the direst of circumstances. As activists continue to press their demands for gender equality to the Islamist-dominated coalition government, Mohammed VI as “Commander of the Faithful” may prove the most valuable ally in their struggle for women’s rights.

- Egypt

Egyptian women’s groups have a long history of working for political reforms and fighting for gender equality. From organizing campaigns against public sexual harassment and female genital mutilation (FGM)—abuses reported by an overwhelming majority of females—to joining men in the demonstrations that toppled President Hosni Mubarak, women are not strangers to the political arena.

Yet despite women's activism and vital role in the uprising, the male-dominated political leadership has relegated gender equality to the bottom of its agenda. Insisting that other tasks such as building a new government and eliminating bureaucratic corruption are more immediate priorities, officials have dismissed the need to address women's concerns, at least for now.

Both the interim government led by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and Islamist parties which have enjoyed electoral success seem to be systematically excluding women from politics. Females have practically no representation in the creation of a post-revolutionary government. The ten-member committee responsible for revising the constitution before the November 2011 parliamentary elections was all men. No women were appointed as governors, and only one serves in the new cabinet. A holdover from the Mubarak period, SCAF-appointed Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Fayza Mohamed Aboulnaga led the recent crackdown on internationally funded pro-democracy groups. Her charges of a "US-Zionist" conspiracy in Egypt have won her support from the Muslim Brotherhood and the more radical Salafi Al Nour Party.

Islamists achieved an overwhelming victory in the parliamentary elections, winning almost three-quarters of seats. The Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) holds the majority of Islamists' seats, but Al Nour candidates gained a significant parliamentary presence. Of the 498 members of parliament, only six are women, and not all are proponents of gender equality. One female legislator from the FJP favors reversing Egypt's ban on genital mutilation and making divorce more difficult for women to obtain. Indeed, Islamist groups, seeking to promote an image of modernity and deflect charges that they oppose human rights, use female candidates strategically to implement anti-feminist policies.

Of equal significance, the 100-member Constituent Assembly, tasked with drafting Egypt's post-revolutionary constitution, includes only five women and six Coptic Christians. With Islamists constituting 60 percent of Assembly members, proponents of democracy fear the potential damage to women's and minority rights. They have refused to participate in the Assembly, claiming it does not represent the country's gender, racial, religious and socioeconomic diversity.

The only official institution offering women a voice, the National Council of Women (NCW) formed in 2000, has been embattled. In 2012, the SCAF and Prime Minister Kamal Al Ganzouri filed a lawsuit against the Council demanding its dissolution and replacement by a body that genuinely represents women. To the consternation of human rights activists and some parliamentarians, the SCAF has

appointed 30 new members to the NCW, creating uncertainty about whether and how this body will articulate women's concerns. Islamist members of parliament oppose the NCW altogether, claiming that the women's rights legislation it supports contradicts Shari`a and weakens families. As of now, the NCW's future and mission remain unclear.

However, Egyptians striving to vindicate women's rights and increase their political participation have not stayed silent. On International Women's Day, 8 March, protesters walked to the parliament building to deliver a list of demands, including women's fair representation in the Constituent Assembly and a declaration of gender equality in the newly drafted constitution. A week later, activists took to the streets again demonstrating against a military court's acquittal of army doctor Ahmed Adel accused of inflicting "virginity tests" on Women's Day marchers in 2011. Enduring the stigma associated with undergoing this "test," plaintiff Samira Ibrahim vowed to take her case to the African Commission on Human and People's Rights.

Activists are risking their physical safety in the struggle for gender-inclusive democracy. Yet with the military and Islamist parties dominating post-revolutionary politics, the situation of Egyptian women will arguably remain precarious and perilous, at least in the short term.

- Jordan

As in Morocco, the effects of revolutions in neighboring countries rippled throughout Jordan. Responding to street protests before they erupted into violence, King Abdullah II launched a process of constitutional and political reform in 2011. He established a Royal Commission to review the constitution and propose amendments. This development gave women's rights activists the opportunity to present their demands, including guarantees of equal access to participation in the political and economic arenas, an end to discrimination and expanded protection from violence such as murders in the name of honor.

In particular, the women's movement advocated adding the word "gender" to Article 6 of the constitution which states, "There shall be no discrimination between Jordanians as regards to their rights and duties on grounds of race, language or religion." Various Arab and Muslim-majority countries have this stipulation in their constitutions. Yet the Royal Commission sent to parliament the wording of proposed changes to the constitution without amending Article 6.

Efforts to increase women's access to political power have been somewhat more successful. The Municipalities Law passed in July 2011 raised the quota for women's seats in municipal councils from 20 percent to 25 percent. This legislation built on the May 2010 elections law augmenting the number of parliamentary seats reserved for women. Activists are now working to prepare women candidates and voters for participation in the upcoming municipal elections. Such preparation is crucial given the popularity of Islamists who are likely to make significant gains through the ballot box. Islamist women are pressing for further electoral reforms, but they generally oppose liberal activists seeking to advance women's rights.

King Abdullah II has sought to moderate and enlist the Muslim Brotherhood's and Islamic Action Front's support for constitutional reforms. At times, he seems to be walking a tightrope between women's advocates and Islamists with the result that the reform process is slow.

Jordanian proponents of gender equality persist in pushing the government to comply with international human rights standards, underscoring CEDAW's importance. The kingdom ratified the treaty in 1992, and after years of women's activism, in 2009, Jordan removed its reservation to Article 15 of CEDAW, which grants females the right to travel freely and choose their place of residence.

The most important challenge facing women's rights advocates is the same one confronted by activists around the world. They must not allow issues and tasks which male leaders deem priorities to overshadow women's concerns. As Islamists' power rises, proponents of gender equality will need to be more vocal and remind King Abdullah II that women's rights should not be the price paid to co-opt the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Action Front.

Viewing snapshots of the political transitions taking place in Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Jordan illuminates how women are responding to these changes. The subsequent essays examine instruments and methods that women may use to preserve and enhance their rights while striving to create gender-inclusive democracies.

