



THE USE OF HUMAN CAPABILITIES

Introduction

No society can develop or prosper without women playing a pivotal role in its formation. This role is not restricted to their biological function as progenitors of, and caregivers for, the young, functions in which women have assumed a central responsibility since humans first emerged. Women have helped in shaping societies through all types of human activity from the earliest times – even before the advent of sedentary life. Yet a mixture of political, economic, social and cultural factors (the last being the rise of male hegemony) entrenched a distinction between the public and private spheres that assigns prominence to men. This distinction remains the basis of the criteria of societal worth, with the result

that women have been largely sequestered in the private, familial sphere. Nevertheless, society does not accord even this vital role the importance that it merits, while society as a whole is deprived of the general good that would result from women's effective participation in production and in the public life of society.

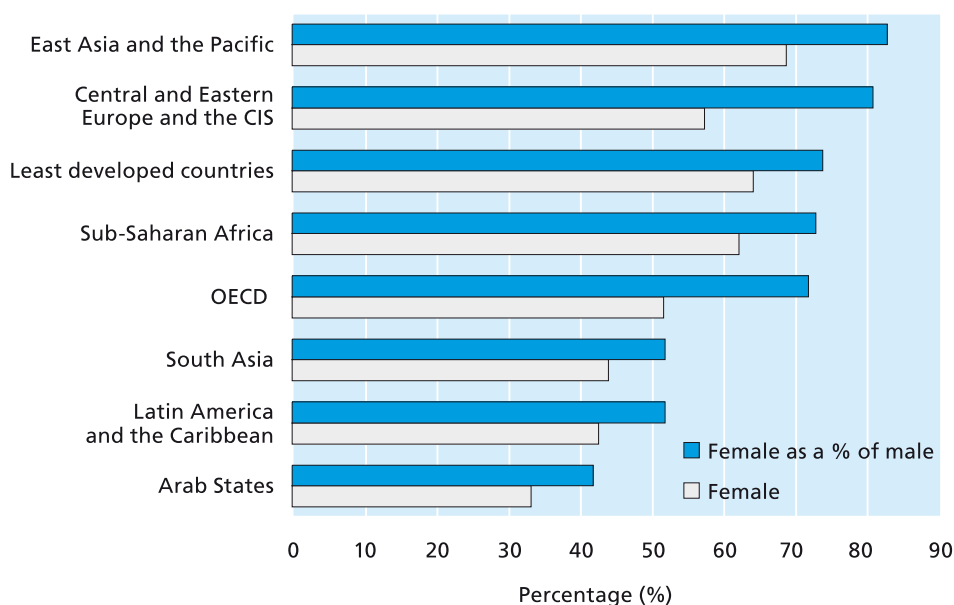
ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Statistics on women's rates of participation in economic activities in the Arab region show these to be lower than in any other part of the world (figure 3-1). It should be noted, however, that these figures are reproduced with the caveat that they greatly underestimate women's true participation (chapter 1).

A mixture of political, economic, social and cultural factors entrenched a distinction between the public and private spheres that assigns prominence to men.

Figure 3-1

Female (age 15+ years) economic activity rate (%) and female activity rate as a percentage of male activity rate, world regions, 2003



Source: UNDP, 2005.

Women have been largely sequestered in the private, familial sphere.

In the Arab countries, experience shows that in times of economic recession, women are the first fired while in times of economic expansion they are the last hired.

First, slow growth in the region predisposes economies towards low demand for female labour. In addition, the traditional view that men are the breadwinners further obstructs the employment of women and contributes to an increase in women's (blatant) unemployment relative to men. In the Arab countries, experience shows that in times of economic recession, women are the first fired while in times of economic expansion they are the last hired. This is illustrated by the decline in the number of working women during the first half of the 1990s, a period of slow growth, especially in the private sector, in Egypt while the number of male employment increased in the same period (Fergany, 1998).

Available statistics, despite their weakness,

also indicate a relatively higher level of women's unemployment than that of men even though many Arab women are willing to work (figure 3-2).

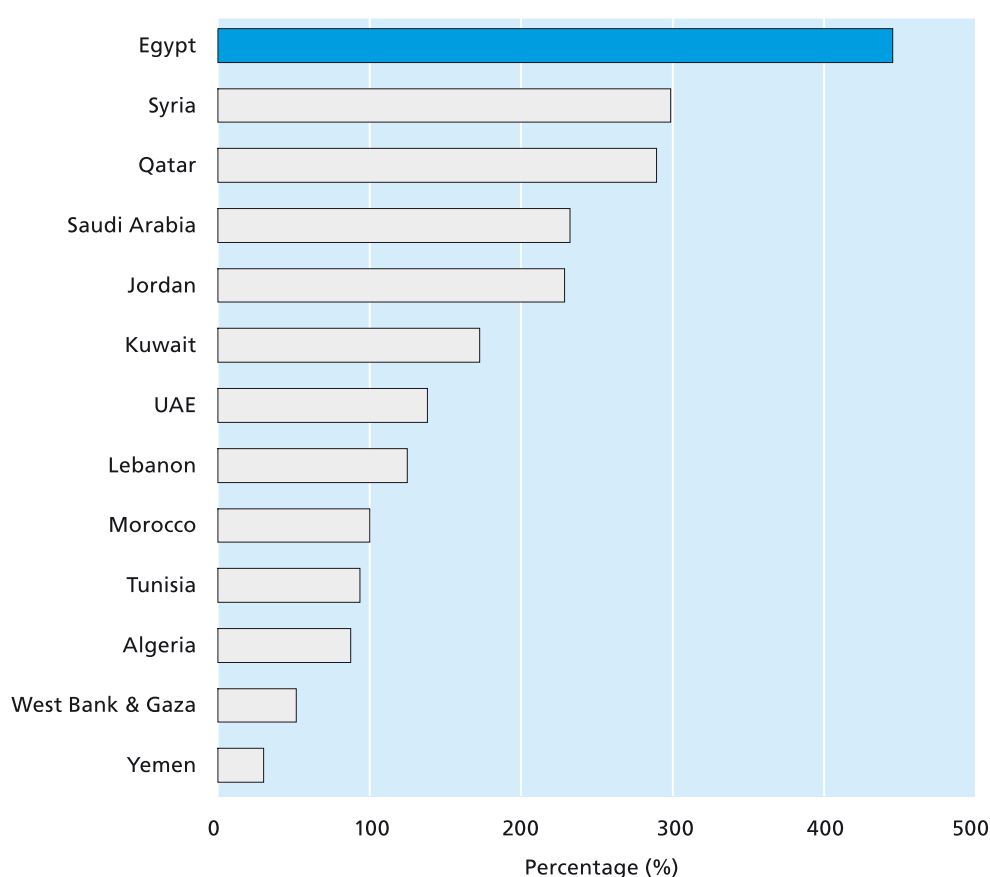
Given women's superior achievements in education, this trend goes against the grain of pure economic efficiency in that the sex with the greater potential for learning, and thus a greater potential to boost production, is less likely to be employed.

It is important to note that Arab public opinion, according to the field surveys mentioned earlier, runs counter to dominant discriminatory practices in Arab labour markets, clearly favouring women's right to equal opportunities to work, equal conditions and equal remuneration (Box 3-1).

Given women's superior achievements in education, their higher unemployment level goes against the grain of pure economic efficiency.

Figure 3-2

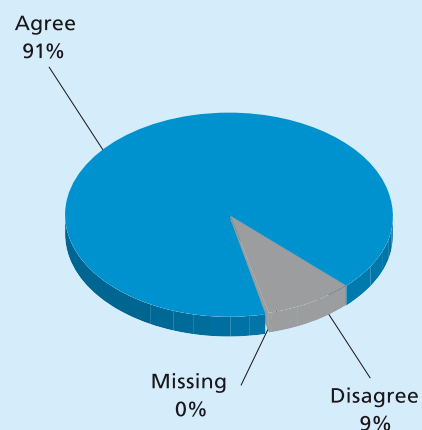
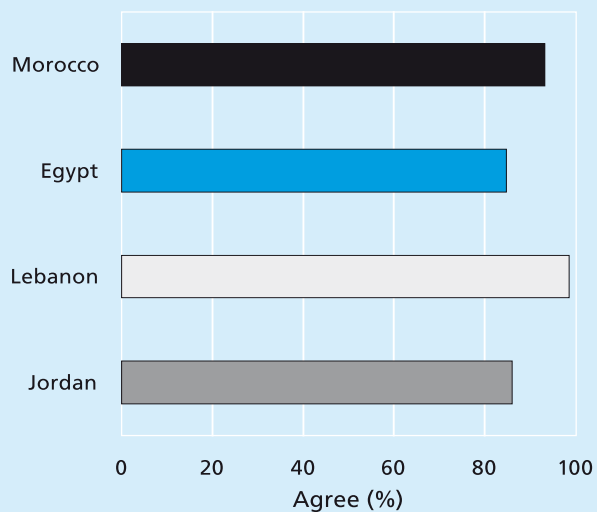
Female unemployment rate as a percentage of male unemployment rate, Arab countries and world regions, most recent year available



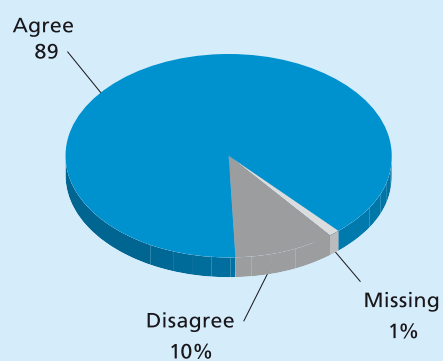
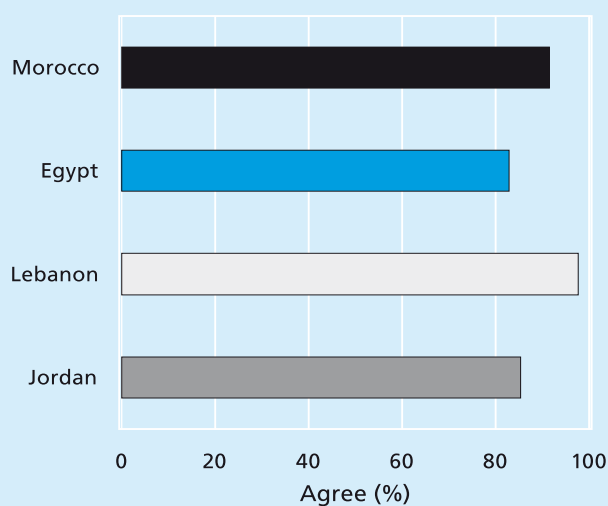
Source: World Bank, 2004.

Public Opinion on Aspects of the Rise of Arab Women, Four Arab Countries, 2005

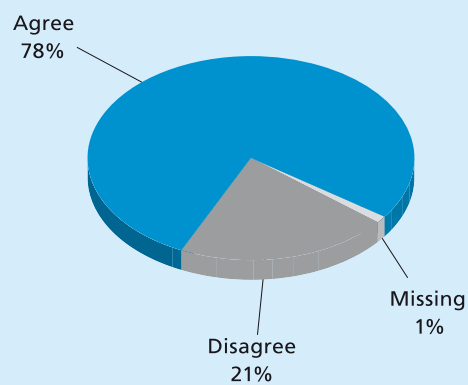
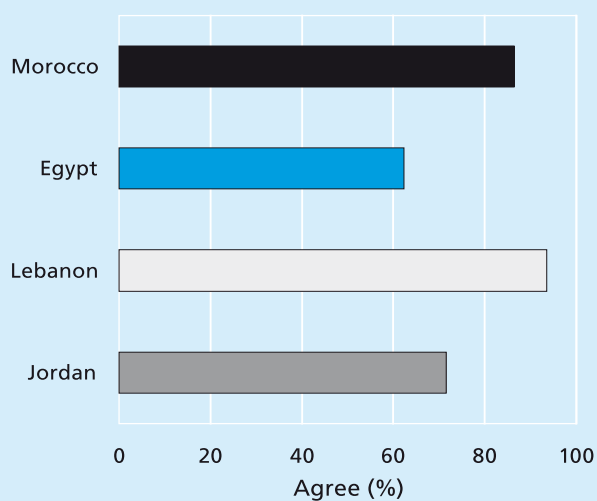
Women should have an equal right to work



Women should have the right to equal employment benefits



Women should have the right to equal work conditions



CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES: SELECTED ISSUES

Despite their large, if unappreciated,¹ share in engendering human welfare and their activities in other spheres of human endeavour outside family life, women encounter many difficulties and obstacles that reduce their potential. Most important of all are the terms and conditions of work: women do not enjoy equality with men in work conditions, or in return on work, to say nothing of equality of opportunity for promotion to the top of the decision-making ladder in public or private enterprises.

THE EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ECONOMY AND THE LABOUR MARKET IN ARAB COUNTRIES

Starting from a low base, between 1990 and 2003, the Arab region witnessed a greater increase in women's share in economic activity than all other regions of the world: the increase for Arab women was 19 per cent as compared to 3 per cent for the world as a whole. Despite this, Arab women's economic participation remains the lowest in the world: not more than 33.3 per cent of women fifteen years and older compared to the world average of 55.6 per cent. The percentage of women participating in the economy in East Asia and the Pacific is a high 68.9 per cent. Moreover, Arab women's participation does not exceed 42 per cent that of men, again the lowest rate in the world, while that in East Asia and the Pacific is 83 per cent and in sub-Saharan Africa, 73 per cent. The world average is 69 per cent.

