

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

# Cultivating Resilient Institutions in the Arab Region

## National Women's Mechanisms in Challenging Times



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## Executive Summary

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) provided the formal impetus for the creation of National Women's Machineries within the larger framework of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Specifically, Strategic Objective H, under chapter IV, outlined the need for national institutional mechanisms, such as National Women's Machineries, to ensure the mainstreaming of gender equality and the empowerment of women in government institutions, policies and programmes. Since this time, the number and scope of National Women's Machineries has grown exponentially, including in the Arab region.

However, despite their near ubiquitous presence, National Women's Machineries in the region have faced unique and trying challenges since Arab uprisings of 2010/2011. Aside from the standard hurdles faced by such institutions, National Women's Machineries in the Arab region must contend with contexts where conflict, occupation and formal political transition, in addition to severe humanitarian crises, have become the norm. Some National Women's Machineries in the region have been called upon to demonstrate their ability to respond to changes in the local political, economic, geographic and sociocultural landscapes and their impacts on women and girls. In the face of such challenges, they must develop and adapt to ensure their ability to deliver upon their mandates and reach the broadest spectrum of women and girls possible – thus, they must work to cultivate resilience.

This study focuses on the unique aspect of how conflict, occupation and formal political transitions affect the work of National Women's Machineries and examines the mechanisms for cultivating resilience in National Women's Machineries in the Arab region utilizing the framework proposed by Judith Rodin in *The Resilience Dividend: Being Strong in a World Where Things Go Wrong* (2014). The characteristics for building resilient institutions – Awareness, Diversity, Integrated, Self-regulating and Adaptive – are applied to the work of National Women's Machineries in four States (Jordan, which is hosting a sizeable refugee population; the State of Palestine, which is under occupation; Tunisia, which has gone through a formal political transition; and Yemen, which is conflict-affected) to obtain examples of good or unique practice.

The analysis finds that National Women's Machineries in the Arab region continuously assume different forms and mandates to remain relevant in challenging contexts. In many instances, they do utilize aspects of Rodin's resilience framework in unique and creative ways to ensure that they meet the challenges of conflict, occupation and formal political transition. Yet, the analysis also confirms that no National Women's Machinery in the region has employed all five characteristics of resilience simultaneously. It is hoped that engaging with the resilience framework to the fullest in the future, particularly in times of stability, will ensure that the Machineries will be better placed to withstand shocks and challenges during periods of conflict and vulnerability. when the time arises.



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# Acronyms

BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSOs	Civil society organizations
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
GBV	Gender-based violence
JNCW	Jordanian National Commission for Women
JONAP	Jordanian National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2018-2021)
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs [State of Palestine]
NAP	National Action Plan
NCLW	National Commission for Lebanese Women
NHRIs	National Human Rights Institutions
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
NWMs	National Women's Machineries
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VAW	Violence against women
WPS	Women, Peace and Security



# Introduction

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# Introduction

## A. Background to the study

National Women's Machineries (NWMs) are institutions that function under "the premise that the State must take the lead in promoting gender equality", and serve as "a form of institutionalized or bureaucratic representation of women".<sup>1</sup> The mandate of NWMs, according to the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) includes, *inter alia*, designing, promoting the implementation of, executing, monitoring, evaluating, advocating and mobilizing support for policies that promote the advancement of women.<sup>2</sup> If able to work to their fullest potential, the mandate of NWMs should allow them to perform catalytic work through the provision of policy advice on programmatic gender mainstreaming in other governmental ministries and departments.<sup>3</sup> There is no one type of NWM. Within the 22 States that comprise the Arab region, these machineries are diverse in form and structure and do not have a uniform institutional design. They vary from dedicated ministries or agencies, to ministries with combined portfolios, to offices within or linked to the central government.

The effective functioning of NWMs requires several factors, including clearly defined mandates and authority, adequate financial and human resources, strong political commitment and location at the highest possible level of government. Similarly, the effectiveness of NWMs depends on their context, including the State's fiscal space, economic structure and political stability as well as their relationship

with civil society, including local women's rights organizations.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee), which is tasked with monitoring the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), has repeatedly expressed concern over the limited capacities of the NWMs to deliver on their intended goals under the Convention. It has emphasized the importance of giving urgent priority to strengthening their institutional capacity and providing them with the mandate, decision-making power and human, technical and financial resources necessary to work effectively and to influence the formulation, design and implementation of public policies focused on gender equality and the empowerment of women.<sup>4</sup>

Notably, political instability, including conflict, transition and/or occupation, is a factor that can seriously hamper the performance of NWMs. For example, continuous changes of government may result in frequent leadership and organizational changes within NWMs as well as alterations to their mandates. Since 2010, the Arab region has been experiencing patterns of violence, social unrest and conflict cultivated by a diverse combination of political, civil, economic, social and cultural underpinnings. Each Arab State, however, has reacted differently to the governance issues, power dynamics and social realities of the changing political and conflict manifestations. The factors mentioned above are

intrinsic to the institution's capacity to adapt and to cope with a changing situation and therefore to its central role in the advancement of the situation of women and the agenda for gender equality at the national level.<sup>5</sup>

## B. Scope and purpose of the study

The concept of "resilience" has emerged as a critical approach to fostering an understanding of a system's ability to cope with and adapt to external pressures and challenges.<sup>6</sup> In this vein, this study examines the impact of conflict, occupation, political instability, and formal transition on NWMs in the Arab region. This study also considers the factors that have contributed to their resiliency, including how they respond to challenges that affect their ability to advance their mandates, utilizing the resilience framework proposed by Judith Rodin, co-chair of the NYS2100 Commission, created in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy to make New York State more resilient. Drawing upon her experiences and observations at the individual, community and organizational levels, Rodin compiled a profile of resilience in her book, *The Resilience Dividend: Being Strong in a World Where Things Go Wrong* (2014). According to Rodin, "to be resilient is to be aware, adaptive, diverse and self-regulating. These characteristics are all present, to different degrees, and in different manifestations, in all resilient entities".<sup>7</sup> This framework was chosen because of its adaptability to different scenarios and institutions. Furthermore, the fact that the framework aims to develop a 'resilience dividend' is especially empowering for entities, like NWMs in the Arab region, that may be exposed to instability for years to come.

The study identifies strengths and gaps in the responses of NWMs, as well as choices

undertaken at the national level to strengthen their resilience. It also draws upon a framework for NWMs outlined by Shirin M. Rai (2003) in her research on strong gender machineries. Rai's assessment of gender machineries, provided during an expert group meeting on "National Machineries for Gender Equality" in 1998, organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, were mainstreamed into the agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women in 1999 (1999/2) on the institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. Rai's contribution contained recommendations for further implementation of the BPfA. Informed by Rai's analysis, the study then proposes a design to enhance the resilience of NWMs in the region with respect to their mandate and structure, as well as their capacities, resources and other elements.

This study draws upon four diverse and distinct examples from States to highlight the various approaches NWMs have utilized during times of instability. The study further argues that the tactics these States have employed, if applied during times of stability, will contribute to creating resilient institutions. Although the selection of States in the case studies is not comprehensive, each State illustrates a different context of instability for the work of NWMs. These four examples include experiences from Yemen (conflict-affected), Jordan (affected by the spill over of the conflict in Syria), the State of Palestine (under occupation) and Tunisia (undergoing a formal political transition).

This study recognizes that during conflict, occupation or periods of formal political transition, NWMs' capacity to operate and implement their mandates is greatly affected. Therefore, the study shows that the institutional

resilience and coping mechanisms of NWMs vary according to the political dynamics within each context. Each example shows that NWMs' institutional trajectories are marked by their capacity to deal with downsizing, government marginalization, political tensions and resource instability. It also presents the different financial and non-financial scenarios adopted by NWMs to increase their resilience and enhance their response to crisis.

Notably, this study coincides with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the BPfA, which remains the primary roadmap for gender equality and the empowerment of women, including the development of NWMs. The study also coincides with the fortieth anniversary of CEDAW, the twentieth anniversary of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda,<sup>8</sup> as well as the fifth anniversary of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls for a significant increase in investments to close the gender gap and strengthen support for institutions in relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women.<sup>9</sup> The convergence of these milestones offers a rare opportunity to review the policies contained in these frameworks which shape States' approaches to the work and role of NWMs, particularly with regard to the role of institutions in conflict and post-conflict.

### C. Methodology

The study is based on information and data collected through several sources. It relies on a desk review of literature examining institutions in times of transition and conflict, the challenging context of the Arab region and existing discussions on resilience frameworks. It also benefits from a survey that the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for

Western Asia (ESCWA) shared with NWMs in early 2018 soliciting information on their nature, structure and mandate and their engagement in developing National Action Plans (NAPs) on the WPS agenda, if at all. It must be noted, however, that of the 18 ESCWA member countries, only 11 responded to questions relating to the status of NWMs. This study also capitalizes on a series of in-depth interviews conducted with members of NWMs in Jordan, the State of Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen, along with other national and international entities who are active in these countries and work in conjunction with NWMs. The interviews aimed to provide a greater understanding of the mandate, structure, relations, budget, adoption of various strategies and programmes, the political support and working relations with civil society and the engagement of NWMs in the WPS agenda. The knowledge gained from the interviews contributed to better understanding how the four reviewed NWMs responded to the challenging contexts in which they operate, and the tactics used to continue operating and delivering their mandate under occupation, during conflict and while in formal political transition. Initial findings of the study were discussed at an expert group meeting organised by ESCWA in Beirut, Lebanon on 4 and 5 December 2018 that was attended by regional and international experts who aimed to fill analytical gaps in the study and enhance its quality. The study also benefited from the expert views of internal and external reviewers.

The research methodology experienced some constraints given the challenging circumstances in which these NWMs operate. Firstly, the information and data available on States in conflict and transition in the region is limited. This curtailed the scope of the study to four countries that ESCWA was able to reach out to, although with difficulty as in the case of

Yemen. In both Tunisia and Yemen, face-to-face interviews were not possible and the consultant who organized the interviews relied on Skype calls, which were impacted by the internet connectivity. Secondly, despite several interviews with representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs), the number of interviewees was too low to allow for an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the views of CSOs on their relationship with NWMs. Finally, while the study team was able to collect and refer to secondary data on the socioeconomic situation of countries in conflict along with some information on the situation of women and girls and the impact of conflict, there remained a scarcity of data. This has impacted the ability to fully understand the situation in the countries that participated in this study.

#### **D. Outline of the study**

In addition to this introduction, this study includes three chapters and concludes with a set of policy recommendations. Chapter 1 sets the scene by providing a conceptual background of “institutional resilience”, discusses the impact on State institutions operating in challenging contexts. The chapter also briefly discusses

the grounding of NWMs in relevant international standards and frameworks.

Chapter 2 anchors the discussion on institutional resilience while looking at specific State experiences from the Arab region. It presents information on several NWMs and then focuses on four specific examples: the case of Yemen, as an example of ongoing conflict; Jordan, as an example of a State affected by neighbouring conflicts; the State of Palestine, as a unique example of occupation; and Tunisia, as an example of State undergoing a formal political transition.

