

**Female political participation
in the MENA region:
Scenarios 2027**



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Disclaimer:

The following report sheds light on the future of female political participation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. It does so, to analyze both opportunities and limitations of the recent turmoil for evolving female-political relations in the region.

The future scenarios presented in the report were drawn up using the scenario-building methodology. This process required a qualitative analysis of the challenges facing the region. The Diaspora community was utilized to present their interpretations of the changing social-political landscape. These were, in turn, critically analyzed and incorporated into 4 general scenarios, and 12 country specific mini-scenarios, to foster further discussion on how to promote female political inclusion.

Despite the lack of rigorous academic testing of theory, the scenarios spawned a practical guide on how to achieve this goal based on the policy recommendations of the expert panels. These recommendations are presented in the concluding chapter of this report.

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1 Executive Summary

On the 25th of April 2012, Aletta E-Quality (former E-Quality) organized an Expert Meeting entitled “Egyptians, Libyans and Tunisians in The Netherlands – United for Women’s Rights” focusing on female political participation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region within the framework of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. During this meeting, scenarios were used to stimulate a strategic dialogue between Diaspora and (non) governmental organizations and other partners about the future of the region.

The scenarios were developed over a two month period with support of the Pax Ludens Foundation. They are the outcome of a scenario-building workshop with Experts, thorough analysis and one-on-one interviews.

This publication is meant to further enhance the insight of policy makers, politicians, NGOs with projects in the Arab region or those who intend to start projects in the MENA region in the future, women organizations, advocates, students and other experts. In view of its mandate, Aletta E-Quality is keen on sharing the outcome of this scenario building process and the recommendations of the Expert Meeting held on April 25th 2012, with all relevant parties involved.



On one side, this project shows how you can activate migrant communities in a positive way and get them involved in processes of change in their countries of origin. It proves that it is possible to build on transnational identities and intrinsic knowledge of Diaspora populations in order to regroup and reassess available information and data for the benefit of policy making, also within the framework of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.

On the other side, it shows how Egyptians, Libyans and Tunisians perceive the future of the region and how they view the advancement of female political participation in the Arab world, one of the main objectives of the second Dutch National Action Plan on Resolution 1325 (NAP II). Aletta E-Quality is a partner of the NAP II. Our commitment within NAP II is to support Diaspora organizations with strategic tools, such as the scenario building methodology.

Developed along the axes of constitutional reform and institutional capacity, the scenarios indicate that although there is room for positive change enabling a significant number of women to access leadership positions, there is also a realistic chance of slipping back into societies that are worse off than before the Revolution, thus reducing the incredible momentum of the Arab Spring to a mere spark in the already tumultuous history of the region.

Interestingly, during the Expert Meeting it was concluded that in the process towards more political participation of women, financial empowerment should be considered a pre-condition to attain this goal. Some see the intention to increase political participation of women as another ambitious Western aspiration - that may be rightful and necessary - but really difficult to achieve in regions that may be facing social and political unrest in times to come and where a clearly defined political system will remain in developing mode without assurances about the eventual outcome.

In our estimation, there are clear indications that the window of opportunity to address crucial issues in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia is closing. Therefore, one of the most important policy conclusions at the end of the report is a general call to act now, before the opportunity definitely slips away. There are key issues to consider in order to be able to define a realistic set of objectives that will facilitate the road ahead. For instance, it is likely that including gender equality on the political agendas of all fractions is going to be challenge. Women in the region call for the constitutional imposition of quotas, but it remains to be seen whether the quota system is the best way to bring female leaders to the forefront of the public institutions.

Chapter two explains the working methodology applied to the scenario building exercise, while Chapter three provides an overview of each scenario for the MENA region and, more specifically, for Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia.¹ Chapter four describes the process of the Expert Meeting held on 25 April 2012 and lists the recommendations from the outcome of the meeting. Following that, Chapter five concludes this report with policy recommendations for organizations seeking to promote female political participation in the MENA region.

¹ The complete version of the scenarios have been included in Annex A. A list of acknowledgements can be found in Annex B.

2 The Methodology

As input for the expert meeting and to engage with the Diaspora organizations, the scenario-building methodology was used to build future scenarios about the region. Within each scenario specific attention was given to Libya, Tunisia and Egypt.

The scenarios were used for multiple purposes:

- Engage with relevant Diaspora organizations in the Netherlands
- Stimulate an interdisciplinary debate about the future of the region
- Advance the sharing of knowledge between Diaspora organizations and relevant (non-) governmental organizations

Each scenario describes a specific trajectory and end-state of women's political participation in the MENA region in 2027. They shed light on the regional influences and developments that led to each of these plausible end-states.