The highest rate of participation among Arab States is in Mauritania (63.1 per cent), followed by Qatar (42.6 per cent, a high proportion of which is comprised of foreign women workers) and then Morocco (at 41.9 per cent). In five other Arab countries, – Jordan, Libya, the occupied Palestinian

territory, Oman and Saudi Arabia – it is still below 30 per cent even though the proportion increased by more than 50 per cent between 1990 and 2003 in Jordan, Oman and Saudi Arabia. The largest gap between women's and men's economic activities occurs in the occupied Palestinian territory, where women's participation reaches no more than 14 per cent of that of men; this is followed by Oman (27 per cent) and Saudi Arabia (29 per cent).

DISTRIBUTION OF THE FEMALE LABOUR FORCE IN PRIMARY ECONOMIC SECTORS

International databases do not provide solid ground for sufficient study of the sectoral distribution of women's work in Arab countries. Figure 3-3, which shows the data available from UNDP for 2005, is restricted to five Arab countries and highlights only three sectors: agriculture, industry and services.

From the graph, it is clear that the majority of the Arab labour force is engaged in the service sector. It is important to note that the service sector in the Arab countries is low in productivity and remuneration since it consists of a high proportion of public-sector and low-paying informal services.

There is a higher concentration of women in the services sector with the attendant implications just mentioned. The exception is in those economies where services are not the dominant sector (in Yemen, for example, agriculture predominates). Here the female labour force is concentrated in the primary sector, where productivity and remuneration are even lower than in services, usually at the expense of the other two sectors.

WOMEN'S OCCUPATIONAL STATUS

The highest percentage of women employed in those Arab countries for which figures are available (Egypt, Morocco, occupied Palestinian territory, Oman and Qatar) work

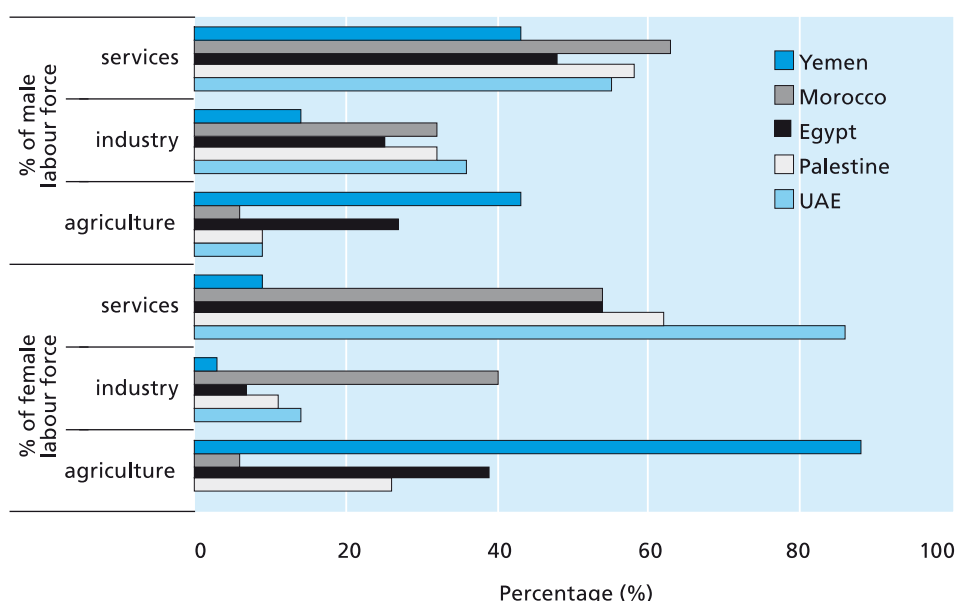
Women encounter many difficulties and obstacles that reduce their potential.

Arab women's economic participation remains the lowest in the world: not more than 33.3 per cent compared to the world average of 55.6 per cent.

¹ The official statistics cover only one area of women's work, namely, formal employment. Other types of work such as informal employment, the production of the necessities for daily survival, unpaid childcare and volunteer work are entirely excluded. Despite attempts to develop more accurate measurements of women's employment by applying the concept of "use of time", this method has been applied only in Morocco, the occupied Palestinian territory and Oman. It is thus necessary to use conventional means for measuring women's economic participation in order to make comparisons between the Arab region and other regions of the world, and among Arab countries themselves.

Figure 3-3

Labour force participation, by sector of economic activity and by gender, five Arab countries, 1995-2002



Figures for men and women working as salaried employees do not diverge much, but there is a great disparity in the nature of work for non-salaried workers.

Source: UNDP, 2005.

either as salaried employees or labourers. The figures for these categories, as percentages of women active in the labour market, are 68 per cent in Egypt; 55 per cent in the occupied Palestinian territory; and as high as 88 per cent in Oman and 100 per cent in Qatar. The figure is less than half in Morocco (34 per cent).

Figures for men and women working as salaried employees do not diverge much, but there is a great disparity in the nature of work for non-salaried workers. Most men working as non-salaried employees are either self-employed or are employed by others, while the greatest number of women in this category work as “family workers”, that is, they work in the private sphere, most of them in unpaid work. The figure for such women in Egypt is 20 per cent; in Morocco, 52 per cent; and in the occupied Palestinian territory, 33 per cent. In those same countries, the percentage for men in the same category is 8 per cent, 22 per cent, and

7 per cent, respectively. This gap, which may seem at first glance to favour women, is actually a burden added to their daily responsibilities.

Among the Arab States, Saudi Arabia has the highest level of women in administrative positions (31 per cent).² In Iraq, the figure is 15 per cent; in the occupied Palestinian territory, 12 per cent; in Bahrain, 10 per cent; in Oman, 9 per cent; and in the UAE, 8 per cent. The lowest number of women in administration is in Yemen, where the number is 4 per cent.³

It is noteworthy that public opinion, as expressed through the AHDR survey, broadly supported women’s ownership of assets and economic projects as well as their management of the latter. However, the degree of support for women project managers was slightly lower (Box 3-2).

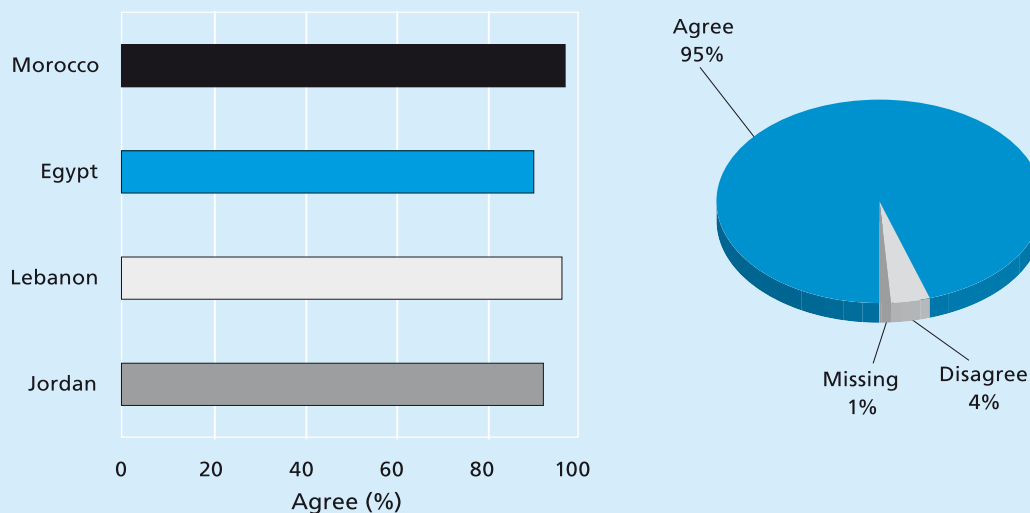
Public opinion ... broadly supported women’s ownership and management of assets and economic projects.

² This figure includes lawmakers, government administrators, senior administrators, directors of companies, and work supervisors. The degree of this discrimination may be attributed to the traditional separation between the sexes in administration and in government services such as the education sector.

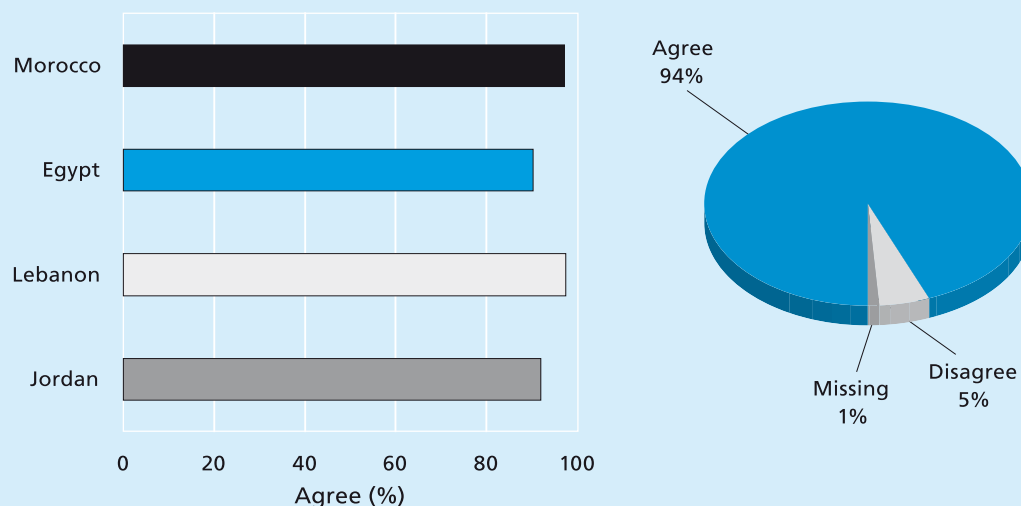
³ “United Nations Statistics Division.” (2005). <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/ww2005/tab5f.htm> (Accessed 6 March, 2006).

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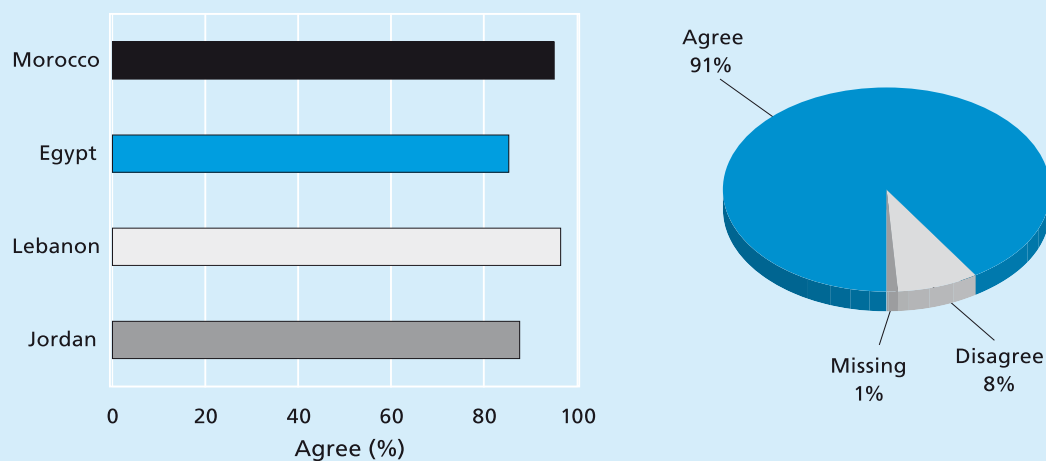
Women should have an equal right to own assets



Women should have an equal right to own economic ventures



Women should have an equal right to manage economic ventures



CAUSES OF ARAB WOMEN'S WEAK ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

Many considerations help to explain the low participation of women in economic life and the high unemployment rates among their ranks, some of them related to demand for women's labour and others related to its supply.

The prevailing male culture

The prevailing masculine culture and values see women as dependants of men. As a result, men take priority both in access to work and the enjoyment of its returns. This tendency ignores the role of women in contributing to family income or in supporting entire families, a phenomenon that is on the rise in all societies, including Arab societies. It also overlooks the fact that, in reality, women exhibit no less responsibility and self-sacrifice in raising families than do men.

At the same time, some employers prefer to employ men in the belief that they are less expensive, using paid maternity leave as a pretext not to employ women as though such leave were a privilege for women and not a right of the new-born child and a service to society. Even though many Arab States extol family values in their public discourse, they leave it to employers rather than to the State to bear the cost of women's reproductive role in the replication of society, an approach that reduces job opportunities for women.

Scarcity of jobs

Slow economic development does not provide the jobs needed to absorb increases in the labour force, whether in the number of men or women. Nevertheless, the low number of jobs available has a greater impact on women. Figure 3-2 shows that the female unemployment rate was greater than the rate for men in two thirds of the Arab countries for which figures are available and that it was more than twice as high in half these countries.

The challenge of providing employment for women will increase in the coming years, especially in light of reports showing that the rate of increase in the female work force will exceed that for the work force as a whole.

The rate of growth in the work force in Arab countries has been estimated at 3.5 per cent per year for the period from 2000 to 2010, while that of the female work force has been estimated at 5 per cent (World Bank, 2003, 4).

Employment and wage discrimination between the sexes

Discrimination in employment and wages plays a part in restricting women's participation in economic life. Men's wages exceed those of women in various positions, especially in the private sector. This wage discrimination in the private sector propels women to work in the public sector for the equal pay and work conditions that it offers even as the public sector continues to contract in most Arab countries under structural adjustment policies.