Chapter 3 builds on the previous two chapters and provides a hands-on policy-oriented discussion on strengthening the resilience of NWMs and how these aspects enable NWMs to carry out their role in the context of conflict, occupation and/or formal political transition. It elaborates on the elements of resilience and includes examples of how these elements enable NWMs carry out their work in practice. Finally, the study ends with policy recommendations to member States, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the relevant international actors, as well as the donor community.



# 1. Framing Institutional Resilience and National Women's Machineries in the Arab Region

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# 1. Framing Institutional Resilience and National Women's Machineries in the Arab Region

This chapter presents the core debate as to why resilience matters for any institution, and particularly NWMs that function in unstable settings in the Arab region. The chapter then discusses the history and typology of NWMs globally and within the Arab region.

## A. Framing institutional resilience

Institutions are defined as regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive entities that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life.<sup>10</sup> Institutions provide formal and informal rules for action, as well as regulative mechanisms that enforce such directives.<sup>11</sup> Existing literature on governance tends to focus on four categories of institutions, namely: the security sector, the judiciary, public administration and political. Public administration institutions, including those entrusted with public policy, such as NWMs, constitute the core element of the State and are critical to its stability, development and peace. They play a crucial role in managing the changes brought about by challenging operational settings, particularly those related to post-conflict reconstruction and development. To prescribe effective policies, public administration institutions must cultivate the necessary technical capacity to handle these types of obstacles.

For States where conflict is ongoing, and even those who have emerged or are emerging from instability, development, which includes governance, is negatively impacted. In countries where conflict continues, institutions have disintegrated. Furthermore, in conflict-affected settings, public finances may be directed towards militarization and security-related efforts at the expense of public institutions, contributing to the population's diminishing confidence in these institutions. Conflict tends to debilitate institutions, rendering them largely incapable of advancing their mandates, while also curtailing their response to peace and security issues just when such work is needed most. In many other countries that have emerged from conflict with new and different power structures, institutions may become exclusionary, weak and ineffective. This can be attributed to limits on their mandates, fragmented approaches and weak coordination with and among governmental and non-governmental sectors, as well as diminishing resources. In this state of affairs, NWMs are at a particular disadvantage.

As a result, societies where institutions are inherently fragile will be affected even more by disruption, making it harder to recover thereafter. Thus, resilience, particularly during conflict, occupation or formal political transition, becomes an important factor in maintaining and cultivating effective institutions.

Resilience, as a concept, refers to the capacity of a system, enterprise or person to maintain its core purpose and integrity in the face of dramatically changing circumstances.<sup>12</sup> Other definitions tend to converge around the notion of a system's ability to cope with and adapt to external pressures.<sup>13</sup> It has been applied to a diverse range of disciplines and considers how individuals, businesses, organizations and the environment cope with challenges, such as climate change, the depletion of natural resources and uncertainties in financial markets in general. Other definitions tend to group around the notion of a system's ability to cope with and adapt to external pressures. This study utilizes Rodin's definition of resilience, which is "the capacity of any entity – an individual, community, an organization, or a natural system – to prepare for disruptions, to recover from shocks and stresses, and to adapt and grow from a disruptive experience. As you build resilience, therefore, you become more able to prevent or mitigate stresses and shocks you can identify and better able to respond to those you can't predict or avoid. You also develop greater capacity to bounce back from crisis, learn from it, and achieve revitalization. Ideally, as you become more adept at managing disruption and skilled at resilience building, you are able to create and take advantage of new opportunities in good times and bad. That is the resilience dividend [...] it is about achieving significant transformation that yields benefits even when disruptions are not occurring".<sup>14</sup> The study also employs Rodin's framework based on the five characteristics deemed necessary for any institution to become resilient – aware; diverse; integrated; self-regulating; and adaptive. These characteristics, taken as a whole, may create more resilient institutions.

Hence, organizational behaviours adopted by institutions to remain capable and relevant

during significant disruption is effectively building "institutional resilience". This effort varies according to the status, inherent capacity, leadership decisions and historical record of such entities. Well-established institutions that maintain qualities of inclusivity, accountability, legitimacy, transparency, equitability, efficiency and effectiveness are deemed more resilient because they enforce regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that endure, even after a disaster. After a major disturbance, prevailing institutions still provide actors with information, strategies and plans of action and organizational structures, thereby preventing complete institutional collapse and facilitating revival in such a way that fragile institutions are not able to. For this reason, institutional resilience implies that institutions are equipped with internal mechanisms to strengthen their resilience to allow them to be less affected by and recover after a disruption, or to adapt to its consequences.

It follows that investing in building the resilience of organizations should, therefore, be everyone's priority, and resilience-building, as a concept and a practice, can be learned and developed. However, there is a tendency to think of resilience only when an event or shock happens. This should not be the case as there is a need to invest in preparedness and anticipation of disruptions, particularly in the institutions that help societies mitigate, respond to and overcome shocks and disruptions.

While resilience capacities are manifested in a huge variety of actions, there are some qualities of those responses and actions that are common to all types of entities in existing and emerging contexts. Furthermore, the concept of "institutional resilience" should not be seen in isolation from other discussions on organizational development. Instead,

it should offer a deeper analysis of the factors that contribute to allowing institutions to flourish, rather than taking a technocratic approach, or imposing a 'one size fits all' model for NWMs.

The varying political contexts in which NWMs operate may also pose major challenges. As early as 2002, the Arab Human Development Report highlighted the centrality of reforming public administrations in the Arab region.<sup>15</sup> In many Arab States, state institutions are foundationally weak and therefore easily manipulated or altered. Furthermore, they have been in a continuing state of frailty due to corruption, political influence, weak rule of law, lack of transparency and ineffective governance and accountability mechanisms. Recent ESCWA publications have also noted that although economic and political challenges are dominating priorities in regional and national agendas, the legacy of weak institutions exacerbates the situation and limits the success of public policies intended to address these challenges.<sup>16</sup> The political context, political and bureaucratic leadership, and institutional design are also important considerations that explain the limits is achievable through existing institutions.

Due to the many disruptions experienced in the Arab region since 2010, economic systems have become more heavily burdened, governance structures strained, and social cohesion stressed and repeatedly tested. Although accurately quantifying the cost of disruption is rather challenging, the immense toll on States should not be underestimated. Moreover, the disproportionate impact of these political and socioeconomic challenges on women and girls requires a gender-focused approach. This is particularly relevant given the increasing needs of women in the region following political

instabilities. To a large extent, such needs are based on pre-conflict gender discrimination in both law and in practice, for example issues relating to violence against women and child marriage, which are exacerbated by conflict. On the other hand, other conflict-related challenges faced by women are freedom of movement, political imprisonment and the inability to register children during internal displacement or when a refugee. Strengthening resilience becomes a valid option that allows NWMs to deliver on their mandates and respond to the emerging needs of women in situations of conflict, occupation, instability and/or political transition.

## B. History and typology of National Women's Machineries

The global movement to develop national machineries for gender equality and the advancement of women emerged from several United Nations conferences and gatherings, particularly in the mid-1970s during the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985). Notably, a handful of States had developed national machineries prior to this event; these include contexts as diverse as Europe (UK),<sup>17</sup> Africa (Liberia, Tunisia and Egypt),<sup>18</sup> Asia (Vietnam, Philippines) and the Caribbean (Jamaica).<sup>19</sup>

The First World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975 recommended that all Governments establish a machinery to promote the status of women, as institutionalizing women's interests at all levels of policy was a goal of women's movements worldwide. The impetus for such machineries came out of the Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) paradigms of the 1970s and 1980s. The creation of a specific machinery

attached to government was a way to develop “more formal governmental and non-governmental infrastructure that could begin to serve as the basis of an international gender equality regime”.<sup>20</sup> According to Manjoo, “The transformation of society required the improvement of women’s position, relative to men, in order to achieve equity and respect for the human rights of both women and men. The empowerment of women was a crucial component of a model that challenged the system of power, status and privilege in the quest for justice and equity for women”.<sup>21</sup>

By the Second World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985 gender mainstreaming was a key strategy for national machineries, as outlined in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies.<sup>22</sup> Mainstreaming served as a form of institutionalization, rather than the ad hoc gender integration as called for by the WID/GAD policies. Gender mainstreaming aimed to look “beyond the promotion of projects and programmes for women, to the consideration of gender issues across all sectors, ministries and departments. This, in turn, may imply transformation of the institutional structures of government and the state and requires close attention to the links between National Women’s Machineries and other areas of government”.<sup>23</sup>

Momentum grew for creating such institutions and, by the end of the United Nations Decade for Women in 1985, “127 Member States had created national machineries... In accordance with the recommendations of the platform for action, steps to improve the status of women included public policy change, legal and legislative change, institutional change, programmatic change, and change in generation and dissemination of knowledge and data disaggregated by sex”.<sup>24</sup>

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) set the stage for the official call for NWMs within a larger framework of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) under articles 201 and 202 (box 1). The Platform for Action emphasised the importance of NWMs “to be given ‘primary responsibilities for ensuring the integration of gender into the policies, programmes and plans of government at all levels.’”<sup>25</sup> Specifically, Strategic Objective H of the BPfA outlines the need for national institutional mechanisms, such as NWMs, that ensure the mainstreaming of gender equality and the advancement of women. Ideally, they function as “a set of coordinated structures within and outside government, with the aim of achieving equality for women...”.<sup>26</sup> This should involve the creation or strengthening of national machineries and other governmental bodies; integration of a gender perspective in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects; and generation and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.

The establishment of NWMs came to fill an institutional gap and to serve as the institutional mechanism for gender equality and the advancement of women. They also served to implement international agreements and conventions that called for their establishment such as the BPfA and CEDAW, which enabled governments to adopt necessary strategies for the advancement of women’s rights. Hence, NWMs were expected to be positioned at a high level within the Government, have adequate resources, commitment and authority for the following purposes: (a) Advise on the impact of all Government policies on women; (b) Monitor the situation of women comprehensively; (c) Help formulate new policies and effectively carry out strategies and measures to eliminate discrimination.

### **Box 1. Strategic objective H of the Beijing Platform for Action on National Women's Machineries**

**201.** A national machinery for the advancement of women is the central policy-coordinating unit inside government. Its main task is to support the government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas.

The necessary conditions for an effective functioning of such national machineries include:

- (a) Location at the highest possible level in the government, falling under the responsibility of a Cabinet minister;
- (b) Institutional mechanisms or processes that facilitate, as appropriate, decentralized planning, implementation and monitoring with a view to involving non-governmental organizations and community organizations from grassroots upwards;
- (c) Sufficient resources in terms of budget and professional capacity;
- (d) opportunity to influence development of all government policies.

**202.** In addressing the issue of mechanisms for promoting the advancement of women, Governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made on the effects on women and men, respectively.

#### **Strategic Objectives**

H1. Create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies.

H2. Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects.

H3. Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.

The work of NWMs enables governments to adopt the necessary strategies, policies, programmes and plans, while working closely with other State institutions to ensure that gender concerns are mainstreamed in the work of the government.<sup>27</sup> Box 2 explains the centrality of gender mainstreaming as a key vehicle for addressing gender concerns and advancing women's rights. While NWMs must be complemented by effective national human rights institutions and a strong civil society, NWMs serve a unique role in their intergovernmental position and dedicated gender mainstreaming mandate.