ISLAMISM AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT—
RESISTING THE BACKLASH IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Ann Elizabeth Mayer*

In the wake of the stunning upheavals known as the "Arab Spring," popular support for Islamist or fundamentalist parties and the strengthening of "Islamic" constitutional provisions and laws seems to be intensifying. With Islamists' electoral victories in several countries, the likelihood increases that newly drafted constitutions will uphold the supremacy of Islamic law and/or impose Islamic qualifications on human rights—a worrying development for the women's movement.

The example of Iran is instructive; after Islamists seized power in 1979, they asserted Islamic law's constitutional supremacy, adopting rules from medieval Islamic jurisprudence that discriminate against women. Thus, when the parliament ratified the CEDAW in 2003, the Council of Guardians overrode the vote, admonishing law makers that the Convention conflicted with Islam and the constitution.

When religion is deployed as the rubric for clamping down on women's rights, Islamists lay the groundwork for a campaign against advocates of gender equality. Even though ample grounds exist for differentiating state policy from Islam per se, women are put on the defensive by charges that they are embracing ideas alien to and incompatible with Islam. At least in the abstract, Islam has very positive connotations in the popular mind, whereas advocacy to end discrimination and enact progressive laws for women's rights evokes negative associations.

Among these associations are that women's activists are servile imitators of the West and/or instruments of Western powers trying to weaken Muslim societies by undermining the traditional family and Islamic morality. Some reforms have wound up linked to hated dictators' unpopular wives. Under President Anwar Sadat, advances in Egyptian women's rights were scornfully labeled "Jihan's law;" progress under Hosni Mubarak was seen as the product of his wife Suzanne's interventions.

In such circumstances, how the women's movement can enhance its appeal is a vital question, as is how to identify and prepare for specific threats that may come from a looming Islamist backlash.

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As efforts to roll back progress grow more aggressive, there may be ways to counter campaigns negatively depicting women's struggle against discrimination. The ideal of gender equality is unlikely to be powerful enough to counteract accusations that the women's movement is insufficiently deferential to Islam. Where an Islamist backlash emerges, the objective of gender equality will win more support if shown to have a utilitarian function and to serve general societal goals.

Three general approaches to increasing the appeal and legitimacy of the women's movement are worthy of serious consideration in the context of Middle Eastern and North African countries: (1) connecting the movement's agenda to a broad ideological current in society; (2) relating the advancement of women's rights to the need for socioeconomic development; and (3) underscoring the importance of respect for international human rights law—not only in the ideal but also as a practical matter in terms of the image a government projects to the world.

One way to boost the movement's legitimacy is to link women's rights with an ideology that enjoys widespread popularity and offers benefits to men and women. Unfortunately, formerly vibrant nationalist and socialist ideologies, purporting to offer solutions to the region's social and economic problems, have collapsed. With no ideology to balance Islamism's appeal, what was an obvious choice decades ago—linking women's progress to secular socialism and/or nationalism—is now gone.

History is full of surprises. During the 1960s, any prediction that Arab nationalism would soon be fatally weakened and Marxism/socialism would be defunct in a few decades would have been scoffed at. Forecasts that Islamism would be the most potent political force in Egypt and other regional countries during the early twenty-first century would have seemed outlandish. Although Islamists contested President Gamal Abdul-Nasir's policies in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood was a marginal phenomenon. Likewise, women dressed in the conventional European styles during that bygone era. Covered hair and Islamic dress were the exception, whereas they have now become the norm.

Bearing in mind the contrasts in ideologies and political life between the mid-twentieth century and the present, there is no reason to assume that the current situation, marked by Islamism's prominence, is stable and that no equally dramatic changes may lie ahead. Islamism seems all-conquering at the moment, but the public infatuation with its promises may not last, because it has yet to be significantly tested. Experience has proved that, once adopted as government policy, Islamism does not have the solutions for the painful cultural, economic and political crises besetting regional societies.

With the appeal of secular Arab nationalism and Marxism/socialism diminished, an ideological counterweight to Islamism is not immediately available. However, connecting the women's movement to the urgent need for socioeconomic development may garner popular support and attenuate any backlash.

The lag in development throughout the Middle East and North Africa has been extensively documented. The *Arab Human Development Report 2005: Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World* is one of many studies warning that the disadvantages suffered by Arab women are related to the region's lagging development.[1] Even without such scholarly research, the effects of globalization readily communicate how much more economically advanced other regions are; Arab citizens are aware of the ills that exemplify retarded development in their countries—economic stagnation, widespread poverty, large-scale unemployment, inadequate infrastructure as well as poor educational and healthcare systems.

The Arab uprisings were in part a reaction to the lack of development and the bitter frustrations of the have-nots. After all, Tunisian street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation, the spark for these uprisings, reflected his desperation over a hopeless economic predicament. Many others inspired to join subsequent protests did so because they have the same grievances against the political and economic systems that effectively imprison them in a permanent, underclass barely scraping out a living while elites flaunt their riches and privileges.

At the practical level, the Turkish model of a strong, prosperous country with a relatively secular state that has supported women's equality is instructive. Women's equality has not been viewed abstractly, but rather instrumentally as an essential component of national development since the 1920s. Fortunately for women, Turkey looms large on the horizon in terms of socioeconomic development as the region's most successful country.

Of course, problematic trends under Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan do exist and merit critical attention; but in relation to other Middle Eastern and North African countries, Turkey offers an example of impressive socioeconomic development. By contrast, no country ruled by an Islamist government can boast such a record as demonstrated by the diverse examples of Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Sudan where women confront discrimination and violence in both the private and public domains.

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[1] Published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS); New York, NY, 2006.

A third and final means of enhancing the legitimacy of the women's movement and its objective of gender equality is to emphasize the significance of respect for international human rights law. Except for groups whose interests and futures are wedded to preservation of hierarchy and oppression, all would benefit from the application of principles designed to enhance human dignity and to guarantee the minimum requisites for a decent life.

International human rights law can be wielded as a weapon to shame and humiliate Islamist governments that stray too far from its precepts. Islamists' views do vary, but by now there is ample evidence that many are loathe to being seen as violating international human rights law and therefore struggle mightily to square their records with its standards.