The wage gap between men and women increases as their level of education decreases. In Jordan, for example, women university graduates earn 71 per cent of the amount earned by males in the same cohort; this drops to 50 per cent among those who have completed basic education only, while illiterate women earn less than 33 per cent of male wages (Moghadam, 2005). Women's suffering increases as their level of education drops, the latter usually being associated with poverty.

High reproductive rates

Women's labour participation rate, reproduction rate, average age of first marriage and level of education, as well as the percentage of the population who marry between the ages of 15 and 19, are linked factors. Similarly, women's participation in economic activity is the factor that most influences reproduction levels. In the Arab States, the lowest rate of women's participation in the labour market occurs in the occupied Palestinian territory, one of the States with the highest birth rate and the State with the highest rate of early marriage (15-19). Meanwhile, States such as Tunisia present the opposite pattern, with low recorded rates of early marriage, low fertility rates (2.1 compared to 4.2 for the Arab region) and a high rate of economic participation (32 per cent). (Fayad, background paper for the Report).

Men take priority both in access to work and the enjoyment of its returns.

Discrimination in employment and wages plays a part in restricting women's participation in economic life.

Laws concerning labour and personal status are among the most daunting obstacles to Arab women's participation in economic life.

The failure to use human capital, especially highly educated women, curbs economic development and squanders important energies and investments.

Laws hindering women, including those designed for their "protection"

Laws concerning labour and personal status are considered to be among the most daunting obstacles to Arab women's participation in economic life. Some personal status and labour legislation restricts women's freedom by requiring a father's or husband's permission to work, travel or borrow from financial institutions. Other labour laws close a number of fields of work to women in the name of "protecting" them (see Chapter 8). Hence "protection" is transformed into discrimination and restricts women's participation in economic activity (Abu Harithiyeh and Qawwas, 1997).

Weak support services

Weak transportation and child care infrastructure act to discourage women from going out to work, as does the lack of social support for children or the aged, the burden of whose care falls on women. Numerous other factors also affect opportunities for women to find work, among them the disconnect between education and the needs of the labour market, the paucity of continuing training in further skills required by women seeking work and women's poor access to credit.

Impact of structural adjustment programmes

Throughout the eighties and nineties a number of Arab States adopted structural reform programmes to liberalise trade, privatise, strengthen the private sector and increase production efficiency in order to establish internal and external equilibrium and promote economic development. Views differ over the effect that these policies have had on women, their employment and their participation in economic activity. While contraction of the public sector has led to a reduction in formal job opportunities for women, some see these policies as affording women wider job and economic opportunities in the informal sector. Although this sector has grown, it does not, by its nature, provide women with any legal protections or guarantees of work.

ARAB WOMEN'S WEAK ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION LEADS TO LOW LEVELS OF INCOME

Dependency ratios in the Arab region remain the highest in the world, with each worker supporting more than two non-working people compared to less than one in East Asia and the Pacific. The principal reason for this is the low rate of participation by women. With real wages facing stagnation and increased rates of unemployment, it is extremely difficult for the small number of workers to provide a reasonable living for their families.

The situation becomes even graver when this high level of dependency occurs in combination with an absence of pension plans and of national safety nets covering all worker cohorts. A recent study shows that pension plans in Arab States do not cover workers in the private or agricultural sectors. While coverage in Libya, where the great majority work in the public sector, reaches 70 per cent, in Morocco, which has a large agricultural sector, it is only 20 per cent of the work force (Robalino, 2005). With the increasing expansion of the informal sector, where worker coverage is low, family support becomes a tremendous burden for the small number of those working, as does the burden on women in providing care for children and the sick, elderly, disabled and handicapped in the absence of sufficient social support. It is thus impossible to realise individual levels of advancement, much less general human welfare, without the participation of Arab women in the labour force.

The failure to use human capital, especially highly educated women, curbs economic development and squanders important energies and investments, which might otherwise contribute to achieving economic development for all. The low employment rates for women and the restriction of their return on their labour are at odds with the simplest principles of equality, which is a fundamental component of citizenship and of human rights. They undermine the foundations of economic development, militate against the requirements of human development and impede the rise of Arab women, the subject of this Report.

Young People's Opinions on Women's Issues in the Arab Region

In November 2005, the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States hosted a consultative session on Arab women's issues with young Arab people⁴ as well as an electronic conference with youth leaders from Arab countries.

Participants agreed that culture, education, economics and political participation all had a great impact on the role of women in Arab society while also providing indicators of the situation of women in the region. The young people believed that religion, and especially Islam, played a large role in most thinking about women's rights, roles and responsibilities and stressed the need to respect religious opinions, while acknowledging that such opinions and interpretations of women's issues varied.

On education, there was agreement that academic curricula needed to be rethought, especially where the portrayal of women was concerned. At the same time, participants called for the teaching of sexual culture as a basic academic subject, especially given that Islam, according to the young people, was a religion of openness that encouraged rather than proscribed the broadening of knowledge.

The session also discussed the phenomenon of violence against girls in schools, which is on the increase, and the paucity of laws protecting girls and young women from such violence. The young participants commented on the rise in school dropout rates and found the rise in the illiteracy rate among

young women a worrisome trend with negative implications for human development in the region.

The decline in the numbers of women involved in political decision-making processes prompted the participants to support affirmative action as a necessary policy response, including the allocation of quotas for women in legislative bodies. Noting that the patriarchal system throughout the region was one of the factors accounting for gender inequality in political participation, they called on the Arab media to play a more effective role in communicating the positive impact of women in leadership positions, as illustrated by success stories in different countries.

The young people remarked positively on the increase in women holding leading economic positions in the region, including in the most conservative Arab States. They noted that for these women, such positions also entailed the responsibility to show initiative in helping to expand the Arab market and create more jobs. They felt strongly that it was important to introduce the idea of shared social responsibility in the Arab economic sector. The sessions also discussed youth unemployment, especially as it affects girls and young women, and asked Arab governments to broaden their efforts to include the young men and women of their generation. All agreed that proficiency with twenty-first-century information technology is one of the many skills of young people today that could help to strengthen development generally.

After forty years of struggle, Kuwaiti women gained complete political rights in 2005.

Women obtained the right to vote in and stand for parliamentary elections in most Arab countries during the 1950s and 1960s.

ARAB WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE

This section begins by illustrating that public opinion in those Arab countries where the Report's survey (see annex II) was conducted is generally positive about women entering the political sphere and occupying senior executive positions in government. Such approval extends up to the highest office of the State, particularly in Lebanon and Morocco although it diminishes with the importance of the position. (Box 3-4).

Women obtained the right to vote in and stand for parliamentary elections in most Arab countries (those of the Gulf States excepted) during the 1950s and 1960s, Lebanon being

the first to grant women these two rights (in 1952).

The beginning of the third millennium saw some improvement for women in the Gulf. In 2003 in Oman and Qatar, they were granted the right to vote and to stand for parliamentary office for the first time. After forty years of struggle, Kuwaiti women gained complete political rights in 2005 (Annex IV, Table 23 and Figure 3-4).

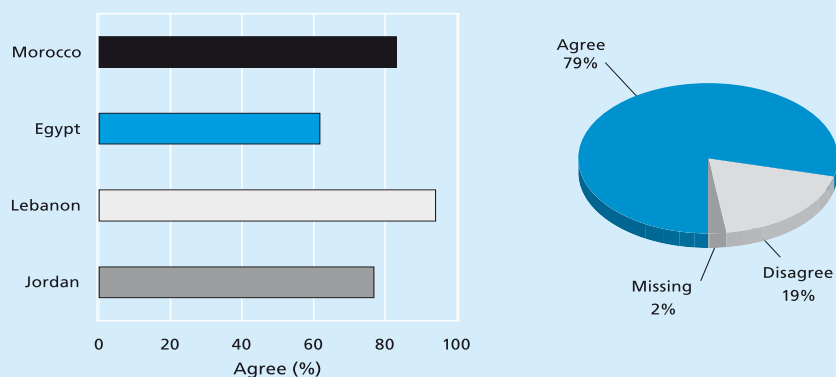
The adoption of quota systems increased women's parliamentary participation in Jordan and Morocco. Despite these favourable changes, the proportion of women representatives in Arab parliaments remains the lowest in the world (Figure 3-5).

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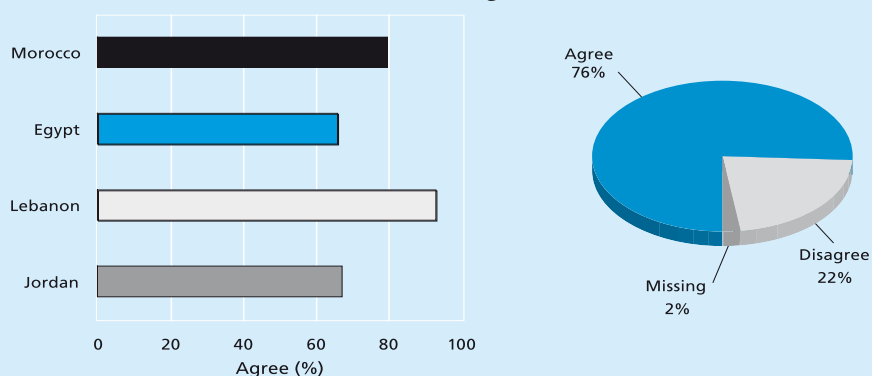
⁴ See annex V for list of participants.

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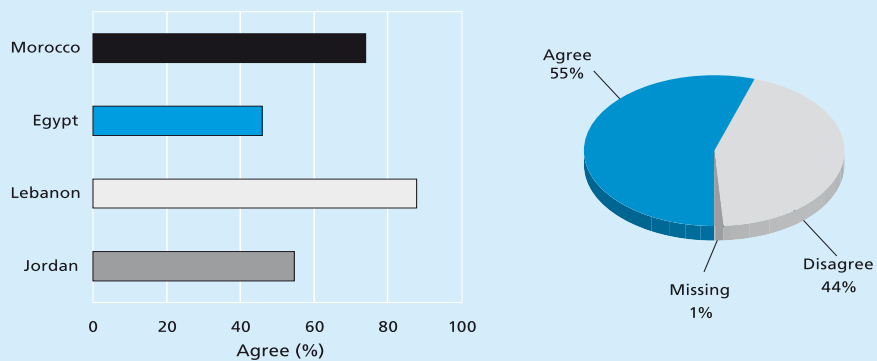
Women should have an equal right to political action



Women should have the right to become Minister



Women should have the right to become Prime Minister



Women should have the right to become Head of State

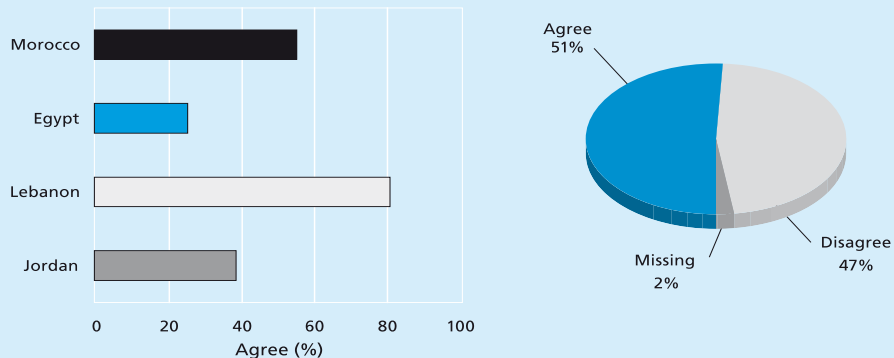
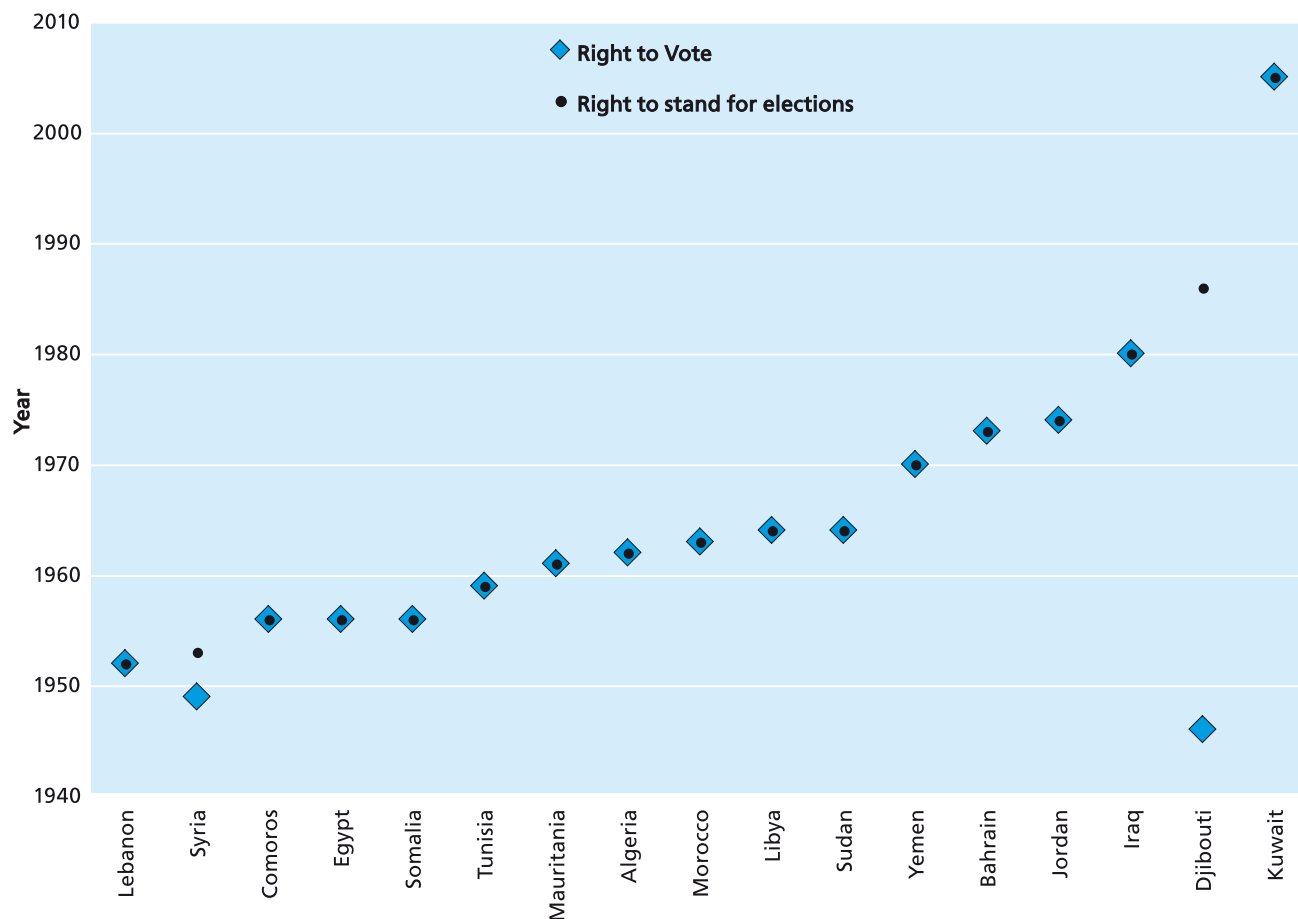