NWMs can take different shapes depending on the context; they can range from ministries to desks, from departments or directorates.

Accordingly, "Some may be located within the President's or Prime Minister's office; others may be a portfolio within a state ministry or local administration; yet others may be ministries in their own right. The mandates, responsibilities and resources of these machineries vary as well".<sup>28</sup> In most States, NWMs are part of the government structure; in other States, they may be located outside government but are still acknowledged and assume the responsibility of a NWM in national and international fora. As such, "These bodies might be considered more autonomous, or less influential, depending on how they are able to negotiate political boundaries, to become effective in improving the status of women".<sup>29</sup> Thus, there is no 'one-size-fits-all approach' to creating NWMs.

### Box 2. Gender mainstreaming

“[We call upon] States, the United Nations system and all other actors to implement the Platform for Action, in particular by promoting an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective at all levels, including the design, monitoring and evaluation of all policies, as appropriate, in order to ensure effective implementation of the Platform”.

*General Assembly resolution 50/203, follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women*

“Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated”.

*ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2*

However, while NWMs can take many shapes and have varying mandates, Rai has outlined five elements that are critical for all NWMs, regardless of context, for their effective functioning:

- Location [at a high level] within the decision-making hierarchy [and authority] to influence government policy;
- Clarity of mandate and functional responsibility;
- Links with civil society groups supportive of the advancement of women’s rights and enhancement of women’s status;
- Human and financial resources;
- Accountability of the national machinery itself.<sup>30</sup>

These criteria have also been supported by the United Nations in the agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women in 1999 (1999/2) on the institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women in the recommendations. However, context matters as NWMs face varying challenges based on location, economic wealth, government

structure, political stability and sociocultural variations. This is especially true of NWMs working in challenging environments where conflict, occupation and/or formal political transition are daily realities and the need for gender mainstreaming and a gender-sensitized response to events is even more necessary. Thus, NWMs in volatile or transitional settings will have a different set of constraints and opportunities that must be taken into consideration compared with machineries that operate under conditions of relative stability.

### C. National Women’s Machineries in the Arab region

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing left an enduring impression on women’s rights activists, civil society and Governments in the Arab region, bringing them together to develop different iterations of NWMs to work with member States on gender equality and women’s empowerment through the adoption of the BPfA and CEDAW (despite several reservations).



Prior to the Beijing Conference, NWMs presence in the Arab region was primarily limited to departments, directorates or units under ministries with broad mandates such as Ministries of Social Development. A report on NWMs from 2010 refers to the gradual growth of such entities since 1967, when the Syrian Arab Republic established the General Union for Women Syria as part of the executive and legislative authority.<sup>31</sup> Egypt followed in 1970 with the establishment of Women's Affairs Directorate in the Ministry of Social Affairs. Other countries in the region followed suit as a response to the international women's conferences beginning in 1975.<sup>32</sup>

However, since 1995, there have been stronger commitments from governments in the Arab region to support the establishment of NWMs, including several that have been upgraded from commissions or councils to ministries. These establishments had, on many occasions, strong ties with power structures in their countries given that in many cases NWMs were chaired by the countries' First Ladies, which ensured a stronger political support. According to an ESCWA study in 2010, out of the 15 established NWMs, eight were presided by First Ladies.<sup>33</sup>

Currently, NWMs in the Arab region assume different structures. In some States, NWMs function as full ministries either with stand-alone mandates specifically dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women (for example, the State of Palestine) or have broader and/or combined portfolios that include women's affairs among other mandates (such as in Tunisia and Morocco). In other Arab States, NWMs take the form of quasi-governmental institutions (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, and Yemen).<sup>34</sup> In Lebanon, uniquely, the Ministry of State for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth<sup>35</sup> and the

National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), divide the gender equality portfolio.

Nonetheless, by and large, the capacity of NWMs, compared to other institutions, is limited, a concern that is also faced by NWMs in contexts outside the Arab region as well. National Women's Machineries have difficulty carrying out their mandates for a number of reasons: their work may be isolated and sidelined; the existence of heavily patriarchal structures; and given economic crises and conflict a number of Arab States face, women's issues are increasingly pushed aside.<sup>36</sup> In some contexts, NWMs are merely tokenistic, which is reflected from the outset in the purposefully weak design of NWMs within the greater institutional structure. In the Arab region, NWMs have faced various challenges since their establishment, including confronting entrenched socioeconomic contexts, weak internal institutional structures, limited human and financial resources and cultural and societal resistance, among others.<sup>37</sup> NWMs have had to grapple with a lack of adequate support, expressed through a dearth of funding and abundant legislative obstacles.

Despite their varied forms and challenges, NWMs in the Arab region have been instrumental in reporting on State efforts to implement CEDAW and the BPfA and have advocated for gender-sensitive legal reform, such as the passage of laws addressing violence against women (VAW) and economic empowerment initiatives. Because of their unique nature and the limited resources allocated to them compared to other governmental entities, NWMs rely significantly on their relationships with donors, civil society, multilateral institutions and other governmental mechanisms to support their work.

**Table 1.** List of designated National Women’s Machineries in ESCWA region

State	NWM	Type
<b>Bahrain</b>	Supreme Council for Women	State agency
<b>Egypt</b>	National Council for Women	State agency
<b>Iraq</b>	Higher Committee for Iraqi Women	State agency
<b>Jordan</b>	Jordanian National Commission for Women	State agency
<b>Kuwait</b>	Supreme Council for Family Affairs	State agency under the Ministry of Social Development
<b>Lebanon</b>	Minister of State for Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth	Minister of State
	The National Commission for Lebanese Women	State agency
<b>Libya</b>	Department for Empowerment of Women, Cabinet	Government department
<b>Mauritania</b>	Ministry of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood	Ministry
<b>Morocco</b>	Ministry of Family, Solidarity, Equality, and Social Development	Ministry
<b>Oman</b>	Ministry of Social Affairs	Ministry
<b>State of Palestine</b>	Ministry of Women’s Affairs	Ministry
<b>Qatar</b>	Qatar Social Work Foundation	State agency
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	Family Affairs Council	State agency under the Ministry of Social Development and Labour
<b>The Sudan</b>	Ministry of Welfare and Social Security	Ministry
<b>Syrian Arab Republic</b>	Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and Population	State agency
<b>Tunisia</b>	Ministry of Women, Family, Children and the Elderly	Ministry
<b>United Arab Emirates</b>	General Women’s Union	State agency
<b>Yemen</b>	Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour	Ministry

**Source:** Data taken from ESCWA’s list of National Women’s Machineries.

As of the date of this publication, all 18 ESCWA member States had designated NWMs (table 1). They are sometimes dedicated State agencies

with the specific mandate to work for the advancement of women and sometimes government ministries with joint mandates

to work on the advancement of women among other priority areas. Both structures are at the highest level of government and State, exercising noteworthy recognition and influence. There are advantages to both structures. On the one hand, State institutions might have a degree of autonomy outside government changes associated with political cycles. For instance, while there have been eight Cabinet reshuffles in Jordan since 2011, the leadership of the Jordanian National Commission for Women remained untouched during the period, allowing for a degree of predictability and continuity.

On the other hand, ministries with a mandate for the advancement of women have a voice at the cabinet level and may be better positioned to propose policy changes and engage in a whole-of-government dialogue on relevant issues. However, given the joint mandates of most ministry-related NWMs, issues for the advancement of women often must compete with other social priorities and may not receive the space or attention they deserve at the cabinet level.

The mandates of NWMs are further determined by their location in the government/State. For instance, independent State agencies tend

to focus more on policy advice and advocacy, while ministries play a leading role in policy development and implementation. Mandates for this action are guided by national legislation, obligations under international human rights law, government strategies, political priorities and expressed needs. National Women's Machineries' ownership of these mandates and their expressed responsibility for their advancement is critical to achieve success in their work. This includes efforts dedicated to addressing manifestations of gender-based discrimination and VAW, as well as efforts to mainstream gender competence in the work of various government entities to achieve equality in law and practice for both women and men, girls and boys.

In the Arab region, CSOs, where they exist, are an important stakeholder and partner for NWMs. Civil society, by definition, represents social groups that seek to advance common interests, usually emanating from common values.<sup>38</sup> Linkages with civil society therefore represent an important repository of support and influence that NWMs can work with to implement their mandate, strengthen their influence, and extend their programming and support, as need be.

**Table 2. National Women's Machineries that revised their mandates**

Type of Revision	Responses		
	Yes	No	No answer
<b>They revised and redefined the political and organizational foundation of the NWM</b>	8	2	1
<b>They defined the legal foundation of the NWM</b>	8	1	2
<b>They defined the role of the NWM in policy, planning and supervisory roles</b>	9	1	1
<b>There is legislation that defines the role and responsibilities of NWM</b>	8	1	2
<b>They defined accountability frameworks</b>	7	2	2

Mechanisms for linkages with civil society vary across the region. For instance, civil society has representatives on the board governing the National Council for Women in Egypt,<sup>39</sup> while relevant ministries often establish ad hoc structures to work on specific tasks of mutual interest among the NWM and CSOs, such as the design of a National Action Plan for Women, Peace, and Security in Yemen.<sup>40</sup>

Across the board, the various manifestations of civil society structures reveal important accomplishments and opportunities. In Lebanon, for instance, civil society is identified as an anchor of stability, with noteworthy contributions to electoral processes, environmental issues and in assisting refugees.<sup>41</sup> Many of these issues resonate with the mandate and priorities of NWMs.

Notwithstanding the above, many of the NWMs in the region have gone through several changes since 2010. A 2018 survey organized by

ESCWA captured some of these developments. For example, out of the 11 NWM respondents to the survey, many indicated that they have revised their mandate. Table 2 highlights the key features of these revisions. However, these changes may have an adverse impact on the role and status of the NWM. A further in-depth and qualitative analysis would allow for a good assessment on this subject.

The political changes that emerged in 2010 spread across the Arab region and toppled some of the most long-serving leaders in the world. Despite the shifts in power, slow and ineffective public sector reforms continue to pose a serious threat to the effectiveness and responsiveness of administrative structures.<sup>42</sup> Since the time of the Arab uprising, some NWMs in the region have been called upon to demonstrate their ability to respond to changes in the local political, economic, geographic and sociocultural landscapes and their impacts on women and girls.

## 2. National Women's Machineries and the Changing Operating Context of the Arab Region



## 2. National Women's Machineries and the Changing Operating Context of the Arab Region

As discussed in the previous chapter, advancing gender equality and the rights of women across the Arab region is a daunting task, made even more complex in the past decade because of numerous geopolitical and geo-economic shocks, as well as cascading social strife. For example, the 2014 plunge in oil prices caused the region's gross oil revenues to drop from US\$697.3 billion in 2014 to \$322.7 billion in 2016.<sup>43</sup> As a result, Arab States had to make dramatic, across the board cuts in public spending and subsidies given the shrinking fiscal space. For instance, the cost of heavy fuel oil went up by 40 per cent for bakeries and food producers in Egypt,<sup>44</sup> a cost that was transferred on to consumers and contributing to the cascading social strife.