Iran's Islamic Republic, for example, fulminates and bristles, resorting to passionate invective, when its appalling human rights record is criticized at the United Nations and insists, implausibly, that it fully respects human rights—including women's rights. At this point, Islamists recognize that their programs affecting women will be dissected in international meetings and on the internet, being judged in relation to principles of women's equality as set forth in CEDAW and other international legal instruments, and that embarrassment looms where there are egregious violations.

As experience shows, Islamists are losing confidence that appeals to Islam suffice to justify violations of human rights. Some exhibit a definite self-consciousness about any treatment of women that flagrantly conflicts with international human rights law and makes Islamist movements look cruel and primitive. Some even seem to realize that women mistreated as subjugated "others" can fuel the ugly currents of Islamophobia sweeping some segments of Western societies. Hassan Al Turabi, a prominent Sudanese Islamist with a high international profile, exemplified this concern when he suddenly decided in 2006 to announce that men and women have equal rights in Islam, worried that the West had developed a bad image of the faith.

Even some Islamists who are hardcore reactionaries are nervous about facing international opprobrium. In 1998, the Taliban, feeling besieged by the terrible publicity resulting from their abysmal treatment of women, actually hired a US public relations firm to help them improve their image. Aspiring to appear more enlightened, they announced a few "progressive" reform measures, targeting some of the retrograde Afghan customary practices that harmed women.

Women's rights activists need to exploit Islamists' anxieties about being portrayed as backward misogynists and utilize international human rights law for leverage to counter the backlash that will likely accompany the rise of Islamism. Activists should stress that women's rights are integral features of the international human rights system. If women's rights are associated with a broader network of interrelated human rights principles—such as freedom of expression and association, free and fair elections, the provision of education for all as well as the rights to food and housing among others—this approach stands to broaden support for the goal of gender equality.

In short, political upheavals in Arab societies could set in motion a backlash presaging major setbacks for women's rights. As Islamists jockey for power and enjoy electoral success in different countries, they are likely to question and actively undermine the project of gender equality. Targets of this backlash could include a country's recently liberalized family codes that give women easier access to divorce, education for girls and women, desirable jobs occupied by women once reserved for men and respect for international legal norms. An energized alliance of Islamist states could mobilize to coordinate strategies in their efforts to thwart and discredit transnational women's rights activism.

However, activists, with their history of creativity and resourcefulness while working in the context of authoritarian rule, can find ways to anchor the cause of gender equality in meaningful projects like national development and the advancement of human rights more generally. Clearly, to defend the gains achieved in recent decades, the women's movement will need to be as nimble as possible in devising their own strategies in response to the changing dynamics created by the new Islamist ascendancy in the Middle East and North Africa.

DEMOCRATIZATION, CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS — THE MODEL OF BRAZIL

Jacqueline Pitanguy*

The experience of striving to create gender-inclusive democracies is relatively new to women in Middle Eastern and North African societies who have previously had to seek their human rights in the context of authoritarian rule. However, they have much political capital to draw on—most notably, their own efforts in advocacy, educational campaigns and movement building; international legal instruments such as the CEDAW; as well as the exemplars of women in other regions who have participated in and led transitions to democracy.

Brazilian women's experience with democratization and constitutional reform may provide lessons for their counterparts in several Arab countries. The women's movement redefined democracy in Brazil so as to advance their human rights within their country's constitution.

THE STARTING POINT—FIGHTING AGAINST DICTATORSHIP

In 1964, amid the Cold War and rising fears of communism in Latin America, a military coup d'état toppled Brazil's civilian president and imposed a dictatorship lasting for 21 years. At its peak between 1968 and 1975, state violence resulted in censorship, the abolition of habeas corpus, arbitrary imprisonment, persecution of political opponents and torture.

The women´s movement emerged as a political actor on the national scene in 1975. Various feminist groups came together in Rio de Janeiro and organized the first major forum to discuss women's situation in society. As a member of the organizing committee for this meeting, my feminist activism began in a hostile political environment—characterized on the one hand by military rule and on the other by opposition forces coalescing under the slogan "people united against dictatorship."

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Ironically, the concept of “people” as a national front to challenge military rule was exclusionary in practice. The strategic rationale for this front, based on a narrow understanding of democracy, did not allow for specific constituencies such as women, indigenous peoples and those of African descent. Issues of women´s rights and racial inequality were deemed secondary to the general struggle. Consequently, the women´s movement fought against dictatorship while working to gain legitimacy within the opposition and society at large. The movement had to demonstrate that women´s issues were not marginal. On the contrary, ensuring women’s rights would be essential to a genuinely democratic agenda.

Feminism expanded as a movement between 1975 and 1979 due to the rise of new groups and the adoption of its perspective by organizations such as labor unions, professional associations, the media and academia. The approval of the 1979 amnesty law and return of thousands of Brazilian exiles reinforced the feminist, environmentalist and anti-racism agendas but also complicated the task of forming coalitions while adding complexities to the concept of democracy.

The late 1970s were marked by growth in the number and diversity of opposition actors—new political parties, trade unions and civil society organizations. Although women´s rights were not yet a central issue, the feminist agenda was no longer seen as divisive. Due to strong advocacy, political parties started to include some demands of the women’s movement in their electoral platforms. Feminism achieved an important triumph with the incorporation into mainstream politics of such issues as gender discrimination; women's exclusion from economic, political and cultural decision-making; and domestic and sexual violence. The transition to full democracy was underway.

The Election of a Civilian President and Democratization

The national campaign for the election of a civilian president solidified the coalition of forces opposing military rule and transformed it into a large democratic front in 1982. Significantly, this transformation did not erase these groups’ diverse identities and agendas. Rather, they learned new strategies from one another.

When a civilian president was elected in 1985, the women´s movement convened to debate whether to demand an institutional space within the government. Two stances emerged: (a) the feminist movement should neither demand an institutional space nor collaborate with the government at the risk of losing its autonomy; and (b) the struggle for a space inside the government would be

crucial so as to make substantive changes in women´s situation, particularly because a constitutional congress would soon be elected. A majority supported the second position and started to strategize about how to advocate for such a space.