Figure 3-4

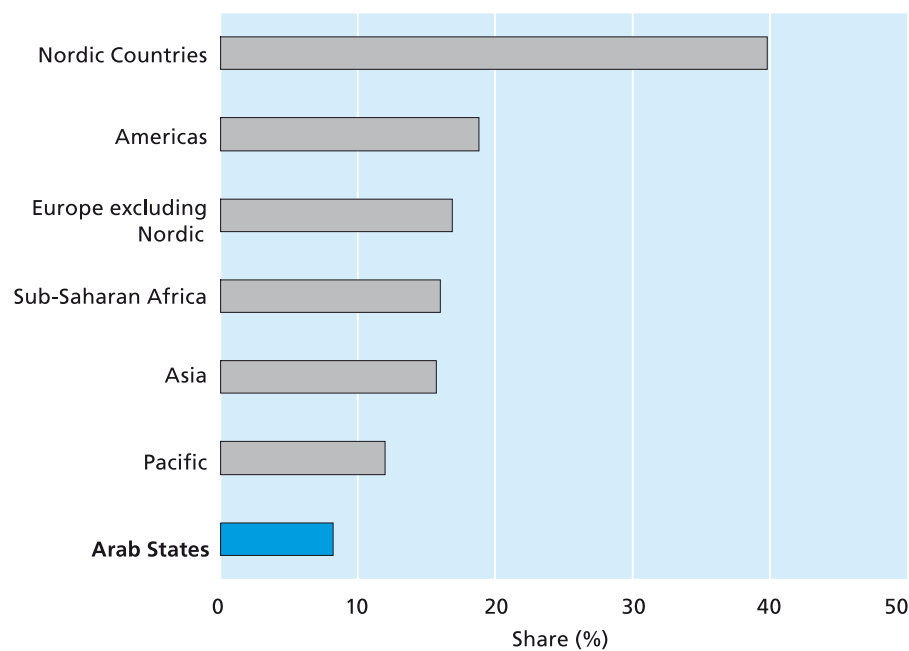
Year in which women were granted the unrestricted right to vote and the right to stand for election, by Arab country



Source: "Inter-Parliamentary Unit." (2005). www.ipu.org/wmn-e/suffrage.htm (Accessed 29 March 2006).

Figure 3-5

Share of women in parliament, by world region



Source: www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm, 15 October 2005.

Arab women have yet to receive ministries directly relating to functions of sovereignty, such as defence, interior or foreign affairs.

The Arab countries clearly differ in the extent of empowerment of women in parliament (Figure 3-6).

The highest level of Arab women's parliamentary participation in early 2006 is in Iraq (25.5 per cent) followed by Tunisia, where women were elected to 22.8 per cent of the seats in 2004. Sudan and Syria, with 66 and 30 representatives, respectively, or 14.7 and 12 per cent, follow. After that come Djibouti, Morocco and Somalia (with 10.8, 10.8 and 8 per cent, respectively). The lowest percentages are in Bahrain (zero), Yemen (0.3 per cent)

and Egypt (2 per cent). There are no elected legislative councils in Saudi Arabia or the UAE and parliamentary elections have yet to be held in Qatar.

Arab women parliamentarians have sometimes assumed significant positions in their assemblies, rising to vice speaker of the assemblies of Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. Not one, however, has risen to the position of speaker.

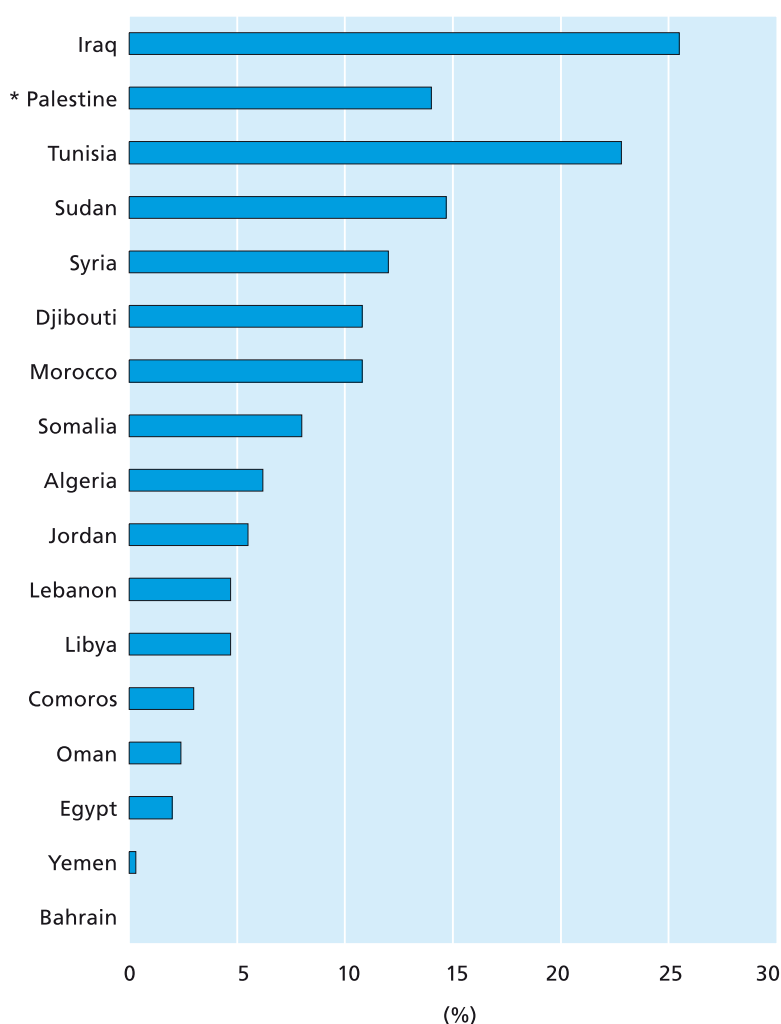
Some Arab States have established higher councils alongside elected assemblies, membership of which is entirely or partly by appointment. Generally, the executive, which makes appointments to these councils, names a relatively larger proportion of women to them to compensate for their lack of success in parliamentary elections.

Arab women have had a share in executive power in some Arab countries since the middle of the last century. The first woman minister was appointed in Iraq in 1959, in Egypt in 1956 and in Algeria in 1962. The number of Arab countries that appoint women as ministers has increased in the last three years to the extent that women now participate in all governments except that of Saudi Arabia. Given that no set quotas exist for women in any of the Arab countries, the number of those who attain ministerial rank varies from one period to another and from one government to another. By the same token, the number of women in the various ministries does not necessarily reflect the general status of the empowerment of women. In general, however, more women are thus employed in republics (such as Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Tunisia) than in monarchies (such as Jordan, Morocco and the Gulf States), albeit the latter have recently started to appoint women to ministerial posts.

In the first stage of their participation in government, women were usually given portfolios concerned with women, children or social development. While Arab women have yet to receive ministries directly relating to functions of sovereignty, such as defence, interior or foreign affairs, they have begun to occupy leading ministries such as planning, industry, trade, communications and mass media. Likewise, women have not attained the office of prime minister or deputy prime

Figure 3-6

Seats in parliament (lower or single house) held by women (% of total), Arab countries, 29 March 2006



Source: www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm, 29 March 2006.

* http://www.elections.ps/pics/Statistic_reg_voters_2-ar.jpg

minister except in Jordan, where a woman became deputy prime minister in 1999.

Other data indicate that women are taking important positions in local administrations (four in Egypt, two in Lebanon), and they participate in local councils in the Comoros, Jordan, Mauritania, the occupied Palestinian territory and the Sudan. On the other hand, there is noticeable difficulty in nominating or electing women to executive positions at local administrative levels, with the result that women are almost entirely absent from these in most Arab countries. The number of women in the judiciary has reached 50 per cent in Morocco, 22.5 per cent in Tunisia, 11 per cent in Syria and 5 per cent in Lebanon. A woman has become a judge of the Supreme Constitutional Court in Egypt, and 76 women have attained judgeships in the Sudan, 53 in Yemen and 14 in Jordan. What is more, women participate in the administration of NGOs at a rate of 45 per cent in Lebanon, 42 per cent in the occupied Palestinian territory and 18 per cent in Egypt (UNIFEM, in Arabic, 2004).

Despite their disparate functions in government positions, women's performance,

on average, has been at least as distinguished as that of men. Outstanding women parliamentarians and ministers have emerged as role models for women in the Arab world. In the Report's public opinion survey, two thirds of respondents considered the performance of women to be as good as, or better than, that of men (Annex II).

PARTICIPATION WITHOUT DIVERSITY

Women's assumption of high State positions does not necessarily mean women's political empowerment. In such a situation, women, like men, are not able to wield effective political influence in the absence of freedom and political plurality in the region.

Women in power are usually chosen from the ranks of the elite or they are appointed from the ruling party as window dressing for the ruling regimes, especially those that are autocratic, or in response to external pressure, as in Iraq and some of the Gulf States. For this reason, the increased participation of some women in the political realm does not prevent

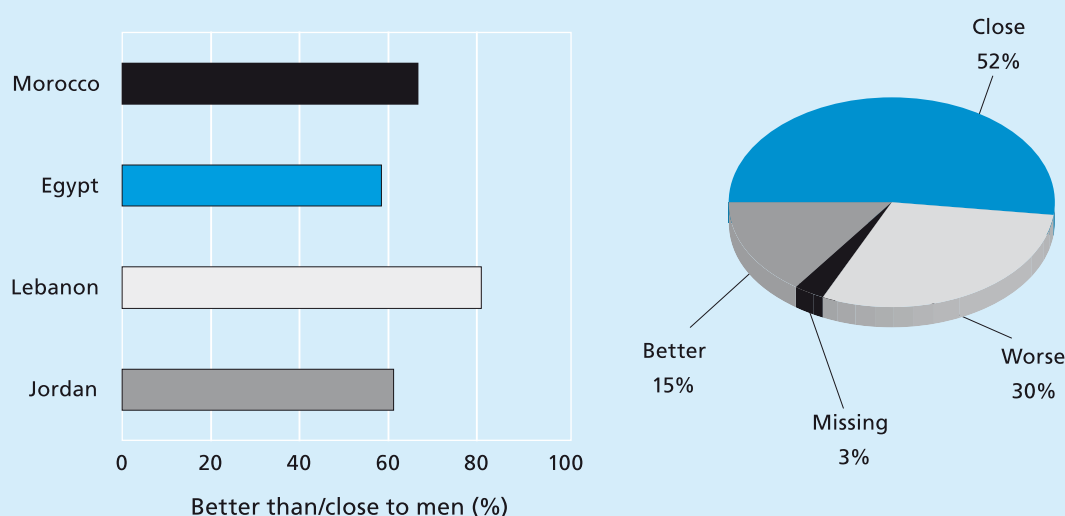
Despite their disparate functions in government positions, women's performance, on average, has been at least as distinguished as that of men.

Women's assumption of high State positions does not necessarily mean women's political empowerment.

BOX 3-5

Public Opinion on Aspects of the Rise of Arab Women, Four Arab Countries, 2005

How do women perform in leadership roles compared to men?



Some Arab studies show that there is no significant difference between authoritarian and liberal regimes in matters relating to the rise of women .

Work outside of government institutions exposes women activists to repression.

the continued oppression of others, among them especially women active in Islamist movements or women in rights organisations calling for democratic reform.⁵

It should also be noted that women's political participation at high levels takes place in countries with one-party systems that usually restrict executive power and authority to a small cadre of supporters and where the prevailing value is that of loyalty rather than efficiency. Generally women's programmes in such countries, as elsewhere, conform to those of the mother party.