In response, the mandates, capacities, and working space for NWMs continued to change and evolve. National Women's Machineries had to identify ways to be effective and offset negative repercussions of shocks and instability, while also having to undertake this work with fewer resources, constrained capacities and in a fragile working environment increasingly hostile to their mandates. More often than not, new institutional arrangements were deemed necessary and alternative operational approaches had to be enacted. This chapter considers the issues facing institutions in general during occupation, conflict and political transition,

with reference to NWMs. It touches on select contextual factors that have affected the functioning of these institutions, such as political dynamics and fragility, austerity measures and their impact, public perceptions and accessibility of NWMs to their key constituencies and stakeholders.

### A. Context of political fragility

Key consequences of the regional instability since 2010 have been the exacerbation of grievances, deepening of pre-existing fragility and weakened State institutions. These transitions and conflicts in the Arab region have taken various forms, including civil resistance, intra-State violence, post-conflict power-sharing agreements, the establishment of security States as well as shifts towards greater democratization. These can have profound long-term impacts, as it becomes increasingly challenging for State institutions to respond to their mandates in fragile operating contexts. Even in relatively stable societies, such dynamics can spill over through inflows of refugees, cross-border security issues, geopolitical instability concerns as well as opportunity costs due to lost trade and investment.

Responding to such regional instability is also a reason for concern, as it results from additional

costs to mitigate effects and prevent direct spillover. Furthermore, heavy-handed security responses often come at the expense of space for civic activism, free expression and freedom of assembly, all of which are vital components of any good governance framework. Such responses can increase the complexity of the political landscape and strain the relationship between governments and civil society, as well as among civilian and non-civilian government agencies, resulting in a vicious cycle of political fragility that can be progressively harder to reverse.

In **Tunisia**, for instance, one of the key demands during the uprising of 2010 was further advancement for the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda, which was already well established and advanced compared to other States in the region. It also had a relatively progressive legislative framework relating to personal status or family law, and an impressive array of policies to address gender-based discrimination and promote the advancement of women. Tunisia is also one of two Arab States to have ratified CEDAW's Optional Protocol, which establishes a complaint and inquiry mechanism through the Convention. It has also undertaken a national audit relating to the national implementation of the BPfA.

The Tunisian feminist movement saw opportunities in the uprisings of 2011 and the associated political transition to demand further reforms and draw attention to women's issues. In response, Tunisia's transitional Government withdrew all reservations to CEDAW in 2011<sup>45</sup> and established a stand-alone Ministry for Women. Furthermore, the Tunisian Higher Council for the Realization of the Goals of the Revolution, Political Reforms and Democratic Transition approved decree 35/2011 that

required gender parity and rotation-based electoral lists in the future Constituent Assembly. This set a precedent in the history of the women's rights movement, not only in Tunisia, but in the Arab region as a whole,<sup>46</sup> and was an important gain for Tunisian women.

A frequent challenge for women engaged in revolutions worldwide is the post-transition disregard for the women's rights agenda that had been promised during protests. However, in Tunisia it appears that the women's rights agenda was able to maintain momentum and influence the incoming Ennahda Party, a socially conservative but overall moderate Islamist group. In 2014, Tunisia launched a Truth and Dignity Commission to shed light on the torture and other human rights abuses conducted between 1955 and 2013, particularly against Islamist communities and dissenting women's rights activists.

Post-revolution, Tunisia implemented gender parity on electoral lists. As a result, the increased representation of women and success of female candidates brought crucial, gender-sensitive input into the development of the new Constitution. Currently, women make up one third of Tunisia's Parliament.<sup>47</sup> The Parliament recently passed a groundbreaking law to protect women from sexual harassment and to simplify procedures for the prosecution of domestic violence. In 2017, President Beji Caid Essebsi rescinded a ban on the marriage of Muslim women to non-Muslims in Tunisia and proposed a bill to give women equal inheritance rights.

In contrast, the situation in **Yemen** has been particularly dire for women. Yemen is one of the least developed countries, with a multitude of socioeconomic challenges made even more precarious by the regional conflict ongoing since March 2015. Even prior to the conflict,



Yemen had close to the lowest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in the region, no Yemeni parliamentarians were women, and 32 per cent of Yemeni women were married before the age of 18.<sup>48</sup> Notably, Yemen has consistently occupied last place in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index for most of the last decade.<sup>49</sup>

Yemen is currently in the midst of the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with approximately 22.2 million people (over three quarters of the population) in need of assistance or protection.<sup>50</sup> The conflict is estimated to have returned Yemen to 1998 levels of development, reversing recent gains made to the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>51</sup> Since the start of the conflict, 10 per cent of the population has become internally displaced. Additionally, 8.4 million Yemenis are severely food insecure, the majority of whom are women and children. The degradation of the health system has had a devastating impact on the health of women and girls. Food shortages and malnutrition have left approximately 1.1 million women malnourished and threatens the lives of 75,000 women who are likely to develop complications during childbirth.<sup>52</sup> Epidemics such as cholera and diphtheria can result in premature and low-birth weight babies, as well as severe post-partum bleeding.

Moreover, the conflict has only exacerbated highly entrenched, preexisting gender inequalities within Yemen. The chaos of the crisis, in tandem with pervasive marginalization, has left women and girls exceedingly vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Women and children comprise 75 per cent of those displaced by the crisis. As men leave their communities to fight in the war, women are left to manage households, as well as protect the wellbeing and physical security of their children and

elderly family members—a duty that becomes increasingly challenging without access to basic economic and social services. Rape and sexual violence have reportedly increased by 271 per cent,<sup>53</sup> and there was a 36 per cent increase in women seeking gender-based violence services in 2017. Rates of child marriage have also escalated, as 66 per cent of girls married under the age of 18 in 2017 compared to 52 per cent in 2016.<sup>54</sup> Even with the unique and dire needs of women during the crisis, women have largely been excluded from recent peace negotiations. However, since 2015, Yemeni women have sought engagement with the peace process through the UN-supported Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security.

While locked out of the formal positions of power, the protracted conflict has resulted in the increased participation of women at the family, local, national and international levels to respond to the acute societal needs. Women are at the forefront of sustaining communities and families during the conflict and addressing its devastating effects. They are contributing to informal peace processes; mediating between armed parties; and contributing to the economy. However, despite the largely gendered impact of the conflict, there has been little to no attention given to women's issues.

The conflict has also significantly damaged the functioning and integrity of State institutions, with the collapse of revenue, administrative systems, and governance pyramid structures, as well as a split between Sana'a, the official capital, and Aden, the temporarily-designated capital. Yemen's former NWM, the Women's National Committee (WNC), had monitored the impact of the conflict on women and girls in the beginning of the conflict in 2015, working closely with humanitarian partners. However, due to the financial crisis stemming from the

conflict, the WNC effectively became paralyzed and ceased most of its operations in late 2015.

For a brief period in early 2018, the Aden branch of WNC was able to revive some of its operations and engage on matters relating to monitoring the status of women. Shortly thereafter the mandate of women's advancement was taken up by the Women and Children Department in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

**Jordan** is yet another country affected by regional political violence, given its shared borders with the occupied State of Palestine and conflict-affected Iraq and Syria. A report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in June 2018 indicated that “Jordan is one of the countries most affected by the Syria crisis, with the second highest share of refugees compared to its population in the world, 89 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants. The majority of Syrian refugees in Jordan live in urban areas and in poverty: over 85 per cent live below the poverty line”.<sup>55</sup> The refugee population imposes a demographic reality that has inevitably impacted the country's developmental status and social infrastructure, alongside the increasing financial, non-financial and opportunity costs of responding to the refugee crisis. This has led to acute deprivation in terms of overcrowding, as well as concerns relating to access to nutrition and water for Jordan's most vulnerable segments.<sup>56</sup>

While many women report the desire to contribute to a household income, they often have difficulties accessing employment opportunities.<sup>57</sup> Some families turn to child marriage to ensure greater financial security for their daughters and for themselves. Furthermore, Syrian children are facing a number of issues related to the quality of

education available, bullying and unaffordable school costs.<sup>58</sup> Many Syrian refugee women experience GBV in both the private and public spheres, impeding their mobility. The financial stress and household tensions of displacement tend to exacerbate domestic violence.<sup>59</sup>

The flow of refugees into Jordan has placed a great strain on Jordan's already-fragile economy and over-stretched resources. Tensions are on the rise between host communities and the refugee population, as host communities who are themselves vulnerable feel threatened by competition for employment, and government or international NGO support. The challenges associated with the refugee influx are particularly acute; several studies point to various forms of economic and social deprivation that spillover between the refugee population and host communities.<sup>60</sup> Addressing these issues puts an additional strain on social infrastructure and the efforts of Jordanian institutions and CSOs working to alleviate socio-economic hardships of all vulnerable population groups.

In the **State of Palestine**, women in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza are subjected to the daily obstacles and pervasive oppression of life under the Israeli occupation. Within Gaza, the 12-year blockade and consistent military assaults have destroyed livelihoods, effectively crippling the economy and leading to high levels of poverty. In 2014, 61 per cent of women were unemployed.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, 47 per cent of the population faces food insecurity in Gaza—an issue that disproportionately affects female-headed households.<sup>62</sup> Poverty is a major determinant of food insecurity. The 2017 Household Expenditure and Consumption Survey found that the poverty rate in Gaza had increased from

38.8 to 53 per cent since 2011.<sup>63</sup> In addition to violence from their own communities, women are subjected to violence from Israeli forces. During Israel's attack on Gaza in 2014, 260 women were killed and 2,088 injured.<sup>64</sup> Countless women were also left widowed from the violence, leaving them with mass trauma and the responsibility of serving as primary caretakers for their families. The occupation has also devastated the health care system within Gaza; during the 2014 military assault, more than 40,000 women were deprived of access to basic reproductive health services.<sup>65</sup>

Within the West Bank in particular, some of the major challenges faced by women include restrictions on movement; excessive use of force by Israeli forces; forced displacement and house demolitions; settler violence and the increasing construction of settlements; the detention of minors; and the further construction of the wall.<sup>66</sup> Women face harassment, assaults and shootings by settlers. The demolition of homes entails the loss of Palestinian families' main economic asset, which forces women to seek work, possibly straining familial relations. The loss of a home is also detrimental to the psychological health and physical security of women.<sup>67</sup> Families are split apart, and women are frequently unable to access basic services due to the lack of mobility and the restricted movement of people and goods. While the political transition in Tunisia, conflict in Yemen, occupation in the State of Palestine, and the refugee crisis in Jordan are taking place in the present, it is important to remember that these situations will have far-reaching consequences, reverberating well into the future, particularly for girls and women.

## B. Austerity measures

An analysis of 284 International Monetary Fund country reports across the Middle East and North Africa region indicated a wide range of austerity measures implemented in eight Arab States,<sup>68</sup> as illustrated in table 3. It serves as an indication that the fiscal space for service delivery and social protection is shrinking, thereby reducing the benefits of those who need it the most. Such austerity measures limit the resources available for State institutions to respond to their functions.