Such is the history of the key role played by the National Council for Women´s Rights (CNDM) in the constitutional reform process. Through determined advocacy, the Council assured women´s rights would be included in the constitution. I enjoyed the historical opportunity to preside over the CNDM during this four-year process.

Among the lessons of Brazil's experience for women in the Middle East and North Africa is that when joining the opposition to authoritarian rule, they should not disappear into a huge national front, losing the specificity of their agendas. On the contrary, the challenge for women is to maintain their status as a distinct political force with their demands incorporated into the democratic agenda.

The model of Brazil also shows that gaining a space within the transitional government is crucial, particularly if a constitutional reform process is underway. Whether by creating new ministries, councils and/or other entities or by occupying existing ones, women must make sure that their posts have political and budgetary autonomy and the strength and legitimacy to be heard within the government. In times of political transition and freer expression, groups once allied in pushing for change begin to promote their own projects which compete for government attention and funding. This competition leads to conflicts; so those governmental entities striving to advance women´s rights have to prepare for continuous struggle.

"A Worthy Constitution Has to Incorporate Women's Rights"

The first civilian government inaugurated a rapprochement between the state and civil society. Government entities staffed by representatives of different positions and parties had more space for diverse views and jostled for influence.

In November 1985, the National Council for Women´s Rights launched a campaign with the slogan, "A worthy constitution has to incorporate women's rights." Initially, this campaign aimed to create a constituency by raising consciousness of this political moment's uniqueness and the opportunity it offered to improve women's situation. The CNDM visited all of Brazil's states to start campaigns in each one, enlisting the support of local organizations. The Council pressed for women's rights and for more female candidates to the Constitutional Congress.

The second goal was to build a broad alliance of women from several groups —trade unions, domestic workers associations, rural women's organizations, academics and feminist groups. This alliance would then forge a consensus on those women´s rights to be included in the new constitution. Working with television and radio outlets as well as the print press, the CNDM publicized its demands to society at large and gained support for women's equality in the new constitution. With a larger, more diverse coalition endorsing the CNDM's agenda, the more likely it would be defended in the Constitutional Congress.

To formulate this agenda, the CNDM consulted with various groups and organizations—those consisting only of women and those with mixed memberships —requesting their proposals for themes they wanted incorporated into the new constitution. Worth noting is that this consultation took place before the internet's existence; even so, the Council received thousands of letters, telegrams and faxes. Feminist lawyers, working pro bono, joined the CNDM's staff to help prepare a document elaborating women's principal demands to the Constitutional Congress. By March 1986, when the legislative session began, this document titled "The Letter of Brazilian Women to the Constitutional Congress" was ready after its approval at a national meeting convened by the CNDM.

With "The Letter" finalized, the third objective was to lobby the Congress, in close consultation with women's groups, to adopt the CNDM's proposals in the constitution. Following the legislative debate on the constitution's chapters, the CNDM's representatives visited the Congress every day—talking to party leaders and key members of parliament. Working with the female parliamentarians was particularly important. Even most of those who did not support the CNDM's demands were willing to work together.

As part of its lobbying effort, the CNDM also orchestrated a media campaign to address important issues as they arose. For example, when the Congress focused on the family, the CNDM took to television, radio, bill boards and the print press with a picture of a family at the beginning of the 20th century, dressed accordingly, the father standing in the middle of his wife and seven children; the slogan read, "Today's family is not the same, but the laws still are." Brazil was ruled by the 1916 civil code in which the man was the head of the family.

The CNDM's work offers insights to women in the MENA. Presenting a proposal that reflects the will of a diverse national constituency and not of only one specific group is vital. Widespread agreement on the Council's proposal gave women power which is the currency of political negotiations.

Moreover, engaging in a continual dialogue with feminist groups and other organizations, as the CNDM did, is essential to maintaining support for policies to improve women's situation—especially when under attack by conservative forces in and outside the government. Because politics are dynamic and contexts change, Arab women in the midst of a transition may acquire experience in using the intricate mechanisms of power, as their Brazilian counterparts did.

The Achievements of Brazil's 1988 Constitution

Numerous constitutions drafted after World War II or after the overthrow of authoritarian and/or racist governments during the late 20th century encompass more rights and duties than does the United States constitution. Examples come from Portugal, South Africa and many Latin American countries including Brazil. The legal statements produced during the drafting of these constitutions were crucial to defining a citizen's rights in every dimension of human life—from the general proposition of equality to specific chapters on family law, labor rights, social benefits, education, the environment and health among other issues.

The CNDM's advocacy led to a constitution that transformed Brazilian women's legal status, which in turn inspired reforms in the civil, labor and penal codes and new legislation regarding family planning and violence against women. The main achievements of the constitutional reform process were the:

- ✓ elimination of the concept of the head of the family and statement of equal rights and responsibilities for women and men within the family;
- ✓ definition of a family, in terms of the members' rights and duties, as sharing a common life—without a marriage certificate required;
- ✓ declaration of the state's duty to prevent and protect against violence within the family;
- ✓ affirmation of healthcare as a right;
- ✓ advancement of a couple's rights to make their own reproductive choices and the state's duty to provide the means for informed decision-making;
- ✓ recognition of discrimination against women in the labor market and the need to take corrective measures;
- ✓ addition to paid maternal leave from 3 to 4 months;
- ✓ assertion of paternal leave to be regulated by labor codes;
- ✓ extension of labor and social rights to domestic workers;

- ✓ support for rural women's right to own land—in their name independent of their marriage status; and
- ✓ statement of the right of women in prisons to breastfeed their babies.