In rentier economies, known for widespread patronage,⁶ bribery, corruption and favouritism, women are either excluded from politics by law or are marginalised by their lack of back-door influence of the sort available to men. In such cases, women rely completely on making common cause with the authorities or the ruling party and on forming close relationships with them through friends and acquaintances.

WOMEN AND THE ARAB STATE: COOPERATION OR CONFLICT

Arab women are faced by a worrisome dilemma over the nature of their relations with the State: should they realise their objectives by attaching themselves to government institutions or by working outside of them in the framework of civil society organizations?⁷ Some Arab studies show that there is no significant difference between authoritarian and liberal regimes in matters relating to the rise of women (Hatem, 1994b, 661-676). Their increasing representation in authoritarian regimes, accompanied by marginalisation in politics in general, invalidates women's participation and separates women in power from any popular

base that they may have. This has a negative impact on women's empowerment through greater political participation. Work outside of government institutions exposes women activists to repression, especially when these activists link women's social rights to a lack of rights and civil and political freedoms in general.

WOMEN IN ARAB POLITICAL PARTIES

At the start, it must be said that the freedom to form political parties is not guaranteed in Arab countries. Some countries, such as the Gulf countries and Libya, ban their formation altogether; others permit them under their constitutions but restrict their establishment or their operation by law and in practice (AHDR 2004).

Women's ties to Arab political parties have varied over time and in line with the respective political structure of each Arab country. Many of the movements resisting colonization succeeded in attracting and mobilising large numbers of women throughout the twentieth century (for example, in Algeria, southern Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territory and Tunisia). After independence, however, the political parties neither made sustained efforts to widen their bases among women nor sought to create comprehensive programmes for their advancement. Parties and movements that justified the rights "given" to women on the grounds of their participation alongside men in the struggle for liberation broke faith with their positions on women's rights because they had not based them on the concept of equality as a value springing from the rights of women as full individuals or as full citizens (Bishara, background paper for the Report).

Nationalist and Communist parties were

⁵ Women Islamists in certain Arab countries are subject to raids on their homes at night with the consequent intimidation of their children. Some have been taken hostage in order to exert pressure on their relatives. Sometimes arrest, torture and sexual assault are involved. Likewise, some governments have the wives of political prisoners dismissed from their jobs as collective family punishment and to force them into divorce. Similarly, in Tunisia, the decree known as decree 108 (recently repealed), prohibiting the hijab (women's headscarf), led to an oppressive campaign against veiled women in public institutions, in the streets, on public transport and in hospitals. It included violence against the women, the tearing of their clothing and their removal to security centres. Some of them have been banned from taking public examinations for the same reason (Rjiba, background paper for the Report). Persecution extends not only to Islamist women but also to female activists working in the groups defending them and anyone else who may provide these groups with aid.

⁶ Relations founded upon dependency (or quasi-feudal clans such as are found in the Levant) and through which the individual demonstrates his loyalty to those politicians who have the ability to dispense services and favours to a person or a group (for more information, see Waterbury, 1977).

⁷ To follow this debate, see Yeatmann, 1990; Kuttat, in Arabic, 1996; Karam, 1998; and Goetz, 1997 and 2003.

interested in mobilising women as proof of their progressive ideas. Nevertheless, many Arab political parties, whether progressive or conservative, were keen to create separate and confining bodies for women, mostly under the administration of a woman. Such organisations constituted a domain specifically for women within the larger party. Although some believed that this would facilitate the gradual entry of women into the general political domain, the continued application of the principle limited their role in the party and, as a result, in society. When women did participate in party life, they usually did so at the grass-roots level of the party and in the context of the family (Fayad, in Arabic, 1998); they rarely reached the leadership, with the exception of Algeria, where a woman leads the Labour Party.⁸

While extolling its accomplishments on behalf of women when compared to the other Arab ruling parties, Tunisia's ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally has only 20.1 per cent female membership, which represents no more than 2.6 per cent of the leaders of branches of the party. Moreover, there are no women heading the Coordinating Committees that exist in the governorates, and there is only one woman among the eight members of the Political Bureau and one assistant general secretary charged with women's affairs.⁹

In Yemen, the percentage of women in leadership positions among all the parties is no more than 2 per cent. Among these, the General People's Conference (the ruling party) can claim first place (Abu Asbah, in Arabic, 2004, from Cherif, background paper for the Report), with women supposedly comprising 15 per cent of the leadership.

The same phenomenon may be observed in Egypt, where women play only a symbolic role in the party leadership apparatus. There are only two women in the upper echelon of the Wafd party out of a membership of 40, representing 5 per cent. Similarly, there are only

three in the general secretariat of the Tagammu' party out of a total of 64, accounting for 4.6 per cent of the members. Only two women are on the central committee of the Nasserist Party, making up 7.2 per cent (Egyptian Centre for Human Rights, in Arabic, 2005).

WOMEN IN THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS

The situation varies somewhat regarding women's representation in Islamic parties. These parties have recently made the organisation of women a goal. For example, with respect to Hezbollah in Lebanon, women join the party's "women's bodies," which constitute its women's cadre, and they participate in most party social, educational, cultural and media institutions. They also play an effective role in the resistance. They are, however, still absent from the main councils of the party, such as the Decision Council, the Political Council, the Executive Council and the Central Council (Qusayr, in Arabic, 2004). In the occupied Palestinian territory, the picture is different: in the National Islamic Liberation Party, the proportion of women at the leadership level is 27 per cent and in the Political Bureau (the party's highest body), 15 per cent (with two members out of eleven) (Jad, 2004a). In Morocco, the official spokesperson for Sheikh Abd Al-Salam Yasin¹⁰ and the Justice and Charity Movement, which can boast 20 per cent women leaders, is a woman.

The above indicators may point to the empowerment of women in the Islamic movements. Nonetheless, these movements contain within themselves contradictions of a different sort. Some of them occasionally wage war against the demands of secular women's movements for changes in laws and policies that marginalise women, as when the Islamic Bloc in the Kuwaiti parliament opposed granting women the rights to vote and stand for election.

Many Arab political parties, whether progressive or conservative, were keen to create separate and confining bodies for women.

Islamic parties have recently made the organisation of women a goal.

⁸ Louisa Hannoun leads this Trotskyite opposition party. Nominated in April 2003 in the presidential elections, she became only the second woman in the Arab world to compete with a man in a presidential race, the first being Palestinian Samiha Khalil, who ran against the late President Yasser Arafat in 1996.

⁹ Web page of the Democratic Constitutional Rally Party, www.rcd.tn.

¹⁰ Nadiya Yasin, daughter of Sheikh 'Abd al-Salam Yasin, leader of the Justice and Charity Movement in Morocco. Ms. Yasin is preparing to take over from her father as the leader of the movement and is working to modernise the image of Islamist women in Morocco (see Yassine, in French, 2005, and Dahbi, in French, 2004).

WOMEN, RESTRICTIONS AND PARTY POLITICS

That women's participation in politics remains weak is connected with the cultural legacy and the discriminatory patriarchal system prevalent in the Arab countries.

With financing playing an increasingly important role in Arab elections, the lack of it is also a major obstacle to Arab women's candidacies.

Poverty and illiteracy are important factors severely obstructing women's participation in politics.

That women's participation in politics remains weak is connected with the cultural legacy and the discriminatory patriarchal system prevalent in the Arab countries, as in many other countries in the world, which do not acknowledge that women are capable of assuming responsibility, including political responsibility.

The state of politics in the Arab countries and the nature of the parties themselves also explain women's lack of participation in party politics. The political process does not provide much security and immunity for those involved in it (UNIFEM, in Arabic, 2004, 267-268). This has produced, especially among youth, a lack of trust in the integrity and transparency of politics and an aversion to joining parties.

As for the parties, a number of them have retreated from the adoption of broad-based political programmes in favour of an increased linkage of such programmes to the person of the party leader. In addition, a tribe will sometimes be decked out in the garments of a political party, as in Yemen. In such cases, the influence of tribal elders and the exclusion of women not affiliated with the tribe will be plainly evident in the party and hence in political work (al-Samiri, in Arabic, 2001, 59-60).

Many studies also point to the role of election laws in limiting women's participation in politics. For instance, Sabbagh finds that in Yemen, the number of women candidates in parliamentary elections declined from 24 in 1993 to 11 in 2003, with a single woman candidate winning in that election (Sabbagh, 2004). The author interprets this decline as arising from the change in the law that required candidates to obtain the endorsement of 300 people from their electoral districts. This posed problems for all candidates, but especially for women, who traditionally encounter difficulties in mobility. On the other hand, however, the increase in the women's vote from 18 per cent in 1993 to 27 per cent in 1997 and to 42 per cent in 2003 means that women in Yemen are showing an increasing interest in the electoral process.

The situation in Jordan is different, with the adoption of laws facilitating the participation of women by abolishing election cards and

permitting the use of identity cards. (The old system placed women and youth under the authority of the eldest male member of the household, subjecting them to a form of moral pressure.) Likewise, mobility is less of an issue, since voting occurs in the place of residence rather than the place of registration, which has also encouraged women's participation (Sabbagh, 2004). Some people, however, believe that the law, which is based on the principle of one person/one vote, will work to the disadvantage of women in that it will "return the elections to the old framework of clan and family, which is well known to favour male over female candidates" (Naffa', in Arabic, 1998). The same is true of Lebanon, where the clan/family/sect-based election law was the greatest obstacle to women's candidacies (Maqdisi, in Arabic, 2000, 81), since women are rarely permitted to represent specific groups when seats are apportioned.

With financing playing an increasingly important role in Arab elections, the lack of it is also a major obstacle to Arab women's candidacies, given women's limited means and economic dependence. In Lebanon, for example, in order to stand for election, a candidate must pay 10 million lira (about USD 7,000) over and above the costs of a media campaign. The same situation confronts Palestinian women, who "have limited financial resources owing to traditional standards that accord preference to men in employment" (Kawar, 2001, 20).

Poverty and illiteracy are also important factors severely obstructing women's participation in politics. Candidates often vie with one another to buy the votes of the poor, frequently paying men and clan chiefs to marshal their womenfolk's vote as a bloc or to take advantage of illiterate or needy women to mobilise support for a particular candidate. This puts women under much greater family and tribal pressure than men.

Some point to women's reluctance to employ men's coercive methods, especially smear campaigns impugning candidates' morals. Moreover, with the spread of the violence that now characterises elections in many Arab countries, candidates may be forcibly prevented from reaching the polls by

supporters of their rivals. In Algeria, Egypt Jordan and Yemen, candidates have received death threats (UNIFEM, in Arabic, 2004, 280). In the occupied Palestinian territory, some women candidates in local council elections were physically beaten by their families, who opposed their standing for election or favoured a male candidate.

WOMEN'S PERFORMANCE AND CREATIVITY IN HUMAN ENDEAVOURS

Arab women's intellectual energy has been released in the last three decades with the expansion of universities and other educational institutions in most Arab countries and with the unprecedented engagement of women in higher education. Nevertheless, in the ranks of scientists and researchers, a discrepancy in favour of men remains although the reverse is true in the social sciences, education, and literature (UN and ESCWA, in Arabic, 2003, 6).

Noticeably, Arab women engage far more in intellectual, literary and media pursuits, especially the theatre, than in scientific, sporting and artistic endeavours. Historically, women's participation in theatrical creativity came late in relation to their involvement in other forms of artistic expression, with fewer women playwrights and fewer plays. This may be attributable to the meagre State funding for the written or visual arts or it may be attributable to the targeting by some fundamentalist movements of the performing arts in general, whether theatre or cinema. Moreover, there is a general paucity of writing for the theatre in the Arab world compared to other forms of artistic expression.

Arab women embarked on the craft of writing in general at the beginning of the twentieth century when Egypt and Lebanon both became bastions of women's journalism.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the number of women writers in the Mashreq (the eastern Arab world) had reached 475; in Egypt, there were 167 women writers and in the occupied Palestinian territory and Syria, 81 each (Supreme Council for Culture and Nur Foundation, in Arabic, 2002). The number of Arab women creative artists is on the rise,

albeit slowly, with the exception of Iraq, where there is a decline in public access to women's creative products. The quality, style and different modes of expression employed by Arab women writers evince an increasing professionalism as they strive to capture and present a social reality of ever greater complexity.

Arab women's participation in athletics is modest; even worse, it is decreasing as a result both of the paucity of sports facilities in schools and universities and the opposition to women's involvement in activities of this sort by some hard-line fundamentalist forces. Lately, certain sports designed for women have appeared, especially in the Gulf States. However, this type of sport, even if it is itself good for the physical development of Arab girls, does nothing to change the stereotypical image of women and men, which blocks women's equal access to sports as a profession.

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS OF ARAB WOMEN

Despite the unfavourable, or at least unencouraging, societal climate for women, reflected in the general trends described in the previous section, Arab history, both ancient and modern, records the achievements of numerous female luminaries who have scaled the heights of human endeavour in different spheres. This Report celebrates a small sample of these leading lights in boxes scattered throughout the various chapters. In addition, brief sketches of women's distinguished contributions to various activities in the Arab world are presented below.