On occasion, such measures result in the abolition of some State institutions. In Iraq, for instance, four ministries were abolished in 2015, including the Ministry of Women's Affairs, while another eight ministries were merged.<sup>69</sup> This was attributed to the limited fiscal space associated with the military operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and the collapse of oil prices in 2014. Although Iraq is gradually recovering from its deep economic strains of the past three years, it continues to reform its public finances to create the needed fiscal space to finance economic recovery plans.<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, the uprising in Tunisia strained productivity and growth in the country with the economy contracting 1.8 per cent in 2011,<sup>71</sup> with the industrial production and tourism sectors contracting the most. Furthermore, the conflict in neighbouring Libya is estimated to have cost Tunisia a 2 per cent loss in its GDP between the years 2011 and 2015, including a welfare cost of \$880 million per year during that period.<sup>72</sup> This has, in turn, affected the fiscal space available for the Tunisian Government, resources available for service delivery and the overall socioeconomic ecosystem.

**Table 3.** Austerity measures adopted in select Arab States between September 2012 and February 2015

Country	Subsidy reduction	Wage bill cuts/caps	Safety net targeting	Pension reform	Labour reform	Health reform	Consumption tax increases	Privatisation
Algeria	•	•			•		•	
Egypt	•	•			•		•	
Iran	•		•		•		•	•
Jordan	•	•	•	•	•		•	
Lebanon	•		•	•		•	•	
Morocco	•	•		•	•		•	
Tunisia	•	•	•	•	•			
Yemen	•	•						
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>

**Table 4.** The National Women's Machinery in Tunisia, 2011-2018

Cabinet date	NWM
4 Jan 2011	Ministry of Women, Family, Children and the Elderly
17 Jan 2011 – 06 Mar 2011	Ministry of Women and Family
7 Mar 2011 – 23 Dec 2011	Ministry of Women's Affairs
24 Dec 2011 – 12 Mar 2013	Ministry of Women and Family
13 Mar 2013 – 28 Jan 2014	Ministry of Women and Family
29 Jan 2014 – 5 Feb 2015	Ministry of Youth, Sports, Women, and Family
6 Feb 2015 – 26 Aug 2016	Ministry of Women, Family, and Children
27 Aug 2016 – current	Ministry of Women, Family, Children and the Elderly

Source: Compiled by ESCWA from Tunisia, Official Printing Office, 2019; and Tunisia, Presidency of the Government Portal, 2019.

Against this background, the transitional government in Tunisia had to identify areas where it could reduce public expenditures and turned to restructuring government entities, including returning the portfolio of family affairs to the Ministry of Women and, for a brief period,

merging the Ministry for Women and Family Affairs with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, as table 4 details.

Austerity measures are also coping mechanisms for Arab States with other challenges.

For instance, Jordan had to enact several public expenditure realignments to address the impact of climate change on the agriculture sector, effectively diverting resources from other areas. Indeed, climate change-induced volatility has caused wheat productivity per hectare to decrease by 38 per cent between 2010 and 2014,<sup>73</sup> while tomato production decreased by 41 per cent between 2013 and 2016.<sup>74</sup> This affected local incomes across the agriculture value chain, revenues from agricultural exports, and overall food security.

### C. Public perceptions

The generalized perception that an institution's presence, actions, and contributions to society are accepted and constructive is key to maintaining and strengthening its resilience. Such perceptions are central for popular cooperation with such institutions and positive engagement. In the case of Tunisia, visible efforts were exerted to address popular demands and showcase genuine attempts to rectify grievances. For instance, the Truth and Dignity Commission (*L'Instance Vérité et Dignité*) was established on 1 June 2014. The aim of the Commission was to ensure a space for victims and survivors of gross human rights violations committed between 1955 and December 2013 to access justice. It registered nearly 65,000 claims by victims, almost a quarter of whom were women. It also conducted 49,000 individual hearings and 14 public hearings. During 2018, it referred the first 10 cases to the Specialized Criminal Chamber. After nearly five years, the Commission issued its final report in March 2019.

Likewise, the establishment of the Peer Council for Equality and Equal Opportunities in May 2016 was received positively by stakeholders and constituencies. This Council is an independent

institution tasked with introducing a gender-based approach to planning, programming, evaluation and budgeting to eliminate all forms of discrimination between women and men. The Council is chaired by the Head of Government, and its deputy is the Minister for Women, Family, Children and the Elderly. It is formed of representatives from several ministries, other relevant state institutions and civil society. The council adopted a national action plan (NAP) for mainstreaming and institutionalizing gender in June 2018 and focuses on: creating a system of accountability for VAW by 2020; increasing the participation of women in political and public bodies at the central and local levels; creating policies and plans for the economic empowerment of women; adopting gender-sensitive public policies, plans and budgets by 2020; and carrying out gender mainstreaming awareness-raising campaigns.

Other parallel efforts include the establishment of gender units in relevant ministries. As of October 2018, such units were established in the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Social Affairs, with plans to roll out such units in the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Education, among others. Tunisia's National Action Plan on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in May 2018, was developed through a consultative process involving the Ministry for Women, Family, Children and the Elderly, civil society, United Nations agencies and international donors.

In the State of Palestine, the Cabinet of Ministers established the High National Committee for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325, headed by the Ministry for Women's Affairs. Its membership includes a wide range of ministries, State institutions and CSOs. This Committee serves as a

collaborative and participatory mechanism for dialogue and the joint development of the NAP on WPS, among various government agencies and civil society partners. Upon its endorsement in 2016, the NAP included particular emphasis on the protection of women and girls from the impacts of the Israeli occupation and ensuring accountability for violations stemming from the occupation. This resonated among several civil society actors because there is a perception that the WPS agenda does not appropriately address instances of occupation. Furthermore, the State of Palestine ratified CEDAW without reservations and amended the Palestinian Elections Law to secure a 20 per cent quota representation in local councils and the Legislative Council.

This chapter has discussed the changing operating context across the region and how

these changes affect the abilities of national institutions, including NWMs, in delivering on their mandates. These changes are often cascading and driven by long-term structural factors, categorized under the preceding discussion as relating to political fragility, austerity and access to resources, as well as popular perception and engagement with stakeholders. Regardless of the extent that these changes affect the institutions, there are some tools and strategies that these institutions can utilize to maintain their relevance, identify new and revisited methods, and work with and through its partners and constituencies to maintain previous gains, mitigate the consequences of these changes to continue working to advance women's rights and gender equality. These tools and strategies are the founding premise behind the forthcoming resilience discussion in the next chapter.

### **3. Characteristics that can Build Resilient National Women's Machineries**

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### 3. Characteristics that can Build Resilient National Women's Machineries

Within the broader framework of human rights, the promotion of gender equality has unique challenges, sensitivities and potential for backlash in any context. National Women's Machineries, as they advocate for greater gender equality and the empowerment of women, are engaged in work that is by its nature, innovative, transformative and, above all, challenging. This work becomes even more difficult in contexts impacted by conflict, occupation and formal political transition. The expertise and role of NWMs is needed in these specific situations to assist the government in prioritizing gender concerns, ensuring gender-mainstreaming through its work, including strategic planning and budgeting within a context of very limited budgets and other resources. Therefore, NWMs need to be able to maintain internal strength while responding to these difficult contexts. However, it is also important to note that NWMs should not bear the onus of responding to such challenging and dynamic conditions alone; indeed, governments, political leaders, donors, intergovernmental organizations, civil society and other actors must also respond accordingly.

National Women's Machineries are often the main catalyst for gender equality at the State level. Their role extends to influencing decisions, strategies, plans, policies, budgetary allocations and to mainstreaming other relevant decisions on gender equality with the government.

A resilient NWM builds the trust of government authorities through its ability to communicate and reflect the experiences of women and girls on the ground. Collaborating with State structures to prepare competent and effective implementation of laws and policies to promote women's human rights may entail reporting annually at United Nations treaty bodies, such as the Human Rights Council or the CEDAW Committee, on the government's actions to promote women's human rights or help governments to prepare gender-competent budgets. Furthermore, NWMs can ensure that local women leaders are consulted on government strategies, plan, and policies to ensure they reflect the experiences of women and girls on the ground.

To achieve this, NWMs must remain agile regardless of their context and resources. In *The Resilience Dividend* (2014), Judith Rodin presents a framework composed of five characteristics that can be developed, to a greater or lesser degree, by any individual, community or organization to build resilience. Based on a study of public authorities, institutions and businesses responding to diverse pressures, such as natural disasters, the breakdown of public utilities and climate change, characteristics were assessed for institutional resilience and the five characteristics deemed most important for resilient entities were: awareness, diversity, integration, self-regulation and adaption.<sup>75</sup>

These characteristics are mutually reinforcing as they jointly enhance the capacity of an entity to fulfil its goals, engage flexibly with the external environment and maintain the internal capacity to be productive. Moreover, these characteristics are complementary and interrelated; resilience is enhanced when all five are present. Each aspect of resilience can be developed independently, but they must function concurrently to obtain the maximum impact.

This chapter seeks to examine whether NWMs in the Arab region have applied any of these five characteristics of resilience and whether such application contributed to ensuring their continued effective operation and the ability to conduct institutional work during difficult conditions.<sup>76</sup> It documents some of the ways in which NWMs from the region have navigated challenging contexts, demonstrating their use of resilient characteristics. The chapter is based on data gathered through interviews with representatives of NWMs and other entities that collaborate NWMs to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. That chapter also seeks to understand the intersection with the larger framework of strong NWMs as proposed by Rai (2003) and adopted by the United Nations.

## A. Awareness

Situational awareness is an essential aspect of resilience and requires that institutions

develop systems for information gathering to assess strengths and assets, liabilities and vulnerabilities, threats and risks, to ensure consistent work, as well as ensure a positive impact on beneficiaries and/or constituents. Ensuring a situational awareness can entail regular meetings with constituents, partners and/or government officials or developing some type of monitoring and/or assessment system. It also means that NWMs should maintain their ability to respond to all issues of concern to women and girls especially in times of conflict, occupation or formal political transition. Admittedly, it is not always easy to develop situational awareness, particularly when a disruption is sudden, very severe, long-lasting or widespread. This is also true when conditions continue to change rapidly so that reliable information is not accessible and reliable feedback loops are cut off, meaning that awareness must be cultivated over time to ensure its application both in times of stability and disruption.

### **AWARE**

*The entity has knowledge of its strengths and assets, liabilities and vulnerabilities, and the threats and risks it faces. Being aware includes situational awareness, i.e. the ability and willingness to constantly assess, take in new information, and adjust understanding in real time.*

Source: Rodin, Judith (2014). *The Resilience Dividend: Being Strong in a World Where Things Go Wrong*. New York: Public Affairs.

Awareness can also derive from mindfulness and the ability to be open-minded and receptive to change. This means that the institution takes pains to see situations as they are, rather than formulate a view based on preconceived assumptions, preferences or recent history.<sup>77</sup>

Finally, to ensure the community's enhanced awareness, institutions are invited to focus on processes as well as on outcomes. This may not always be possible given the need to quickly

implement and be accountable, particularly in conflict-affected or humanitarian contexts. However, with a focus on processes, the institution can further refine their work and response, which will not only improve deliverables, but will increase overall responsiveness to the real needs of women and girls.