These stipulations within Brazil's constitution represented major advances in women´s human rights and foreshadowed the progress that would come during the 1990s through the cycle of United Nations conferences. During the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, the Brazilian delegation thus had the moral authority to endorse the international movement demanding that violence against women be recognized as a human rights violation. Brazil's constitution had established a standard to aspire to and a reference point for advocacy. The same was true with respect to those women's rights discussed at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Consequently, Brazil's recent history of democratization and constitutional reform may be illuminating and instructive for Middle Eastern and North African women presently experiencing a political transition. The region's women have already participated in deliberations and the adoption of international human rights legal instruments such as CEDAW and the jurisprudence of international courts. As they press forward with democratization, advocacy against reservations to CEDAW and for the inclusion of international women's human rights standards in their new constitutions are essential.

A transition is not genuinely democratic without gender equality. The ballot box is one among the various tools of democratization, but elections are not synonymous with democracy, nor are human rights principles necessarily assured through the voting system. As women in the Middle East and North Africa seek to establish gender-inclusive democracies, they, like the Brazilians, will see the need to use the ballot box, but also and of equal importance, to build movements, forge coalitions, advocate for change and create consensus around the objective of advancing their human rights.

INCREASING WOMEN'S VOICE IN POLITICAL PARTIES— INSIGHTS FROM THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

Susan Markham*

For more than 25 years, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) has worked with more than 720 political parties and civil society organizations in more than 80 countries, including in the Middle East and North Africa, to create open political environments in which women and men may participate in the democratic process.

As the Arab revolutions against authoritarian rule sparked in 2011 continue into 2012, multiple political parties are emerging in societies where they have previously been weak, operating underground and/or nonexistent due to various factors including government suppression. As in other regions of the world, these parties are likely to become the primary and most direct vehicle through which women may gain access to elected office and rise to positions of political leadership. Consequently, the values, structures, practices and policies of parties have a profound impact on the extent of women's participation in their country's political life.

Parties that take women's political participation seriously benefit from stronger electoral positions, access to new groups of voters and more robust relationships with their constituents. Additionally, parties that produce new faces and ideas by enlisting women maintain a vibrant, energized image in an age of declining voter turnout. Some results are dramatic; some are subtle; and some are achieved incrementally. Yet the overall outcome for political parties is a net gain in every case.

Enhancing women's roles in the electoral and governing processes is not a matter of numbers alone. Efforts to increase women's numbers without offering them genuine qualitative influence or decision-making powers are unlikely to result in new or immediate benefits to parties. Examples of such efforts include creating a women's wing without statutory authority or sway; selecting so-called female place holders on candidate lists; placing women in districts where they stand no chance of being elected; removing them from viable positions on candidate lists at the last minute; and marginalizing women officials once elected.

The question thus arises: What factors help women participate more fully in political life? Five conditions that facilitate their engagement in most political activities are applicable to their participation in parties as well.

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First, women must have **reasonable access to positions of power**. Political leadership is often centralized and informal. Holding a formal position, even an elected post, does not necessarily mean greater influence. The real leaders do not always hold formal titles. Moreover, power in democracies may be built on relationships that go back several years. In countries where women are just emerging in public roles, their historical absence may significantly impede their involvement in political parties and decision-making. However, a pathway to power may be forged by giving women the tools they need to lead, providing opportunities for their advancement, cultivating networks of like-minded women and men as well as ensuring that the legal rights of women are firmly entrenched.

Also critical to women's advancement in civil society and within the political process is **transparency**. The lack of openness in decision-making and undemocratic internal procedures and policies challenge all newcomers to politics, but particularly women. Similarly, the complex hierarchies of parties and legislatures are barriers to many women who enter politics at the local level and aspire to leadership roles.

The **citizenry's willingness to accept new ideas about gender roles** is the third crucial condition that enables women to become fully engaged in political parties. Many societies discourage women from competing directly with men or consider women's sole domain to be childcare and housekeeping. As such, women who support political activism at the grassroots level are more common than those in leadership positions. Concerted efforts are needed to raise awareness of gender inequality and to underscore how stereotypical gender roles inhibit women's political participation. In the same vein, the support of male leaders is a key element in engendering a political climate that encourages women's participation.

Women must be **financial autonomous or able to gain access to economic resources** to engage fully in political activities. Worldwide, women's lower economic status, relative poverty and discriminatory legal frameworks are substantial hurdles to overcome. Because women control and have access to fewer economic resources, they are often unable to pay the formal and informal costs associated with gaining a party's nomination and standing for election.

Finally, **women must have the political will**. Many political actors and public officials profess their support for the notion of equality; yet quite a few less are willing to make the personal and professional sacrifices necessary to sustain measurable societal change. No outside individual or group can make change. If political will does not exist on both sides—among those in power and those currently without it—no change can happen.

In seeking to augment women's political presence and influence, NDI's work has focused on "the three Cs"—capacity, confidence and connections. NDI has endeavored to develop women's political skills so that they come to believe in their own abilities to create positive change while building networks with others who share experiences and support their efforts.

NDI's new handbook titled *Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties: A Good Practices Guide to Promote Women's Political Participation*—published with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)—examines 20 case studies in countries spanning the globe to discern what parties can and must do to increase women's political participation.[1] Strategies vary depending on the phase which parties are going through in the electoral cycle: the internal party organization, pre-electoral, electoral or post-electoral periods.

When looking at transitions from authoritarian rule to pluralism, as is the case in much of the MENA, the analytical and practical focus should be on the internal party organization phase. Unfortunately, this period is usually the least exciting for a political party and is thus often ignored.

However, during this phase, activists and officials should carefully consider which steps must be taken and tasks performed to enlist women and make certain that they have a voice within the party—among them:

- ✓ Developing a gender-sensitive legal framework and governing documents. These include the party's constitution or by-laws and a statement on gender equality in its founding documents.
- ✓ Implementing measures such as the establishment of internal quotas to promote women's participation on boards and decision-making structures. Women are generally under-represented within party leadership even though they constitute 40 to 50 percent of membership.
- ✓ Creating a well-funded, organized women's wing in the party that is not marginalized. It can provide a forum for women to discuss political priorities, serve as an outreach tool for the party and train up-and-coming female leaders.

[1] Authored by Julie Ballington, published in 2011 and available in English, Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish.