The first generation

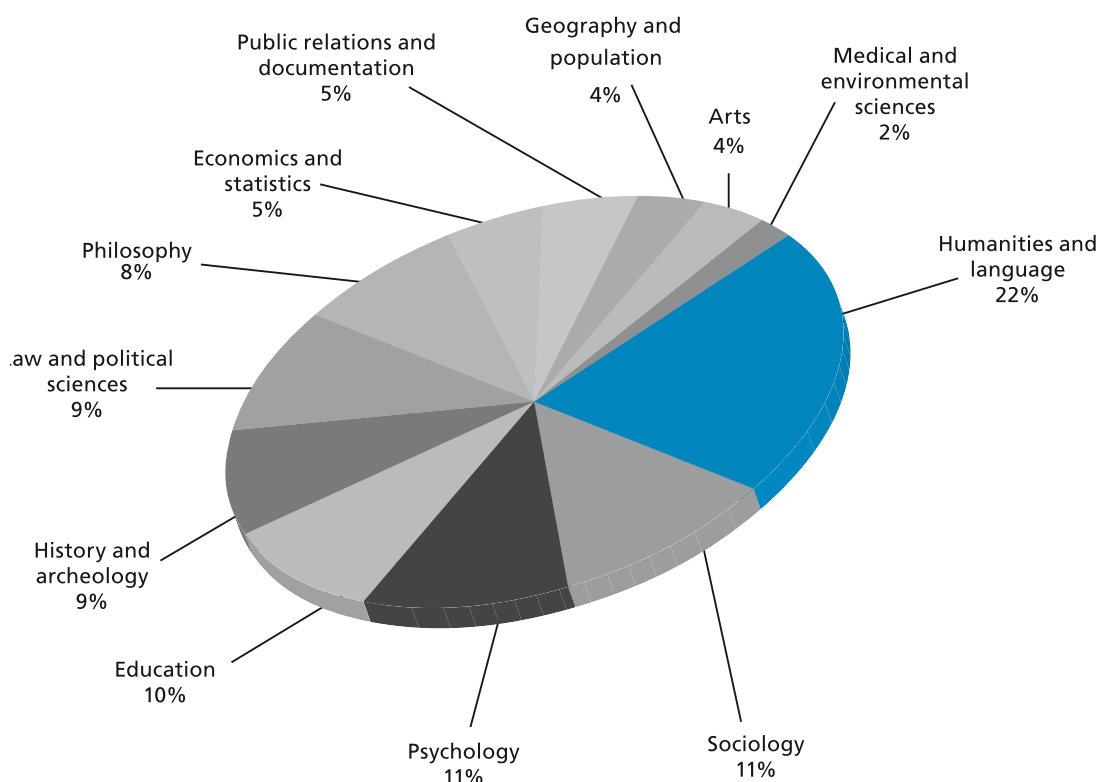
Among the most important women pioneers of the first generation was Huda Sha'rawi, who set off something close to a social revolution in Egypt and other Arab countries. She was the founder and patron of the Egyptian Feminist Union, which collaborated with women's unions across the Arab world and abroad. In Lebanon, Ibtihaj Qaddura became a celebrated social worker, driven by her awareness of society's need for solidarity and collaboration in the face of its diverse and multifarious

Arab women's intellectual energy has been released in the last three decades with the expansion of universities and other educational institutions.

Arab history, both ancient and modern, records the achievements of numerous female luminaries who have scaled the heights of human endeavour.

Figure 3-7

Percentage of Arab women researchers, by specialisation



Source: Bayyumi, Hatit and Ghandur, in Arabic, 1999.

problems. Her example inspired other women to such an extent that another pioneer of her day, 'Anbara Salam al-Khalidi, said of her, "Ibtihaj is the history of the contemporary women's renaissance in this country...with her work, a major institution has arisen in Lebanon, and the eyes of women all over the Arab world have turned to her". Others said of her, "Hers was the first voice to be raised in our eastern Arab region on behalf of the political rights of women". She was not alone in the arena, however; she had daring, collaborative colleagues who also believed passionately in the importance of social work.

Space does not permit the mention of more than a few of the outstanding women of the first renaissance who made important contributions in various fields. Julia Tu'ma Dimashqiyya founded "Al-Mar'a al-Jadida"

(The New Woman) magazine, one of the 24 journals published by women in the early years of the last century. Anas Baz and Saniyya Habbub were pioneers of Lebanese medicine at a time when the university refused to accept women students in the College of Medicine. Rose El Youssef – pioneer of the stage and one of the earliest actresses, who went on to found the journal "Rose El-Youssef" and what, to this day, remains one of the most important press houses in Egypt – was a woman unique in her time. It was she who uttered the famous words, "I made this woman myself". One could also salute numerous female writers and educators who left their mark on Arab society, such as Widad al-Maqdisi Qurtas and 'Anabara Salam in Lebanon and Mary 'Ajami in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Women's writing, however, came of age

only with Mayy Ziyada, “Miss Mayy”, who wrote of herself, “I was born in one country, my father in another, my mother in another, and I live in a fourth...The phantoms of my self move from country to country –so to which of these countries do I belong, and which of them should I defend?”

Mayy, who lived out and wrote this uncertainty, belongs to all Arab countries. She wrote a number of books, her works were translated into several languages, and she took her place alongside the great literary figures of her time as an equal and a partner. By inaugurating the “Tuesday Seminar”, her celebrated literary salon, she brought about a literary revolution. She created a free arena to which poets and writers raced, bringing with them their works, and where they competed in reading, debating and contributing to the enrichment of a golden age unique in the annals of literary history. It could not have been otherwise, when the period numbered

among its pioneers writers and poets such as Ahmad Shawqi, Lutfi al-Sayyid, Khalil Mutran, al-Shalabi al-Shumayyil, Taha Husayn, Jurji Zaydan, ‘Abbas Mahmud al-‘Aqqad, Ya‘qub Sarruf and others. The only woman among those who frequented the salon was the writer Malak Hifni Nasif, known as “Bahithat al-Badiya” (Searcher of the Desert) (Nasrallah, background paper for the Report).

Literary creativity

Many a woman’s pen was prominent in literature and expressed itself with daring and beauty. The originality of some works took critics and readers by surprise, so much so that it was no longer possible to ask any of them, “Who does your writing for you?”

Women writers proved that they could write and were well capable of taking their place alongside their male peers and, indeed, of surpassing them. Among the figures who shone in the 1960s and who are still at work

Many a woman’s pen was prominent in literature and expressed itself with daring and beauty.

Luminary: Fadwa Tuqan (1917-2003), from her autobiography

When I was six, I went to the government girls’ school in Nablus and when I was eleven, they made me put on the veil and forced me to stay at home. My brother, the late poet Ibrahim Tuqan, discovered my inborn talent for poetry and took charge of me. He was my teacher, who taught me to write poetry. Ibrahim formed me and was my literary creator.

In the eyes of my cousins, I was the false note, the sheep that insisted on straying from the flock, and throughout my childhood and adolescence I remained the target of the “executioner’s sword” that I mentioned in my first verse collection, published in 1952. That sword, or whip, continued to whistle over my head throughout my adolescence, in the name of tradition and ridiculous moral standards. However, the pressures exerted on me were no more than a venting of the malice and fury caused by my choosing the path of poetry, which I embarked on, and to which I devoted my life with a strange and mystical fervour. My cousins wore foreign clothes and spoke English, French and Turkish, and ate with a knife and fork, and fell in love, yet despite all this they kept me under a microscope because of my aspirations, my desire to realise myself through poetry and my devotion to culture and knowledge. They represented the schizophrenia of the Arab, one half of whom is for progress and keeping pace with the rhythms of modern life while the other half is fossilised and paralysed, haunted by the egotism ingrained in the soul of the Arab male with all that that implies about the oriental approach to the treatment of women.

Source: Campbell, 1996.

In such a climate, I was incapable of the vigorous interaction with life required of the poet. My only world, in that terrible reality with its emotional void, was the world of books, and I absorbed myself in studying and writing, while my femininity howled like a wounded animal in its cage.

The subjects of my verse have become diverse, fluctuating among the pulls of the self, of contemplation, of humankind, and of the nation. After the first Nakba (Catastrophe), the social transformation that usually takes place following a war started to work itself through in my city of Nablus. The veil was abandoned and with that the modern woman advanced, new horizons of higher education and economic independence opening before her, while I myself escaped from the “magic bottle” of the harem to a life that I could touch with my fingers just as it touched me. My poetry started to become more mature and my experiments bolder. After the 1967 war, I dedicated my verse to resistance of the Israeli occupation and my encounters with the public at poetry readings, which were eventually banned by the occupation forces, became more frequent. Moshe Dayan, the former Israeli defence minister, made the famous statement that “every poem Fadwa Tuqan writes creates another ten Palestinian resistance fighters”.

In 1978, I won the prize for authors and poets of the Mediterranean region awarded by the Italian Cultural Committee in Palermo.

Women writers proved that they could write and were well capable of taking their place alongside their male peers and, indeed, of surpassing them.

The Arab-Egyptian cinema was born thanks in no small measure to the efforts of women, who subsequently became vital forces in the films that they chose to make.

today are the novelists Layla al-Ba'labakki and Layla 'Asiran and, later, Hanan al-Shaykh, Huda Barakat and Mayy Minassa from Lebanon, then Salwa Baker and Radwa Ashour from Egypt, and Colette Khoury from Syria. In Kuwait, Layla al-'Uthman's pen won renown and almost got her thrown in prison. In Iraq, Nazik al-Mala'ika was in the vanguard of modern poetry along with Lami'a 'Abbas 'Amara, while Dayzi al-Amir became known for her stories (Nasrallah, background paper for the Report).

Creativity in the arts, with a focus on the cinema

Arab women were as prominent in the founding of the cinema as they had been in the liberation of society and political awareness that Egypt witnessed at the start of the twentieth century. Cinema came into being in 1896 and in that same year, the Arab world, and Egypt above all, welcomed this new art form, which spread

rapidly. Its creative content was eventually translated into an independent, self-standing, Egyptian and Arab visual art form whose cultural and artistic outlines women helped to define as producers, actresses and directors.

The Arab-Egyptian cinema was born thanks in no small measure to the efforts of women, who subsequently became vital forces in the films that they chose to make. These films reflected their readings of reality from a vantage point that let them survey the many facets of society, culture, education and popular awareness. The medium also enabled them to express the self, the spirit and the feelings of living beings. Although the Arab region at the time was suffused with puritanical religious teachings and mired in a conservative traditional culture and oppressive social climate that deprived women of many of their rights, women were nevertheless able to perceive a way out of the dark –provided that certain basic human conditions were

Luminary: Dr. Salma Jayyusi

Salma Khadra Jayyusi is an Arab-American writer, poet, literary critic and scholar. She grew up in Acre and Jerusalem and, as a native Palestinian, was one of the early innovators in the contemporary Arab poetic movement that first emerged after the Nakbah. She was one of the first Arab female poets to be mentioned in the Lebanese "Literary Magazine", her poetic accomplishments culminating in the publication of various collections of poetry, including *Return from the Dreamy Fountain* in 1960.

Jayyusi earned her bachelor of arts degree in Arabic and English literature from the American University of Beirut in 1945, after which she obtained her Ph.D. in Arabic literature from the School of Oriental and African Arts (SOAS) in London.

Soon after obtaining her doctorate, in 1970, she began her career as a professor, teaching first at the University of Khartoum (1970-1973) and then at the Universities of Algiers and Constantine between 1973 and 1975.

In 1975, the University of Utah invited her to be a visiting Professor of Arabic literature, after which she remained in the United States, teaching at various academic institutions, including the Universities of Utah, Washington and Texas.

While in the United States, she founded the Project of Translation from Arabic (PROTA) with the objective of translating Arabic literature into English and other languages in an effort to

bridge cultural gaps. The PROTA mission was "the dissemination of Arabic culture and literature abroad". In less than a decade, PROTA initiated and supervised the publication of a body of translated works, extensively contributing to the repertoire of sources in English, particularly on Arab literature. At the end of the 1980s, Jayyusi launched another branch in PROTA for the translation of Arab cultural studies in addition to literary works, which came to be known as the East-West Nexus.

PROTA has consequently been able to publish a large number of books, including both anthologies and individual works. Prominent PROTA-translated anthologies edited by Jayyusi include *The Literature of Modern Arabia* and *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*. In total, Jayyusi completed more than forty works, including nine anthologies of Arabic literature. She also edited several books, including *The Legacy of Muslim Spain* and the folk romance, *The Adventures of Sayf Ibn Dhi Yazan*, as part of the East-West Nexus. Jayyusi has also published two books on Jerusalem; the first in collaboration with Thomas Thompson and entitled *Jerusalem in Ancient History and Tradition*, and the second, *My Jerusalem: Essays, Reminiscences, and Poems*, in collaboration with Zafar Ishaq Ansari.

Jayyusi is currently working on an anthology of Palestinian literature and, with Roger Allen, on an anthology of contemporary Arabic theatre.

Source: "University of Arizona." (1994). <http://fp.arizona.edu/mesassoc/Bulletin/allen.htm> (Accessed 17 March, 2006).

"Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre." <http://www.sakakini.org/literature/literature.htm> (Accessed 17 March, 2006).

Luminary: Umm Kulthum (May 1904-January 1975)

Known to millions in the Arab world as “Umm Kulthum, Star of the East,” she gave her public, with her beautiful voice, exquisite performances, and fetching renditions of their best loved words and music, half a century of dedicated, brilliant artistry.

Her journey from simple peasant woman in a village to Star of the East was full of struggle, inspired by the pursuit of excellence that lasted to the end of her life. In the midst of wars and conflicts and before kings and commoners, Umm Kulthum sang to the glory and nobility of them all, moving the hearts of the Arabs in the East and the West for decades.