For example, the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) embarked on developing its first NAP for the implementation of the WPS agenda and its revision of the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women through a consultative and participatory process that allowed for meetings with women in the different parts of Jordan. The process allowed the incorporation of the particular needs of women and girls in the Jordanian National Action Plan (JONAP) for advancing the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325), aligning its objectives with the situational needs and building on an in-depth understanding of the context.

Ultimately, an institution's self-awareness translates to knowledge of its abilities and limitations within the context in which it functions. When an institution is aware, it is more able to understand situations as they are, exercise foresight, revisit assumptions and ideally respond more quickly and appropriately to change. This is evidenced by JNCW's role as a commission rather than a ministry, which demonstrates its astute awareness of its abilities and the need to maintain its linkage and unified work agenda with civil society. The JNCW has chosen to continue functioning as a commission and to deflect attempts to convert it to a ministry. Discussions with representatives from JNCW acknowledged that while aspiring to a

ministry may be desirable in other contexts, this is not the case in Jordan where the Commission seeks to maintain its independence from the Government. Attesting to the power of partnering with civil society, particularly women's organizations, there is the belief within the JNCW that if the Commission becomes a ministry, civil society will view it as an executive arm implementing the Government's agenda rather than as an ally and advocate to the Government. In this vein, the JNCW also believes that it should not compete with civil society in work or for funding. In addition to civil society, the JNCW also has several partnerships with United Nations agencies, NWMs from various parts of the world and with donors. Its relationship with UN Women is fundamental for ensuring the strategic positioning of gender equality issues in Jordan.

In contrast, there is the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), which was created by a decree in 2003 and mandated to ensure gender mainstreaming in the work of the Government and the services it delivers, as well as provide capacity-building and foster coordination on gender-related work amongst governmental bodies and institutions. It has managed to do so not just under occupation, but also amid an ever-changing political climate and under threat of limited funding throughout the Government. Notably, while the Ministry is responsible for several frameworks and policies to address VAW, the situation of women with disabilities, women's economic empowerment, women's political representation and the implementation of the WPS agenda,<sup>78</sup> it does not provide direct services to Palestinian women and girls. The reason for not engaging with direct services relates to an internal study carried out by MoWA that concluded that various direct services are provided by other ministries, such as the Ministry of Social

Development and the Ministry of Health, in addition to civil society, and hence MoWA would be in a better position to capitalize on these efforts and not to duplicate services or compete with others. Thus, MoWA positioned itself with the primary focus on developing policies and strategies that build on other services.

These two examples highlight how each institution – the JNCW and MoWA – acknowledged their limitations, but also their strengths and assets in their specific contexts. The JNCW has aimed to keep its commission status to ensure a level of independence from the Government as well as maintain strong relations with civil society. In the case of MoWA, it has assessed its ability to provide direct services and acknowledged that others are in a better position for providing such services, so it chose to serve as a partner to ensure that such services are empowering and gender sensitive. In both instances, each institution has exhibited awareness of its mandate and its abilities and the landscape in which it operates, allowing them to maximize their work, particularly when underresourced or enduring instability.

## B. Diversity

Diversity means that an institution does not rely completely on any one element for critical function; thus, critical or core components or activities can be replaced by others, whether

they are based at the same institution or with partners. This should entail cultivating different sources of capacity, internally and externally. One example is ensuring alternative backup elements (akin to having a backup generator), including several alternatives or backups to ensure flexibility in several different scenarios, so it can call upon reserves during a disruption or switch over to an alternative functioning mode. The result is an institution that can withstand stress or even continue functioning during a crisis or a period of instability. According to Rodin, diversity can manifest in the form of hard elements, such as infrastructure and systems, and soft elements, such as people and ideas.

Diversity also entails the action of diversifying – that is, moving away from a monoculture. As the examples below reveal, different NWMs have sought involvement in various governmental and civil society activities. In doing so, they seek to expand their scope and influence, while also ensuring that some institution is working

on a gender-sensitive approach at the local and national levels. The following section provides examples from Jordan, Tunisia and Yemen, highlighting how each NWM has diversified its partnerships to ensure addressing the broadest number of concerns impacting women and girls.

In Jordan, the JNCW engages with a variety of stakeholders to ensure that its voice is heard at different levels. It builds alliances with civil society and actively represents gender concerns

### **DIVERSE**

*The entity has different sources of capacity, so it can successfully operate even when elements of that capacity are challenged: there are redundant elements or assets. The entity possesses or can draw upon a range of capabilities, ideas, information sources, technical elements, people, or groups.*

Source: Rodin, Judith (2014). *The Resilience Dividend: Being Strong in a World Where Things Go Wrong*. New York: Public Affairs.

in interministerial committees and fora. The JNCW became a member of the Interministerial Committee for Women, headed by the Minister of Social Development, engaging in its discussions and utilizing it as a channel through which to present some of its initiatives. In this way it seeks the support of the Committee which, in turn, presents agreed upon actions to the Cabinet for adoption. The JNCW participates in various initiatives of the Government to ensure gender mainstreaming including the development of the financial policy, the national plan for general statistics, and the High Committee for Sustainable Development. The JNCW also leads the Interministerial Gender Equality Taskforce, a cross-sectoral body that includes all line ministries as well as representatives from civil society, which is tasked with reviewing and updating the strategy for women. The links with various State bodies ensures that gender mainstreaming continues, regardless of political changes within government, and illustrates the importance of building institutional structures.

At the beginning of the conflict in Yemen, the former National Women's Committee took the lead in working on an agenda for women's advancement and became the official NWM. The National Women's Committee in Yemen worked closely to build the capacity of and coordinate the national work on the advancement of women with women's departments in different service ministries. However, due to the conflict, the Committee ceased operating in 2015. Furthermore, except for the Department of Women and Children at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, the role of women's departments within various ministries was also weakened with the escalating conflict and closures of central Governmental offices. The Department of Women and Children at the central level in Aden

and at the governorate level in areas under the control of the Government continued to provide humanitarian and social services to women constituents and carried on the work of the National Women's Committee. The effect of this was seen at the governorate level where the Department provides services for women.

In Tunisia, the Women's Department in the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and the Elderly was re-established in December 2011, after the uprising. This was a significant step given the role that activists and women's movements had in the initial protests and transitional phase. Within the Ministry, the Women's Department is mandated to mainstream gender equality; evaluate and propose gender-sensitive legislation; adopt early warning systems while monitoring the situation of women; and develop mechanisms, policies and programmes for the empowerment of women. The Department functions in the context of several other gender mechanisms and strategies in Tunisia, including a special Committee on Women and Development that contributes to the elaboration of development strategies, national strategies to promote women's situation in Tunisia and the special national programme to promote gender equality. The Ministry does this work through the Peer Council for Equality and Equal Opportunities, which has been active since March 2017. This Council is tasked with introducing a gender-based approach to planning, programming, evaluation and budgeting to eliminate all forms of discrimination between women and men. The Council is chaired by the Head of Government and its deputy is the Minister of Women, Family, Children and the Elderly. It comprises representatives of several ministries, other relevant state institutions, and civil society; the Ministry acts as its Secretariat. This highlights

how the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and the Elderly has diversified its portfolio to ensure its impact across a spectrum of initiatives, but also to ensure that it has the support of other relevant entities in government.

### C. Integrated

Integration ensures that elements of a system are well coordinated and harmonized not only within the institution, but with other entities functioning in the context, particularly women's rights activists and CSOs. In companionship with diversity, integration seeks to ensure the use of diverse actors. While diversity may bring disparate ideas/options/alternatives, integration means to engage proactively with different actors to analyse and explain these variables and present a new working mechanisms and solutions. Therefore, many NWMs reach out to and work closely with other gender mechanisms; national human rights institutions; CSOs; community leaders, including women leaders; academics and research centres; political parties; trade unions; the media; the private sector; as well as regional and international organizations to ensure that a response is appropriate and multifaceted.

Jordan utilized an integrated approach to repeal article 308 of the Jordanian penal code (the so-called "marry your rapist" law). Repealing article 308 was a prominent campaign that involved

the JNCW, CSOs, the media and others, and was carried out at the grassroots level. Initially, there were very few members of Parliament who gave their guaranteed support to repealing the article. However, this changed with the campaign. More support was gained after the JNCW and CSOs hosted debates on the topic.

Additionally, the Royal Court was in favour of repealing the provision, a position that was eventually adopted by the government.

One of the important outcomes of this campaign was the strengthened relationship between the JNCW and CSOs. The JNCW acknowledges that the momentum for change is based on an accumulation of several years of work and partnership between CSOs and the JNCW. Coordination with CSOs also allows the JNCW to benefit from efforts and expertise by these organizations. To emphasize the collective nature of the efforts, slogans, letters, and billboards did not carry the logo of any specific group or organization. This resulted in buy-in from many

groups and organizations at different levels, which increased the legitimacy of the demands of the campaign. Notably, the campaign also served to build momentum in the region: following the campaign, both Lebanon and Tunisia abolished their own versions of the "marry your rapist" laws.

The Palestinian MoWA has worked with the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Justice on the draft Family Protection from

#### **INTEGRATED**

*The entity has coordination of functions and actions across systems, including the ability to bring together disparate ideas and elements, work collaboratively across elements, develop cohesive solutions and coordinate actions. Information is shared, and communication is transparent.*

Source: Rodin, Judith (2014). *The Resilience Dividend: Being Strong in a World Where Things Go Wrong*. New York: Public Affairs.

Violence Law, which was prepared with the participation of non-governmental women's and human rights organizations. The Ministry of Social Development, which runs shelters for women victims of violence and provides services to women and girls with disabilities and to older women, also benefited from discussions raised during MoWA's consultation. Furthermore, a National Observatory on VAW, which collates data and information provided by the Government and civil society, was established and is managed by the Ministry.

As for the WPS agenda, the National Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 for the State of Palestine (2017-2019)<sup>79</sup> was developed through a coordinated and consultative process, led by MoWA and supported by United Nations agencies and the European Union; this was done after extensive advocacy by the Palestinian Women's Coalition on Security Council resolution 1325. The Coalition is comprised of a range of civil society organizations, including women's rights organizations from the West Bank and Gaza, and functions under the leadership of the General Union of Palestinian Women. In 2015, the Palestinian Cabinet instructed Government ministries and other institutions to include WPS in their plans and to allocate funding. This was based on a policy of gender-responsive budgeting adopted by the government in 2013, due to the efforts of MoWA and several CSOs.

In Tunisia, the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and the Elderly works closely with other ministries, including the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Youth, and the Ministry of Education, among others. The Ministry has also created gender units in relevant ministries; as of October 2018, implementation began in the Ministry of

Defence and Ministry of Social Affairs. Outside of Government entities, there is collaboration with CSOs. For example, Organic Law no. 2017-58 on the Elimination of Violence against Women was proposed and prepared by the Ministry in coordination and partnership with national stakeholders, including civil society. Furthermore, the recently approved budget by the Parliament included a large emphasis on activities related to women. The budget allocation targets the Ministry for Women, Family, Children and the Elderly as well as other ministries that implement activities relating to women. This enhances the central role of the Ministry given that other ministries rely on its presence and expertise to implement the various activities.