- ✓ Planning for women's involvement in party conventions which offer opportunities to build political and financial relationships as well as to engage in drafting and/or passing the platform.
- ✓ Mainstreaming gender issues into the formulation of policy and the party platform, which entails advocating gender-specific reforms and making sure that gender is discussed with regard to all issues.

Electoral quotas, whether adopted voluntarily by the party or mandated by electoral law, are arguably the most decisive, efficient and preferred means of bringing more women into parties and politics in general. Candidate quotas affect the supply of women running for office, and reserved seats determine the proportion of positions that must be awarded to women.

Yet having a quota law on the books does not suffice. The implementation of quotas depends on aspects of the electoral system—whether or not it is first-past-the-post, whether candidate lists are open or closed, etc.—and on women's placement in winnable seats. Expanding the pool of women candidates and funding their campaigns are also vital to the efficacy of quotas.

NDI's work around the world demonstrates that the most meaningful strategies simultaneously combine reforms to political institutions and targeted support to women party activists, candidates and elected officials. Although women in Middle Eastern and North African societies have been at the forefront of recent political change, ensuring their presence and voice within parties and in governments will be a challenge.

Nascent political parties and those re-emerging after decades of operating in a limited capacity may be tempted to ignore enlistment of women into their ranks. Among men's justifications, they may insist that the tasks associated with learning how to function in a more open but shifting and uncertain political environment are more important than tending to women's concerns. However, women's full engagement as political party members and leaders will not set back the achievement of these tasks. Quite the contrary: Only if women and men work together will they learn the values of civil discourse, compromise, empathy and power-sharing which are crucial to the establishment of gender-inclusive democracies.

MEDIA USE AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN ARAB SOCIETIES — "TECHNOLOGY IS EASY, COMMUNITY IS HARD"

Anne Nelson*

The West has paid a great deal of attention to the role of digital media in the revolutions known as the "Arab Spring." Some observers have even labeled the Egyptian uprising against Hosni Mubarak as the "Twitter Revolution."

However, sometimes the attention paid to novelties can detract from understanding the most significant factors in political processes. This is particularly true in the realm of digital media and its role in the Arab world. The underlying political forces of Arab societies that have been struggling and evolving for decades are often invisible to outsiders—especially to those who are enchanted by the "transparent transactions" from the region that they can follow on their own social media feeds.

The saying in the more sophisticated media circles is: "Technology is easy, community is hard." This was very much the case in Egypt. Under President Hosni Mubarak, civil society had an uphill climb. Political parties and elections were crippled by dictatorship. Various associations, trade unions and traditional media outlets labored under severe restrictions. Consequently, when textile workers launched a series of strikes and protests over food prices in 2007, little notice was taken in the outside world, but their actions had an influence on how Egyptians viewed their own political process. Organizations with close social ties—religious groups, student associations and traditional reformists—needed media for communications. Yet the battery of new technology would have been useless without the underlying social ties.

Much of the Western concept of the "Twitter Revolution" reveals a profound misunderstanding of the state of technology in Egyptian society. Egypt is a country of some 80 million people. Like their counterparts in many countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa, few Egyptians have access to landline telephony. Much of the computer use throughout the country occurs in internet cafes and the workplace, not in a home-based broadband setting.

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The real game-changer in Egypt has been the cell phone. There are now more cell phones in Egypt, some 82 million, than people. As of 2011, only a tiny percentage of these were smart phones. As such, Twitter as a web-based service reached only a small percentage of Egyptians.[1] One study found that out of 52 million Twitter account holders, only 14,642 indicated that they are based in Egypt, Yemen and Tunisia combined.[2] While some users in the region surely chose not to disclose their locations, the data still suggests that the most important role for Twitter was to amplify events in Egypt for a massive audience in the West.

The importance of this amplifying effect should not be underestimated. For many years, the United States actively and tacitly supported the Mubarak dictatorship with economic and military aid, turning a blind eye to human rights abuses. The amplification of the events in Tahrir Square through social media forced the hand of the US policy makers, limiting the possibility of perpetuating the policies of the past.

Yet for Egyptians themselves, the real technical difference came with mobile telephony: phone calls and text messages via plain vanilla cell phones, which only a decade earlier would be have been impossible.

Even if web-based technology played a limited role in the upheaval of January 2011, its influence will clearly grow at a rapid rate in Egypt and the rest of the developing world; 3G networks are multiplying across the African continent, along with a new generation of low-cost Chinese Android smart phones (50 US Dollars). This proliferation will enable users to gain access to mobile services ranging from social media to video, altering every aspect of communal life—cultural, economic and political.

One of the most significant challenges will be the generation gap. The next generation of youth will be “hard-wired” for digital technology from birth and will acquire digital skills unthinkingly. The same is usually not so for the older generations who may struggle with the logic and technical skills of new media. Many leaders in society have wisdom to share but may not know how to communicate in tweets. At the same time, young people in need of education will have to learn how to focus and do so on platforms that require more attention and concentration than the entertainment-oriented social media to which they are accustomed.

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[1] Using some functions of Twitter over a “dumb phone” is technically possible, but only with difficulty and on a very limited basis.

[2] See http://mashable.com/2011/02/01/egypt-twitter-infographic/.

This digital generation gap is a critical issue for non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and foundations alike. Much of the activity around digital media in developing countries has been oriented towards training youth; but in societies that are experiencing disruption and upheaval, sharing common platforms for peaceful communication is extremely important for all elements of civil society. The timeliest use of media development support may be to train elders in the use of digital media and to remind the young of the unique attributes of quality legacy media. This approach could help to build bridges between generations and contribute to the creation of a social consensus for the challenging times ahead throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

GENDER AND CIVIC EDUCATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

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The concept of informed citizenship through education is not new. Aristotle is oft quoted that "If liberty and equality, as is thought by some, are chiefly to be found in a democracy, they will be attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost." Comprehensive, inclusive and gender-aware citizenship education is the key to enlightened citizenship, and enlightened citizens are crucial to vibrant, stable democracies. The revolutions called the "Arab Spring" were both incited by and have continued to incite an engaged, networked and informed citizenry, with women playing a prominent role.