It is said of Umm Kulthum that the Arabs agreed on nothing so much as they did on her voice. Raised in song, it became the symbol of Arab identity, for she took great care in choosing what she sang, accepting only the words of the great poets, ancient or modern. The songs of Umm Kulthum nourished Arab nationalism with their ability to unify Arab passions and express authentic Arab feelings through song, music and performance.

Umm Kulthum was known for her strong personality and the high respect with which she

treated both herself and her art. She was respected as much by kings and leaders as she was by ordinary people and was loved everywhere. Her artistic and social status was unique and one that no other oriental singer had achieved previously.

When Egypt suffered the defeat of 1967, Umm Kulthum decided to form an organisation for national solidarity and held concerts outside Egypt in support of the war effort.

She was awarded many prizes and decorations during her long journeys in the service of her art. In 1955, she received the National Order of the Cedar and the Order of Merit, First Class, from Lebanon. In 1968, she won the State Prize of Appreciation in Egypt. She was also given Jordan's Order of the Renaissance, the Mesopotamian Medal of Iraq, the Syrian Order of Merit and Pakistan's Star of Merit and obtained the Greater Order of the Republic from Tunisia in 1968 and the Moroccan Order of Excellence.

Umm Kulthum's songs still resound in the hearts of many and continue to top the musical charts in the Arab world today.

Source: “Almashriq.” <http://almashriq.hiof.no/egypt/700/780/umKoulthoum> (Accessed 9 March, 2006).

met. So long as a woman could become aware of herself as a human being capable of being educated and acquiring knowledge and so long as she was able, as an artist or actor, to have her say in society, education and culture, she had options. The Arab woman thus began to

leave the narrow orbit that male society had created for her, guided by a political, social and cultural movement in which women such as Huda Sha'rawi occupied a conspicuous position.

With the arrival in Cairo, from the end of

The Arab woman began to leave the narrow orbit that male society had created for her.

Luminary: Fairuz (November 1935 -)

The outstanding singer Fairuz (real name Nihad Haddad) was born in Jabal al-Arz, Lebanon, Fairuz joined the Conservatoire, where the director of the time, Wadi' Sabra, refused to accept tuition fees from her.

The Fulayfal brothers helped her to become a member of the Radio Liban chorus. She sang with them for two months, and was then chosen as a soloist, having been singled out by the composer Halim al-Rumi, who gave her her professional name (he offered her a choice between Fairuz and Sharazad, and she decided on the former). In 1951, Halim Al-Rumi decided to present Fairuz to the Rahbani brothers, Asi and Mansur, who were preparing a musical project of a highly unusual sort, namely the revival of traditional Lebanese music through the use of modern orchestration.

In 1956, Fairuz and the Rahbanis began their appearances at the Baalbek Festival. As they grew more famous, their shows went on tours around the world and Fairuz ceased to sing exclusively for the Rahbani brothers, collaborating with a number of

composers such as Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab and Filimon Wehbeh while at the same time presenting anew the songs of Sayyid Darwish, including “Zuruni Kull Sana Marra” and others. Fairuz also took lead roles in several successful musicals and films, among them “Lulu, Bayya' al-Khawatim, Ayyam Fakhr al-Din, al-Mahatta, Jisr al-Qamar, and Mays al-Rim”. At the end of the 1970s, Fairuz and Asi separated, but Fairuz continued to sing the songs of her son Ziad.

Fairuz refused to leave Beirut during the Lebanese civil war and started singing again as soon as it was over. The new stage in Fairuz's career found expression through her collaboration with her son Ziad Rahbani, whose new approach marvellously fuses Eastern and Western music. Fairuz's first album with Ziad was called “Keefak Inta” and was followed by other successful works, of which the latest is “Wa-la Keef” (2001). In 2005, Fairuz was awarded an honorary doctorate in voice by the American University in Beirut.

Sources: “Fairouz.” (2006). <http://www.fairouz.com/fairouz/tribute/fb.html> (Accessed 24 March, 2006).

“Fairuzonline.” (2006). <http://www.fairuzonline.com/alegend.htm> (Accessed 24 March, 2006).

The works of pioneering feminists ... evince a joy in the discovery of unknown "continents" in the history, heritage, beliefs and renaissance of the Arab world.

the nineteenth century, of Arab women such as Asya Daghir, Mari Kiwini (Marie Queenie), 'Aziza Amir and others active in music and song, Arab cinema embarked on its long and difficult course towards the creation of a new artistic product. This circle of women gave birth to stories, screenplays and numerous other forms of creative expression that ultimately had an impact on other arts, such as dance, song, music, cinematic production and literature. This creativity also inspired the political, artistic and social struggle (Jarjoura, background paper for the Report).

Arab women's achievements in the production of knowledge

The social sciences

This section focuses on the distinguished achievements of women as scholars, achievements that brought about a movement of exploration and revolution and a complete break with the past. It highlights, in particular, scholars in the field of "women's studies" to underscore how radical their theses were, notably on the problematic issue of authenticity and contemporaneity. This issue, more than any other, goes to the heart of the question of women's position in Arab societies, constantly

swinging between the modernist, Western model and that of traditional society, which springs from the inherited culture and its religious and moral complexities.

The works of pioneering feminists such as Nawal al-Sa'dawi and Fatima Mernissi, for example, evince a joy in the discovery of unknown "continents" in the history, heritage, beliefs and renaissance of the Arab world. For these scholars, such discoveries served as rafts to which they could cling for help and salvation in their fierce struggle to escape from accustomed limits and sail beyond the zone of the harem, with all the connotations of repression, oppression and exclusion that this word holds. The motivations and experience of these feminists may not have been very different from those of the pioneering women scholars who took refuge in modernism and secularism, creating a final break with the past and religion. The latter's writings have their own importance, dazzling the reader with their sparkling intuition and flashes of daring despite their historical, social and religious context, which was often hostile, even under the most progressive of nationalist regimes during the struggle against colonialism.

Perhaps enmity towards the male academic establishment was at the base of these writings

BOX 3-6

An Arab woman joins France's "Club of Immortals"

On 16 June 2005, the Algerian woman Asia Jabbar was elected to the French Academy (also known as the "Club of Immortals"). Jabbar won the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1996 in recognition of her capacity to transcend the boundaries of culture, language and history in

her poetry and prose. Before that, she had won the Gabriel Garcia Marquez prize. Jabbar is also a film director and took the critics' prize at the Venice Biennale in 1979. She writes in French and her works have been translated into many other languages.

Luminary: Nawal Saadawi

Nawal Saadawi is a militant activist for women's rights. She has written on society, ideas, heritage, politics and freedom and is one of Egypt's best known writers internationally, her writings having been translated into more than twelve languages. She attended Cairo University, where she obtained a doctorate in psychiatry in 1955. After first working in her field of specialisation and practising general medicine, she became an official at the Ministry of Health. She has written much on Arab women, addressing their deteriorating situation and calling for their liberation from social constraints and

Source: Fouad, background paper for the Report.

participation in political and economic life. She has not, however, limited herself to writing. She is a union and NGO activist, editing field studies on women in various parts of Egypt and participating in seminars and lectures locally, in the Arab region and internationally. Her many writings on her religious and political positions have put her life at risk under threats from extremists. As a result, she received police protection at her home in Guiza until she left Egypt to work as a lecturer at universities in North America.

that were liberated from the rules of strict methodology, especially since they were biased towards the logic of binary opposition, which is based on the male-female dichotomy. In all cases, the second generation has overcome this issue and its writings will be more scientifically grounded and balanced without compromising the feminist outlook (Fouad, background paper for the Report).

A notable recent development in the production and dissemination of knowledge from the feminist perspective is the appearance of women's focus groups established by Arab women scholars, sometimes with the help of male peers. These groups study, discuss and publish new thinking on women's issues in order to aid the women's movement in the region.

The natural and exact sciences

It is not surprising that some Arab women have distinguished themselves in the fields of literary and artistic creativity or in those branches of knowledge such as the humanities and social sciences that are conventionally considered "appropriate" for women.

However, a galaxy of Arab women has made stellar contributions to the natural and exact sciences as well. The truth is that when Arab women scientists and technicians have

Luminary: Fatima Mernissi

A Moroccan researcher and writer, Fatima Mernissi studied in France and America and holds a research professorship at the Institute of Scientific Research of Mohammed V University in Rabat. She is also a member of the Advisory Board of the United Nations University.

Mernissi writes in English and French and all her works have been translated into Arabic. She supervises a number of research groups and publication series concerned with the fields of women and sociology. She has published numerous works, including: *Sex, Ideology, and Islam* (1983); *The Political Harem (The Prophet and Women)* (1983); *Forgotten Queens of Islam* (1994); *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (1987); and *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (in English, 1994).

Fatima Mernissi is considered one of the leading researchers in feminist sociology. In a brief overview of her work, her book, *The Political Harem: The Prophet and the Women*, stands out as particularly important. In it, Mernissi tackles a sensitive topic, one that has been passed over in silence in the traditional Islamic canon: the question of human sexuality.

Source: Fouad, background paper for the Report.

This subject remains the source of confusion and questioning among many of us, both male and female, albeit we may not admit it or have decided to ignore it. Through an intelligent and thought-provoking reading, she reaches striking conclusions concerning the familiar and the conventional.

Forgotten Queens of Islam is considered to be Mernissi's second most important and daring work. Here she discusses the issue of governance in Islam, making an important distinction between the political, earthly ruler on the one hand, and the caliph, God's shadow on earth, spiritual leader of the Muslims, entrusted with the application of shari'a, or divine law, on the other. Later, Mernissi presents us with her own special and striking reading of the biographies of some women who actually ruled in various parts of the Islamic world. These are figures whom history has consigned to oblivion or whom male-centred historians have marginalised or written off, portraying their achievements, at best, as moments of national collapse and decadence.

been given an opportunity to use their abilities at the international level, they have achieved extraordinary results.

When Arab women scientists and technicians have been given an opportunity to use their abilities at the international level, they have achieved extraordinary results.

Luminary: Zaha' Hadid - A Diva of World Architecture

The Iraqi architect Zaha' Hadid rose to the pinnacle of her profession internationally, a profession combining art, science and technology. She obtained a first degree in mathematics from the American University in Beirut and studied architecture at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London. In 1982, when a teaching assistant at the School, she outstripped 538 other architects with her winning design for the Peak Building in Hong Kong. Subsequently, she won a series of international competitions, including for the design of a "habitual bridge" in the middle of London containing theatres, cinemas, hotels and restaurants in 1966.

With the turn of the twenty-first century, Zaha' Hadid had opportunities to design and execute several major architectural projects, such as the Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art in Cincinnati, a BMW plant in Leipzig and the Bergisel Ski Jump in Innsbruck. In winning the contract to construct a bridge linking Abu Dhabi, the island on which the capital of the United Arab Emirates is situated, to the mainland of the United Arab Emirates, she scored a historic precedent. This is the first bridge ever not only to have been built by a woman but to

have been seen through from design to completion by an architect. In 2005, the Iraqi architect became the first woman to be awarded the Pritzker Prize, architecture's equivalent to the Nobel Prize.

Now in her fifties, Zaha' Hadid, continues to compete not only against other internationally renowned architects but also against herself. In her recent design for the Odrupgaard Museum in Copenhagen, she abandoned her trademark stark, straight-edged contours, which are said to have been inspired by Kufic script, and instead opted for natural, gentle and, if we may say so, "feminine" curves and sloping walls. Hadid says that in designing the museum, she tried "to fuse the architectural space with the natural scenery of the park in which it is enclosed". The "amazing transition from closed to open sites" is what most fascinates her in Arab architecture, which, in her opinion, achieves the fundamental function of architectural structure: "the joyous aesthetic sensation of moving from an enclosed space, such as the prayer area in the Zeitouniya Mosque in Tunisia, to the mosque's courtyard - open to the sun, the air and nature".

Source: 'Aref, background paper for the Report.

Luminary: Huda Zoghbi, first female Arab scientist to be elected to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS - Houston, USA)

Professor of paediatrics, neuroscience and molecular genetics at the celebrated Baylor College of Medicine in the United States, Dr. Huda Zoghbi is from Lebanon.

She is particularly noted for her studies of brain cells in diseases related to neurodegenerative disorders. Her studies have broadened understanding of diseases of the neurosystem, such as Alzheimer's,

and of the role of a neuron particularly implicated in neurodegenerative behavioural diseases, such as ataxia, or loss of balance. Her studies have shown how high levels of a normal protein in the neurosystem can act as a toxin and are associated with the onset of neurological disorders, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

Source: 'Aref, background paper for the Report.

The astronomical sciences

The astronomical sciences have attracted a group of the most brilliant Arab women scientists. Could this be due to nostalgia for a glorious past, which saw the birth of the astronomical sciences in the countries between Mesopotamia and the Nile and stupendous advancements in these sciences during the Arab-Islamic scientific renaissance in the Middle Ages? Or is it because astronomy, in the words of the French scientist, Pierre-Simon Laplace, "is the handsomest monument to the human spirit, the most distinguished decoration of its intellectual achievement?"

Astronomy and the space sciences have sparked the interest of women scientists from the Arab East to the Arab West and from such diverse disciplines as physics, mathematics, geology and geography. Four of these women have ascended the arduous path of astrophysics, a branch of science that emerged from the fusion of astronomy and physics. Like most prominent Arab women in the sciences, three of these luminaries graduated from Arab universities before obtaining advanced degrees and conducting research in internationally reputed universities abroad.