Integration requires more than just partnership; it requires NWMs to ensure thorough and strategic collaboration with several diverse entities that are both governmental and non-governmental, national and international. This ensures that a diverse set of actors will provide checks and balances along the way so that implementation is effective and credible. Notably, it appears that combating VAW serves as common ground for NWMs and other entities to come together. While commendable, the scope of interventions must be expanded for NWMs to respond to the diverse needs of the government and women and girls.

## D. Self-regulating

Disruption is more easily managed when an institution is self-regulating. It does not guard against failure; rather, it ensures that there is no institutional implosion or meltdown when adversity strikes. As Rodin argues, a self-regulating system prevents disruptions from causing a multiplier effect when it suffers severe

dysfunction.<sup>80</sup> The best example of self-regulation entails the development of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that work is effective, and that successes and failures may be accurately captured to develop lessons learned. Regular evaluation of the work of NWMs is also necessary to enable NWMs to self-reflect and strengthen their resilience. Specifying benchmarks and indicators through project cycles is very important to measure progress. In that regard, the national statistics office may be an important partner to design such benchmarks and indicators and measure progress.

In other cases, due to conflict and/or political instability, institutions may have to reinvent themselves or develop temporary structures to pick up where the previous institution left off. Yemen has been involved in a multifaceted conflict since 2015, paralyzing several institutions, including the NWM. As the structures of the Government started to weaken, the role of the Women's Departments in the various ministries was greatly affected. Most of these departments were closed. However, the main ones located at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in Aden and at the governorate level in areas under the control of the Government, continued to function. As of October 2018, the Women's Departments at the Ministry of Human Rights, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Information are also functioning. An additionally devastating consequence of the conflict is the loss of archives, studies and data from these departments. An important body to

have emerged during the conflict in Yemen is the National Commission to Investigate Alleged Violations to Human Rights. As of December 2018, the Commission has issued five reports citing violations, and has carried out a gender analysis of the impact of the conflict on women. It also keeps a database of its documentation.

The information gathered is relevant for the work of Yemen as it engages with the WPS agenda; it serves as background analyses for the NAP and future strategies.

To properly function, NWMs must be fully funded. A lack of funding not only impacts NWMs in the Arab region, but also has historically impacted NWMs worldwide (including in stable contexts).<sup>81</sup> To build resilience, NWMs must have autonomy over their planning and priority setting, to ensure their capacity to respond to the needs of women and girls. Their mandates need to allow them to recruit and retain appropriate staff, including leadership; to organize their work according to the most important priorities and needs; and have control of

their internal budgeting and other processes to take effective action relating to staff well-being, safety and training. Indeed, while there are cases of NWMs relying on the impactful work of volunteers, this does not offer a sustainable path for the institution.

In Jordan, the JNCW has prioritized building an internal structure that reflects its priorities, as reflected in its three-year strategic plan that is fully budgeted. Seeking to institutionalize its work, the JNCW has worked to build

### **SELF-REGULATING**

*The entity can regulate itself in ways that enable it to deal with anomalous situations and disruptions without extreme malfunction or catastrophic collapse. Cascading disruptions do not result when the entity suffers a severe dysfunction; it can fail safely.*

Source: Rodin, Judith (2014). *The Resilience Dividend: Being Strong in a World Where Things Go Wrong*. New York: Public Affairs.



institutional capacities and relations with different actors. Financial resources are one of the main challenges facing the JNCW. In 2016, the Commission received a considerable funding increase from the Government, giving it more stability. However, the JNCW continues to need to seek external funds to ensure continuity. The fact that the JNCW can raise its own funding is very important as this enables it to implement its own plans according to priorities emerging from the situation in Jordan.

## E. Adaptive

The ability to respond effectively and flexibly according to changing circumstances – adaptability – is the final element of a resilient institution. Being adaptive means making improvements and transformations to counter a disruption or instability; it also implies the ability to change in advance of the disruption, or to avoid or mitigate the effect of the disruption. Adaptability is a broad concept and can be applied to all facets of work within an institution. Essentially, it is the accumulation and intersection of the previous four characteristics of resilience – Awareness, Diversity, Integration and Self-regulation. An adaptive institution can make use of the resources and abilities at hand and deliver as needed, even if that means it reinvents its work.

Different contexts require different adaptive responses. For example, the Palestinian UNSCR

1325 NAP for the period of 2017-2019 focuses on the protection of women and girls from the Israeli occupation, seeks to ensure accountability for violations by the Israeli occupation, aims to increase the participation of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution

at all levels and is presented in a clear logical frame that includes strategic goals, policies, interventions, activities, outcomes, explanation and responsibilities. However, the NAP does not include internal concerns and measures related to prevention and protection within Palestinian society. However, MoWA argues that there is no need for these as they are included under other strategies and NAPs, including the Palestinian General National Plan on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment for 2017-2022. At the same time, the NAP is being incorporated in to other plans, including those on VAW and political participation.

Being adaptive means that NWMs need to be aware of and prepared to address a variety of concerns at the legal and policy levels in an innovative way,

including women and girls' humanitarian needs; security for women and girls; acting on predatory economies that exploit women and girls while promoting economic and social rights for women; and transitional justice and reparation. Particular groups of women and girls – including female-headed households, former combatants and women and girls who were associated with armed groups, women with disabilities and adolescent girls, to name a

### ADAPTIVE

*The entity has the capacity to adjust to changing circumstances by developing new plans, taking new actions, or modifying behaviours. The entity is flexible: it has the ability to apply existing resources to new purposes or for one element to take on multiple roles. This includes having control over work plans, staffing, and budget.*

Source: Rodin, Judith (2014). *The Resilience Dividend: Being Strong in a World Where Things Go Wrong*. New York: Public Affairs.

few – also have particular needs which may not be immediately obvious but should fall under the rubric of the mandate of NWMs. Thus, it is imperative that NWMs are not only adaptive in terms of action/mandate, but also in terms of population served.

Resilience also comes from assessing, planning and, if necessary, providing immediate assistance, through assessing humanitarian needs of women and girls. This may include finding out the needs for shelter, sanitation, food and water and health services. With the right expertise and experience in humanitarian assistance, NWMs are more able to advocate to the government for mainstreaming gendered services, strategies and plans and develop needed policies so that such services are available, accessible, affordable and of good quality.

In Jordan, there are more than 1.4 million Syrian refugees though only 660,000 are registered as persons of concern with UNHCR.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, there are only three official refugee camps in the country, however most refugees live outside these camps in urban areas or in informal settlements. The JONAP (2018-2021) on Women, Peace and Security was developed to respond to the country's challenges, including the situation of refugee women, something not addressed by the National Strategy for Women (2013-2017).<sup>83</sup> The process began in 2010 with the establishment of the National Coalition to develop a National Strategy for advancing the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. However, with the uprisings in the region, the JNCW conducted a comprehensive review of the National Strategy and the National Coalition's mandate, to respond to conflicts in neighbouring countries and the spillover of refugees. The Commission then led an inclusive and participatory process that brought together over 60 representatives from the

security sector, the Government, CSOs, youth organizations, media and international organizations to aid in drafting the JONAP. A High-level Steering Committee was then formed by cabinet decree. National and local consultations resulted in the adoption of several priorities that served as the foundation for the JONAP. Notably, the JONAP has a dedicated pillar on preventing violent extremism.

Women are not a homogenous group and different contexts call for different measures to ensure equality. To ensure adaptability, NWMs and their regional offices need to be prepared to do targeted work that may vary between communities. This involves working in the field in the various localities, through establishing local offices, and ensuring that NWM staff can travel and develop a conducive working relation with local governments, local civil society, grassroots organizations and local communities. This connection to the community is vital to the resilience of NWMs – allowing them to not only to build expert knowledge of the situation across the country, of the realities and priorities on the ground, but also to solicit the support of the different communities they serve. This way of working will ensure that the NWM can promote effective policies, strategies and solutions that respond to reality in the places where decisions are made.

In Tunisia, to ensure that women have access to services in both urban and rural areas, the Ministry for Women, Family, Children and the Elderly has 24 regional offices that serve as mini-outposts of the Ministry (also known as Regional Delegate for Women, Family and Children). They each have a head for women's affairs. The delegations implement the programmes of the Ministry, while considering local realities. They initiate programmes to suit local needs, including specific actions on human

trafficking, or girl child labour and school drop-outs. They also oversee childcare centres and women's shelters. The Ministry also runs a hotline for reporting cases of violence against women, children and the elderly.

The examples highlight how NWMs in Jordan, Tunisia and Yemen continued to remain relevant amid diverse challenges and instability. In the case of Yemen, this meant altering the mandate of the Women's Department to ensure an appropriate response to the nation's

humanitarian crisis. In Jordan, which is experiencing spillover from the crisis in Syria, this resulted in developing a NAP on Security Council resolution 1325 that was consultative and inclusive – the JONAP addresses the needs not just of Jordanian women but also refugee women. Lastly, in Tunisia, the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and the Elderly has sought to localize its services through regional offices, responding to needs on the ground as opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach.



## 4. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations



## 4. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

This study comes as the major international women's rights frameworks of our time—the BPfA, CEDAW, the WPS agenda, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—all reach significant milestones. The convergence of these policies offers a powerful opportunity to guide States' approaches to the work and role of NWMs within the context of such frameworks, especially during periods of conflict and transition.

National Women's Machineries are important institutions within State structures that are mandated to ensure gender-mainstreaming across government. One can hardly imagine how a State might ensure that its laws, policies and programmes are gender-sensitive without a mandated and enabled specialized institution. Without these institutions, the State may struggle to ensure that it responds to the needs and demands of all of those living under its jurisdiction, including the specific needs of women and girls. The State may also struggle to ensure that gender equality is guaranteed, particularly in times of instability or disruption.

This study has focused on how conflict, occupation and transitions affect State institutions with a particular focus on NWMs. Institutions are normally established during the pre-conflict or a phase of relative stability. During periods of upheaval, institutions are under pressure to operate during shocks that challenge their normal functioning. Instability or disruption may cause the institution to change its focus or cease to exist. It is therefore

paramount that institutions, such as NWMs, are enabled to be resilient from the outset, to minimize risks and shocks due to conflict, occupation and transition.

Available experiences from NWMs in Jordan, the State of Palestine, Tunisia, and Yemen show how employing some elements of the five characteristics of resilience allowed these institutions to cope and continue to deliver on their mandates in challenging circumstances. The tactics employed by MoWA in the State of Palestine has allowed it to gain legitimacy through its linkages with CSOs, which have protected it from attempts to question its usefulness and the nature of its work as a non-service provider body. Establishing a strong reputation of authority and trustworthiness is particularly important under occupation, as local institutions are often delegitimized by the occupying force. This is especially important given the political divide within the Palestinian Government – despite this divide, MoWA continues to be viewed as a reliable actor and advocate for Palestinian women's rights.

The JNCW is a very good example of an NWM that is focusing on strengthening its capacities, linkages with the civil societies and enabling the Government to strengthen its gender mainstreaming obligations as essential mechanisms for delivering its mandate. The JNCW believes that building capacities and linkages will enable it to react to crisis, realizing that when an emerging situation arises, this serves as a form of resilience. Given the ever-

pressing strains of the Syrian refugee crisis on Jordan, JNCW's capacity development is highly strategic for strengthening its ability to respond to such shocks and to continue to deliver.