Government's procedures and mechanisms touch all citizens' lives, and those who with the least access to power—who are least likely to be sitting at the table where decisions are made, whose voices are most often absent from the discourse—are usually most vulnerable to political change and have the most at risk when policies do not respond to their needs. Women form the overwhelming majority of this under-represented citizenry.

Women and men risking life, limb and livelihood to foment the Arab revolutions are on the leading edge of the innovative, informal, citizen-led, networked civic education that many experts laud as the future—this despite the fact that in these countries, formal means of citizenship or civic education, let alone the existence of a robust and engaged civil society, have been heavily restricted.

While the established Western democracies may have valuable lessons to teach emerging democratic movements about implementing formal, institutionalized methods of civic education, these technology-savvy revolutionaries have just as much, if not more, to teach established democracies about what citizenship education *can* be: engaging, participatory and exhilarating. Knowledge sharing and resource exchange—key to both civic education and vibrant democracies—are alive and well. The older and young democracies have much to teach each other.

Of course, the issues of women and gender are critically important to creating responsive, inclusive formal and informal civic education programs, and they are at the core of a truly participatory, sustainable democracy. Not only must women be

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empowered to find and add their voices to the political discourse; the issues of women and gender must become of crucial significance to policy makers, government leaders and other authorities.

WHY CIVIC EDUCATION IS SIGNIFICANT FOR DEMOCRACY

As a general concept, citizenship or civic education (CE)[1] is a key element in building and sustaining democracies, challenging injustice and ensuring that the populace is engaged and participating in creating and maintaining the kinds of societies that *all* citizens *want* to live in. This is just as true for established democracies as it is for emerging democracies.

CE helps establish universally understood definitions of terms and principles. "In particular, civic education appears to contribute to significantly greater rates of political participation ... especially at the local level. It also leads to more moderate, but still significant, differences in participants' knowledge about their political system and about democratic structures and institutions ... and ... tends to contribute to a greater sense of political efficacy."[2] While understanding the mechanics of democracy is vital, knowing *how* the system works is only part of the picture.

To cultivate an engaged, enlightened citizenry, people must grasp not just *how* a democracy works, but *why* its works this way. CE aids in creating shared understandings of such concepts as citizen, class, community, fairness, gender, human rights, justice, identity, inequality, power, rule of law and society. When these concepts are universally understood and accepted horizontally and vertically—among all citizens and up through the tiers of power—citizens can feel secure to exercise their rights and governments can feel secure in governing.

CE empowers citizens to think critically about government, citizenship and society as they acquire the skills needed to engage in informed debate and civil discussion, to speak out against injustice and to have reflexive and flexible attitudes that allow room for shifts in thinking and for diversity in society. Effective CE encourages conflict resolution over conflict, collaboration, advocacy and the ability for people to explore power dynamics.

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[1] The terms *citizenship education* and *civic education* are used interchangeably in much of the literature.

[2] United States Agency for International Development (USAID), "Approaches to Civic Education: Lessons Learned," 2002. http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and_governance/publications/pdfs/pnacp331.pdf.

CE gives people the ability to assess various realities, to ask who benefits from preserving certain dynamics and particularly the asymmetries, to question their own roles and complicity in maintaining inequalities and to devise more inclusive, responsive solutions to the resulting problems. CE thus stimulates critical analysis of gender dynamics—comparing women's and men's access to power, education and economic prosperity among other social goods. It entails more than examining the relationships between citizenry as a universal group and the government. CE is a logical place to explore the gendered nature of power differentials and encourage engagement among women and girls to challenge the status quo.

For emerging democracies, CE is essential to help build a population that can free themselves from the psychological and educational limitations of having lived only under authoritarian rule in which expression, association and participation in society were restricted or prohibited. CE is crucial to bring the emerging democratic societies together around common understandings of citizenship and the rights and responsibilities of citizens *and* governments.

Establishing agreed-upon or universal definitions of key terms and principles is a first step to engaging a population in protecting their democracy and mitigating reactionaries and (re)emerging authoritarianisms. **However, without comprehensive CE that promotes gender equality and women's role in society and as citizens, women and their contributions to the revolutions, to democracy and to society in general will surely be overlooked.**

WHERE CIVIC EDUCATION HAPPENS: FORMAL VS. INFORMAL, SCHOOL-BASED VS. ADULT CE

Civic Education happens every day all around us. Some of us have grown up experiencing CE in a formal institution, within primary or secondary school curriculum along with reading, math and science. Others do not have the experience of formalized CE in our classrooms.

Regardless of where we encountered CE, it most likely came alive when it spoke to us about issues to which we, as individuals, relate. That said, many agree about the importance of starting at an early age and the need to continue offering age-appropriate but engaging and innovative—multi-disciplinary and multi-media—CE in the classroom as an emerging best practice in the field. To play an effective role in society, students should understand the obstacles that may impede them

from attaining their full potential.[3] More specifically, formal CE "is about the pedagogy and curriculum necessary to ensure children and young people's positive identities, willingness and competence to engage effectively in public and community life, and to promote values which support harmonious, democratic, peaceful and equitable relationships within local, national and global communities…"[4]

Formal CE may be the best place to begin transmitting core democratic principles to children without indoctrination or ideology and to prioritize "…moral values, community engagement and political literacy."[5] However, conducting formal CE places a burden on the classroom teacher; understanding what constitutes political literacy is necessary to organize what to teach and how to teach it. Teaching political literacy entails addressing potentially uncomfortable, even controversial themes such as "power and authority, division of labour, social control, conflict, interdependence, cooperation, tradition and social change."[6]

The desired outcome for students participating in school-based CE is for them to become "informed, responsible, and competent participants in the political life of their communities, states, and the nation."[7] The good news is the "...abundant evidence both from research and everyday observations that good civic education produces desirable results. When students receive a sustained and systematic education in civics and government they become [better citizens]."[8] Because CE is about teaching children the rights, responsibilities and importance of being engaged, proactive and informed citizens, it provides a logical opportunity in the formal school setting for critical examination of the gender and how inequality is often gendered.[9]

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[3] Hilary Claire and Cathie Holden, "Gender and Citizenship Education," citiZED (Citizenship and Teacher Education), 2006. http://www.citized.info/pdf/commarticles/Claire_&_Holden.pdf (A study based on CE experiences in the United Kingdom).