Arab women astronomers have put paid to the view that women are biologically unsuited

*Arab women
astronomers have
put paid to the view
that women are
biologically unsuited
for science.*

Luminaries in Astronomical Sciences:

Maha Ashour-Abdalla

Professor of astrophysics and director of the Center for Digital Simulation of the University of California-Los Angeles, Maha Ashour-Abdalla obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in physics from the University of Alexandria, Egypt, and her Ph.D. in astrophysics and space plasma from the Imperial College, London.

The Egyptian scientist, who has more than 300 published studies to her name, is regarded as one of the world's foremost specialists in the polar aurora, that entrancing atmospheric phenomenon resulting from the permeation of the earth's magnetic field by solar winds and manifested as luminous waves that stretch for thousands of kilometres over the north and south poles.

Shadia Rifai Habbal

The lengthy academic career of Shadia Rifai Habbal took her from Damascus University, where she obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in physics and mathematics, to the American University in Beirut, where she completed her Master of Arts degree in physics, and from there to the University of Cincinnati, where she obtained her Ph.D. in physics.

The activities of Habbal, a mother of two, have ranged from teaching university classes to taking scientific teams to observe solar eclipses around the world. She has contributed to the development of the first spaceship to be sent to the closest possible point

near the sun in 2007, and spearheaded an academic movement for women scientists called "Adventurous Women".

The studies on solar winds conducted by this Arab scientist and her colleagues were like "bombs going off". At least this was how they were described in America's Science magazine, which cited reactions to Rifai and her colleagues' discoveries as diverse as "heretical", "a gigantic step forward", "controversial" and "revolutionary".

Leila Abdel Haqq Belkoura

A young Moroccan astrophysicist, Leila Belkoura is also a science writer who achieved worldwide fame with her first book, *Minding the Heavens*. The book relates the discovery, told through the lives of seven astronomers, of the Milky Way, which contains our planet, Earth, our solar system and billions of other stars.

Like an enthusiastic astronomy teacher, Leila Belkoura takes us in her book on a journey beneath the open night sky to what she calls "the inner lining of the celestial dome": "If you lie down on your back, in a dark and quiet space, and look up towards the stars, you may feel that you can sense the slow revolution of the dome as it moves, with all the stars stretched out before you, from the east to the west, and tosses them beneath you to the other side of the globe".

for science. Nevertheless, Harvard University President Laurence Summers fell into this error in a speech he delivered last year, in which he attributed the paucity of women's contributions to the sciences to their preoccupation with the family and "intrinsic aptitude". His remarks drew a widespread outcry both within and outside of American academic circles, forcing Summers as well as the university to offer an apology.

That Leila Belkoura and her colleagues began their scientific journey in physics brings to mind the remark of the celebrated physicist, Ernest Rutherford: "All science is either physics or stamp collecting".

Belkoura obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in physics from Cornell University and her Ph.D. in astrophysics from the University of Colorado. The Year of Physics, 2005, demonstrated that this science remains caught in the tug-of-war between relativity and quantum theories and that the only inroads made so far have been in astrophysics. As Belkoura forged her way through this difficult discipline, she gratefully acknowledged "the enormous influence" her father, Abdel Haqq Belkoura, had upon her intellectual life. In a personal letter, she wrote, "Although I did not follow in his footsteps – he is an economist – he trained me to think in a particular way and to express what I believe. He taught me to try to see the 'bigger picture' or the 'totality' of things".

Perhaps the most beautifully phrased appraisal of Arab women scientists appears

in the introduction of the Arabic edition of *Minding the Heavens*. It is written by the young Syrian astronomer Rim Turkmani, who relates: "I, who could not write this short introduction until after I put my baby to bed and made sure he was asleep, was astounded to learn that Leila had begun writing this book while pregnant and completed it after becoming a mother". The introduction concludes: "Leila offers a superb model for Arab women, because of her ability to perform, simultaneously, the role that life had chosen for her and the role that she chose in life. Both are creative roles, so why should they not support one another?" ('Aref, background paper for the Report).

Athletics

In spite of the marginal part that sports plays in forming the traditional conception of the role of women, a small number of women from Arab countries have risen to the highest levels of accomplishment in this field at the international level, becoming gold, silver and bronze Olympic medal winners.

In the last six Olympic Games (1984-2004), six women in the Arab world, five from the Maghreb¹¹ and one from the Syrian Arab Republic, won one of three high prizes in track and field events. Two thirds of them were gold-medal winners, certainly a relatively high figure when compared to the fact that only a quarter of male Arab Olympic medal winners were gold medallists.

A small number of women from Arab countries have risen to the highest levels of accomplishment in the field of athletics at the international level.

TABLE 3-1

Women in the Arab world who won medals in the last six Olympic Games (1984-2004)

Name	Year	Nation
El Moutawakal, Nawal	1984	Morocco
Boulmerka, Hassiba	1992	Algeria
Shouaa, Ghada	1996	Syrian Arab Republic
Merah-Benida, Nouria	2000	Algeria
Bidouane, Nouzha	2000	Morocco
Benhassi, Hasna	2004	Morocco

¹¹ Comprising Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. These are countries where women enjoy a greater respect for their rights and a relatively higher status than in other Arab countries, which suggests a strong correlation between respect for the rights of women and their ability to perform better in various fields of activity.

Arab women entrepreneurs: a growing economic force in Arab countries

Even before the advent of Islam, women played a role in business in Arab countries that did not go unrecognised.

In Saudi Arabia, estimates of the number of women-owned businesses range between 20,000 and 40,000.

Egypt, today, has 22 businesswomen's associations in contrast to only one in 1995.

Even before the advent of Islam, women played a role in business in Arab countries that did not go unrecognised. One of the legacies of Islam for women's rights is that it conferred upon women autonomous financial rights, which helped to sustain the presence of women in commercial affairs, whether directly or as partners of male relatives or other men. Today, the move towards free market economies, together with growing advocacy for the empowerment of women in Arab countries, has worked to increase the contributions of women entrepreneurs in Arab economies. It has augmented their influence in private-sector business organisations and, indeed, has given rise to their own organisations, even in those Arab countries that are the most conservative with respect to women's issues.

For the purposes of this Report, entrepreneurs are defined as people who organise or manage business ventures, generating income for themselves and others. The success stories of women in business have become so commonplace that they no longer cause the sensation that they did only two decades ago.

Despite the paucity of data on the number of women entrepreneurs, there are indications that their numbers are steadily on the rise. In Bahrain, for example, the number of women employers rose from 193 in 1991 to 815 in 2001 – a 322 per cent increase (Chamlou and Yared, 2003). In Saudi Arabia, estimates of the number of women-owned businesses range between 20,000 and 40,000 (Esim, 2005), and in Tunisia, the number of women-owned businesses increased from 2,000 in 1998 to 5,000 in 2005. Many of these are family concerns, as is generally the case with economic ventures in Arab countries.

Businesses owned by women tend to focus on the service sector, as is the case with 77 per cent of such ventures in Yemen, 59 per cent in Egypt and 37 per cent in Morocco (GEM, 2005). Another survey, conducted in Morocco in 2004, found that the majority of female entrepreneurs were university graduates and three fourths of them managed the companies in which they invested (AFEM, www.afem.ma).

As the share of women in business and wealth increased, so, too, did the number of female directors of bank branches and financial institutions providing services for women. The first bank branch for women was opened by the Kuwaiti Finance House in Bahrain. The branch, which offers Islamic banking services, is managed by a Bahraini woman who also acts as the auditing coordinator on behalf of the banking group.

It was also only natural that, with the growing numbers of women entrepreneurs, there would be a commensurate rise in businesswomen's associations working to overcome the constraints on women in business, such as limited access to markets, information and experience. Egypt, today, has 22 businesswomen's associations in contrast to only one in 1995. In Morocco, Saloua Belkeziz, owner of an information technology firm, established the Association of Moroccan Women Entrepreneurs (AFEM) for Moroccan Business Women, with a membership that rose from 70 in 2000 to 184 in 2004. In Yemen in 2001, Gabool Al-Mutawakkel and her sister founded the Girls World Communication Centre to support women between the ages of 18 and 35 seeking to participate in the labour market and civil society. The Centre also offers training in human rights awareness and advocacy skills to directors of women's NGOs. In Mauritania, the Association of Women Traders has a membership of 270.

This organisational activity extends to chambers of commerce. In the Gulf States, specifically, the Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CCI) have been instrumental in the empowerment of women. Over 400 women participated in the first Gulf Cooperation Council Businesswomen's Forum hosted by Oman and organised by its CCI in cooperation with the Federation of GCC Chambers of Commerce. In November 2005, the Jeddah Trade and Industry Chamber of Commerce and Industry set a milestone by opening nominations to its 18-member board of directors to women. Two women were elected in spite of the great disparity in the numbers of women and men voters (100 versus 4,000). (Hijab, background paper for the Report).

Leading Women Entrepreneurs

• Asila al-Harthi, Oman

Initially, Asilah al-Harthi had difficulty in persuading her father to allow her to study abroad and, after graduating from Harvard Business School, to let her take part in managing the family business, the Al-Harthi Group, which began in real estate and moved into information technology-related services. Asila Al-Harthi became the first female member of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the first female chief executive of the Oman Oil Company.

• Azza Fahmy, Egypt

Azza Fahmy has made her distinctive mark in international jewellery design and her work has been displayed in more than 200 exhibits around the world, including several museums. After graduating from the College of Fine Arts, she became an apprentice to gold and silversmiths in Cairo's famed Khan El Khalili bazaar, the first woman to do so. She was chosen by the International Gold Council as one of its permanent members and judges.

• Khalida Ahmad al-Qatami, Kuwait

One of eight daughters, Khalida was chosen by her father to co-manage the Al-Khunaini Al-Qatami General Trading Company and then became chairman of the company in 1995. After her father died, she continued to direct the company but eventually sold her shares and founded a real estate company. She also owns and runs her own pharmacy, which has been in operation for 20 years.

• Layla Khayyat, Tunisia

CEO of Plastiss, an industrial manufacturing firm with 125 employees, Layla Khayyat took over the business after her husband's death. Until then, Khayyat had been a professor of French literature, but she took night courses in management and soon doubled the company's number of employees and output. Khayyat is president of the International Women Entrepreneurs' Union and served for seven years as the president of the World Association of Women Entrepreneurs.

• Lubna Olayan, Saudi Arabia

CEO of Olayan Financing Company, Olayan ranked among Fortune's 50 most powerful women outside the United States.

• Maria Hibri and Hoda Baroudi, Lebanon

Maria Hibri and Hoda Baroudi have achieved regional and international recognition with their textile and design firm, Bokja, which has held ten exhibitions worldwide during the past five years.

• Mona Bahari, Egypt

Mona Bahari founded the Mobaco sports wear company, which grew from three sewing machines, three operators and an output of 30 pieces a day in 1974 to an LE 70 million operation with 700 employees. Many members of her family, including her father, husband, sons and

daughters, and their spouses, now work in the firm, whose products are tailored both for the Egyptian market and for export. Mona attributes much of her success to a supportive father, husband and grandmother.

• Nadia Dajani, Jordan

Although she originally studied architecture, Nadia Dajani is now a rising star in the world of jewellery design. The jewellery firm she founded in 2003 is the first such company to be registered with the Ministry of Industry and Trade. Her designs are sold, and imitated, throughout the region.

• Raghda Kurdi, Jordan

Raghda Kurdi founded a pharmaceutical company, currently staffed with 101 employees and the first in Jordan to be fully computerised. She also collaborated with her mother in launching a clothes boutique and co-founded the Jordanian branch of the International Women's Forum.

• Reem Acra, Lebanon

After several years of practical experience as an embroidery artist, Reem Acra established her own fashion house in 1995, which gained international recognition as one of the world's renowned bridal salons. She sells to more than 200 of the most prominent retailers in Europe and the United States where her designs have become a favourite of luxury stores as well as red carpet regulars.

• Sabra al-Riyami, Oman

After working as a journalist with Omani television, she co-founded an events management firm with her husband, the first such company in Oman. Founded in 1995, the company grosses around \$1 million a year.

• Suad Amiry, occupied Palestinian territory

An architect, Suad Amiry co-founded the Riwaq cultural organisation in Israeli-occupied Ramallah, with the aim of documenting architectural heritage. After 1996, when it became possible to restore and conserve this heritage, Riwaq became a source of employment for a large number of Palestinians. The organisation renovated 30 buildings, primarily in rural areas in the West Bank, and transformed them into centres that have themselves created more job opportunities.

• Thuraya Yaqoub, Yemen

Thuraya Yaqoub entered business while still in university, starting with a children's clothing project. She then used her inheritance to establish a communications centre, after which she opened an Internet café. She now plans to found a natural medicine centre. Her younger sister hopes to follow in her footsteps and join her in the business.

Source: Hijab, background paper for the Report.

SUMMARY

Arab women have amply demonstrated their capacity to participate in areas of human activity outside the family. However, as illustrated in this chapter, women in Arab countries are still denied opportunities to use their capabilities in traditional economic areas and political institutions, where men tend to remain dominant.

It should nevertheless be recognised that women in the Arab world have made increasingly significant inroads in their fields. Indeed, some have achieved critical acclaim in domains which were, until recently, restricted to men.