The case of Tunisia shows that NWMs' ability to nurture well-established linkages with various governmental organizations and other actors not only benefits the NWM, but also other ministries as well. Hence, the relationship becomes mutually supportive when responding to women's needs and the gender equality agenda. Given that many of the ministries have a budget exclusively for activities relating to women, their implementation of these set targets is dependent on the expertise of the Ministry of Women Affairs, Family, Children and the Elderly to achieve the advancement of women and girls. The connections developed between the Ministry and actors across the spectrum has facilitated broad support for and implementation of women's rights in Tunisia.

The case of Yemen shows that having the flexibility to change structure and to adapt to different circumstances enables an organization to effectively use existing spaces, tools and resources. Hence, when the role of the National Committee for Women was affected by the ongoing conflict in Sana'a, the Women and Children Department in the Ministry of Social Affairs took the lead and continued to effectively fulfil the mandate in partnership with all women's departments in the various ministries, which served to minimize the impact of the brutality of the conflict and its gender-specific impact.

The resilience of NWMs is dependent on their status, mandate, powers and roles, resources and capacities and linkages. To be resilient, NWMs also need to work with State authorities to make it clear that implementing a women's

human rights agenda is a requirement of international human rights law and a political priority, as well as a reflection of the fact that women and girls are half the population and the same proportion of Government attention and resourcing should follow their needs. A resilient NWM also builds trust in Government authorities, through its ability to communicate and reflect experiences of women and girls on the ground.<sup>84</sup> The previous chapter presented how some NWMs in the region have adopted coping mechanisms that fall under the resilience framework developed by Rodin. Although the choices made by NWMs to adopt a particular response to various challenges may have not been guided by the resilience framework discussed above, some of these mechanisms serve as creative ways and good practice to ensure that NWMs meet the challenges of conflict, occupation and/or formal political transition. Furthermore, and while the chapter also made clear that no NWM has employed all five characteristics of resilience simultaneously, tactics applied are in line with the Rodin framework, which ensured their resilience. Further, it is just as important that NWMs receive the necessary support from their respective governments, particularly in situations that require resilience. Political leaders must take women's issues and the gender mainstreaming efforts of NWMs seriously in order to ensure the empowerment of their citizens and ultimately the betterment of their States.

The analysis of institutional resilience of NWMs in challenging operating settings in the Arab region leads to policy recommendations. Most importantly, this study recommends that NWMs adopt a resilience framework that fits the Arab sociopolitical context. This framework should bring resilient elements into the various components of NWMs' functions and processes.



The suggested framework stems from the experiences that were presented in the discussion above and the good practices of NWMs' coping mechanisms and resilience elements and builds on both Rodin's framework and Rai's model of strong institutions. Such adaptation and adoption will allow NWMs to continue operating effectively and conduct their institutional work during difficult conditions and in harsh environments. Engaging with this framework further, particularly in times of stability, will ensure that NWMs are better able to withstand shocks and challenges. The features of this model are relevant to its mandate and structure; its reporting mechanisms; capacities and resources; linkages; and collaboration and coordination. These are explained further below.

**Mandate and Structure:** Governments should adopt a resilience-based model upon the establishment of a NWM by law with a clear mandate and authority to influence decision-making in relation to women's rights, gender equality, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment across the government; ensure that the mandate and work of different stakeholders do not overlap in relation to gender equality and women's empowerment; hold government institutions accountable in their response to NWMs' mandates according to each State's specific legal context; and make sure that NWMs' governance structures enable the participation and inclusion of civil society and women's human rights defenders and organizations representing diverse segments of society in decision-making processes.

**Reporting mechanisms:** Government institutions and NWMs should establish and enhance independent and gender-sensitive monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms of the institutional performance.

Governments should institutionalize gender mainstreaming in their planning and guarantee the generation of sex-disaggregated data. International and regional organizations should support efforts to build the capacity of NWMs based on international standards and best practices of monitoring and evaluation of performance and impact, in addition to setting benchmarks and indicators.

**Capacities and Resources:** Governments should allocate the required sustainable financial resources and budgets for NWMs for them to be able to fully implement their mandate. Additionally, they should ensure the transparent recruitment of staff based on competence, inclusion and commitment to gender equality. International and regional organizations should support in the provision of technical assistance and capacity building for NWMs' staff and members in pertinent areas of work, including enhancing their knowledge of relevant international norms and standards; and coordinate their support for gender equality and women's empowerment efforts to avoid duplication and overlap.

**Linkages:** Experiences from around the region have shown that gender equality may not feature highly on the political agenda during or post-conflict or during occupation. Thus, building preparedness and expertise on key gender-related practical concerns that arise pre-conflict, during, and post-conflict is imperative for NWMs, so that they can manage the emerging and long-term needs of women and girls. Such efforts should be based on established linkages and strong working relations with civil society. The development, adoption, resourcing and implementation of NAPs on WPS is one example of processes that NWMs could lead to establish a stronger partnership with civil society in addressing the needs of women and girls.

Similarly, international and regional organizations should provide support to NAP development processes on WPS and facilitate the exchange of resources.

**Collaboration and Coordination:** This would also entail that NWMs ensure that the voices and experiences of women on the ground are communicated to various authorities and acted upon, to build trust so that they can accompany women and girls in the long term through times of stability, conflict and/or occupation, and the post-conflict, peacebuilding and or political transition phase. In addition, establishing

linkages with community-based organizations and grassroots initiatives of leadership and service provision would allow for a better understanding and responsiveness to the needs of women and girls. Where appropriate, the NWM can advocate with central government to provide the appropriate support and scale up good practice. With such coordination and collaboration, NWMs would be positioned to create a new vision specific to their context while bringing the benefit of international standards and the previous experiences of other countries to help work with women and girls to develop their own local solutions.

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# Endnotes

## Introduction

1. Goetz, 2003, p. 69.
2. Beijing Platform for Action, para. 196.
3. United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 2005.
4. See, for example, CEDAW/C/LBN/CO/4-5, para. 24(a); CEDAW/C/IRQ/CO/4-6, para. 20.
5. E/ESCWA/ECW/2017/1.
6. Sjöstedt, 2015.
7. Rodin, 2014, p. 13.
8. In October 2000, United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) was drafted and adopted; subsequently, an additional eight resolutions were drafted to support and clarify the goals of 1325 – this is Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. In total, the nine resolutions of the WPS agenda seek to promote gender equality and strengthen women’s participation, protection and rights before, during and after conflict, and through post-conflict reconstruction. Security Council resolution 1325 affirms that peace and security efforts are more sustainable when women are equal partners in the prevention of violent conflict, the delivery of relief and recovery efforts and in the creation of lasting peace.
9. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals are a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations General Assembly to be achieved by 2030 that seek to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

## Chapter 1

10. Scott, 2008, p. 222.
11. E/ESCWA/ECRI/2017/4, p. 15.
12. Langeland, and others, 2016, p. 5.
13. Sjöstedt, 2015, p. 1.
14. Rodin, 2014, p. 3.
15. UNDP RBAS, 2002.
16. E/ESCWA/ECRI/2016/1; E/ESCWA/ECRI/2017/4.
17. Stokes, 2003.
18. Manjoo, 2005.
19. Goetz, 2003.
20. Kardam, 2002, p. 427.
21. Manjoo, 2005, p. 270.
22. A/CONF.116/28.Rev.1.
23. Byrne, and others, 1996, p. 5.
24. Kardam, 2002.
25. Manjoo, 2005, p. 270.
26. Byrne, and others, 1996, p. 5.
27. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.
28. Kardam and Acuner, 2003, p. 96.

29. Rai, 2003, pp. 25-26.
30. Rai, 2003, p. 26.
31. ESCWA, 2010.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. E/ESCWA/ECW/2017/4.
35. On 31 January 2019, the newly formed Lebanese Cabinet established the Ministry of State for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth, which replaced the Minister of State for Women's Affairs that had been previously established in December 2016.
36. E/ESCWA/ECW/2017/1.
37. ESCWA, 2010.
38. E/ESCWA/SDD/2015/2, p. 7.
39. Clause 3 of Law 30/2018 regarding the re-organization of the Higher Council for Women in Egypt.
40. Clause 1 of the Cabinet decree 106/2018 naming members of the National Action Plan's Drafting Committee.
41. Karam, 2018.
42. Dixon, and others, 2018.

## Chapter 2

43. E/ESCWA/EDID/2018/1, p. 23.
44. E/ESCWA/SDD/2017/Technical Paper.5, p. 10.
45. E/ESCWA/ECW/2011/3, p. 8.
46. Ibid, p. 11.
47. Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019.
48. UNICEF and ICRW, 2017.
49. World Economic Forum, 2018.
50. UNFPA, 2018, p. 1.
51. UNDP, 2019, p. 42.
52. UNFPA, 2018, p. 1.
53. ESCWA calculations based on UNFPA and the Yemeni Women's Union (2015) and S/2019/280.
54. UNFPA, 2018, p. 1.
55. UNHCR, 2018, p. 1.
56. E/ESCWA/EDID/2018/WP.5.
57. UN Women, 2018, p. 3.
58. Ibid, p. 15.
59. Ibid, p. 4.
60. The World Bank, 2013; E/ESCWA/OES/2015/WP.5; Regional Refugee and Resilience Framework, 2018.
61. E/CN.6/2015/5.
62. E/ESCWA/ECW/2016/Technical Paper.3, p. 12.
63. OCHA, 2018.
64. E/CN.6/2015/5.
65. OCHA, 2014.
66. UNRWA, 2018.
67. E/ESCWA/ECW/2016/Technical Paper.3, p. 8.
68. Ortiz, and others, 2015.
69. The Republic of Iraq, 2019.
70. The World Bank, 2018.

71. The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013.
72. E/ESCWA/EDID/2017/TECHNICAL PAPER.2, p. iii.
73. E/ESCWA/SPDP/2019/CP.3, p. 27. Data cited is for the Madaba governorate.
74. Ibid, p. 15. Data cited is for Al Mafraq governorate.

### Chapter 3

75. Rodin, 2014, p. 14.
76. The authors acknowledge that the five characteristics under discussion require a set of internal and external factors depending on the context. Also, included in this context is the extent to which the NWM is empowered to act. Despite these considerations, the five characteristics provide a guideline for NWMs to measure their resilience and build upon opportunities.
77. Rodin, 2014, p. 15.
78. E/ESCWA/ECW/2019/TP.2.
79. State of Palestine, 2017.
80. Rodin, 2014, p. 32.
81. UN Women, 2016.
82. UNHCR, 2019.
83. JNCW, 2018.

### Chapter 4

84. This is particularly key when dealing with issues of public safety and security: for example, engaging with the Ministry of the Interior, policing, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Defence (if the violence is perpetrated by armed forces); the Ministry of Education (ensuring safe schools and safe transport to school so that girls can continue their education); the Ministry of Justice (in relation to the situation of women in prisons, correctional and rehabilitation institutions); and the Ministry of Health (dealing with victims and cases of violence, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, etc.).