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] USAID, "Approaches to Civic Education: Lessons Learned."

[8] Ibid.

[9] Claire and Holden, "Gender and Citizenship Education."

WHY CIVIC EDUCATION MATTERS TO WOMEN

Due to gendered divisions which close off the public sphere to girls and women, they have not always benefitted fully from civic education. Boys and men may gain more because CE can buttress gender inequalities. Yet with fresh understandings of best practices—namely, advocating a gender-aware maximalist approach to CE and making it relevant to the target audiences' the daily lives—it is an essential tool for empowering girls and women to be civically involved, to grasp the concept of equality and to open public spaces not always welcoming to them.

Without this maximalist approach to CE, women's roles in political transitions and in society more generally will go unnoticed, as evidenced by the Arab revolutions. Women are learning that despite their profound involvement in these revolutions, once the fight is over, their contributions are relegated to the background, if not dismissed altogether. Worse yet, modest gains in gender equality won under prior authoritarian governments are being undermined by political entrepreneurs—such as Islamists espousing interpretations of the Quran that set women back dramatically. Indeed, many women activists have been attacked.

Moreover, power asymmetries exist not only between men and women in the Middle East and North Africa, but also between groups defined by ethnicity, race, religion, tribe, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation. As women have multiple identities, these other asymmetries may overlap with and intensify gender inequalities, which complicates the tasks of building and sustaining democracies.

As authoritarian rulers fall, few women are qualified to become involved in establishing democratic governments and to run for office. This situation—the subversion of human rights, overlapping inequalities and a shortage of women with political skills may be attributed in part to the unavailability of CE altogether or simply to women. Consequently, the design and implementation of gender-aware CE is vital in Arab societies, through schools and informal networks geared to adult learners.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT CIVIC EDUCATION IN THE EMERGING ARAB DEMOCRACIES CE

For democracy to take root in the MENA, people will have to learn the lessons inherent in civic education—acceptance of diversity, respects for different viewpoints, even encouragement of, dissent.[10] CE can equip people with the ability

[10] Muhammad Faour an Marwan Muasher, "Education for Citizenship in the Arab World: Key to the Future," **Carnegie Papers**, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Washington, DC, October 2011, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/citizenship_education.pdf.

to construct systems that redistribute and check power, draft and implement sustainable constitutions, engage the electorate, strengthen the rule of law and promote human rights and equality.

Education reform is central to creating space for citizenship education. Thus far, however, reforms in the region have focused on education's technical aspects such as building schools, acquiring capital like computers and textbooks, improving test scores in basic competencies like reading and math, etc. Though necessary, these reforms overlook a "human component." Students should grasp early on "...what it means to be citizens who learn how to think, seek and produce knowledge, question, and innovate rather than be subjects of the state ... These attributes are essential if the region is to move away from ... [relying] on "rents" in the form of oil and outside assistance, and toward ... [a] system that empowers its citizens ... to build self-generating, prosperous economies and achieve a quality of life..."[11]

Daunting challenges to comprehensive formal CE exist in Arab societies. Among these are:

- ✓ Governance: Ministries of education in Arab governments assume a highly centralized role and continue to be dominated by authoritarian management systems lacking vision, strategic planning and competent personnel.
- ✓ Teachers: As new opportunities for education emerge, particularly for girls, there is a shortage of qualified teachers. Some who are currently working lack the experience to innovate and encourage critical thinking.
- ✓ Funding: While some major international initiatives are launching civic education in regional countries, funds are lacking for indigenous, grassroots organizations or programming around formal or informal CE.
- ✓ Distrust: Civic education, whether formal or informal, confronts a misconception that it and the democratic principles it aims to teach and reinforce are inherently "Western," corrupting and/or un-Islamic.

Amid these challenges, the experiences from both formal and informal CE initiatives in both established and emerging democracies offer valuable lessons. By looking to these experiences, developing successful, sustainable CE strategies for different target audiences is feasible in the Middle East and North Africa. Strategies

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[11] Ibid.

for maximalist, gender-aware civic education should reflect the need to reach and engage students, government officials, activists, passive or apathetic citizens as well as disenfranchised and marginalized members of society, chief among them women. Recommendations for this kind of civic education include:

- ✓ **Focus on "core concepts" for democracy**. Choose terms that may be considered universal—for example, freedom, equality, gender and tolerance—but also incorporate concepts relevant to the local context.
- ✓ **Ensure discussions around gender are 'mainstreamed' throughout the CE program.** Some areas where CE can explore gender are women's human rights and the relationships between local and global inequalities.
- ✓ **Make CE engaging, relevant and participatory.** Ways to implement this maximalist approach to programming include: incorporating events that touch participants' lives into content and cultivating networks with others in the community and around the world through new social media.
- ✓ **Ask yourself critical questions.** Educators should ask themselves some important questions about content, process and school/organizational structures when designing CE programming: Do we directly address economic and political gender inequalities in the curriculum's content? Do we support through the educational process marginalized participants? Are gender issues raised through the structure of schools/organizations?
- ✓ **Monitor, Evaluate and Modify.** Engage in ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the CE initiative to ensure that it fulfills both the target audience's and the wider community's needs.

Women have been instrumental actors in the Arab revolutions; to deny gender equality's universal importance is disrespectful and ungrateful given the price they have paid in the uprisings and the sacrifices they continue to make. Such assertions also play into the hands of those seeking to monopolize the truth and to deprive half the population from achieving their full potential.

Middle Eastern and North African countries desperately need formal and informal civic education to cultivate citizens who are empowered for engagement in their communities. Deeply rooted barriers remain for women striving to achieve recognition as full citizens. Gender-aware, inclusive CE is not a magic bullet, but it is a critical strategy to move societies struggling to rise from the ashes of tyranny towards pluralistic, sustainable democracies where women and men have equal value and have an equal stake in building their futures.