The scenarios – as presented in this report – were used as input for an expert meeting on female political participation, see chapter 5.

2.1 Elaboration scenario-building

The scenario-building methodology was chosen as it provides a structural process to engage with stakeholders in foresight. Using a set of workshop exercises, participants are challenged to elaborate on trends and uncertainties in order to develop scenarios. Scenarios are **fictional** stories about possible future end-states. The key word is **fictional** as they cannot be backed up by scientific evidence. They do, however, function as projections of what a particular case study, i.e. the MENA region, may evolve into. Scenarios seek to challenge, inspire and provoke the reader. In doing so, she or he may gain new insights and understanding of the forces that are currently at play within the region. These insights can be used for "*backcasting*" and the development of new strategies.

Timeline scenario development:

The scenarios were developed in between the 29th of March and the 25th of April 2012. The following activities took place:

Phase:	Activity:
1	Scenario-building workshop: during which a group of MENA experts set the parameters and drafted the 1 st version of the scenarios.
2	Revision scenarios: PxL further developed the scenarios, further elaborating content and creating consistency in writing style.
3	Consultation Diaspora: EQ and PxL use the further developed version of the scenarios for consultation with Diaspora organizations. An interview format was used.
4	Finalizing scenarios: With input from the Diaspora the 4 general scenarios were made country specific
5	Presentation scenarios: the scenarios were presented during the E-Quality Expert meeting (25 th of April, 2012)

Afterwards, they have been further developed with input from stakeholders and experts.

2.2 The workshop

The parameters and basic outline of the scenarios are based on the input of a group of MENA experts at a scenario-building workshop facilitated by PxL on March 29th, 2012.

During the workshop, participants first chose a timeline and outlined important actors, driving forces and uncertainties relevant to the issue at hand. After mapping these driving forces and uncertainties according to their level of impact and degree of future uncertainty, they chose two principal factors (with high uncertainty and high impact) as the 'axes' of their future projections about women's political participation in the MENA region. The workshop yielded the following parameters:

Scenario Parameters: Future of Women's Political Participation in the MENA Region	
Timeline	15 years (2012-2027)
Axes (important overriding drivers of future developments)	
X	Capacity of both formal and informal institutions to implement laws, policies and programs
Y	The extent to which constitutional reforms enabling the political participation of women are adopted

Institutional capacity



Constitutional reform



Participants used the established axes to predict what women's political participation in the region will look like in 2027, incorporating relevant regional, political, social and economic developments. A summary of the scenarios can be read in chapter 4.²

2.3 Consultation Diaspora

Upon completion of the first versions of the scenarios, interviews were conducted with various members of the Egyptian, Libyan and Tunisian Diasporas. These Diaspora members expanded on each of the regional scenarios by considering the implications on their respective countries of origin.³ During these interviews, participants examined and refined both the regional and national scenarios.⁴

The regional scenarios, complete with country-specific input from Diaspora consultations, were presented as the basis for discussion for the Expert Meeting "Egyptians, Libyans and Tunisians in the Netherlands – United for Women's Rights" held on April 25th, 2012.

² See annex A for a full overview of the scenarios

³ See annex B for a full list of contributors

⁴ See annex A for a full overview of the scenarios

3 Overview scenarios

Below the four scenarios are summarized. Attention is also briefly given to Libya, Egypt and Tunisia.

3.1 Scenario A: Powerful women in a peaceful region

In 2027, the region has shown a great deal of progress. Over the past 15 years, women in the region were able to increasingly take advantage of opportunities and succeeded in the economic and political spheres. The region-wide economy is booming.

MENA countries are well on their way to achieving equal rights for all regardless of gender, religion or ethnic affiliation. Women's political participation has become the norm; they constitute roughly 50% of parliaments. Throughout the region, female leaders have emerged in the private sector. The current CEO of Libya's largest oil company is a woman.

Although some fundamentalist groups continue to insist that women's rights should be restricted (especially in rural areas), MENA countries have new or amended constitutions to ensure that such disagreements are resolved. Women are protected by law from exclusion, violence and exploitation.

Successive governments throughout the region have focused on institution building. Great strides have been made in health care and education. Civil society plays an active healthy role and maintains good relations with counterparts overseas. They ensure that the checks and balances are simply in place.

Furthermore it's crucial to note that in this scenario rural communities tended to adapt at a slightly slower pace to the societal changes set about through constitutional reform, institution-building and economic growth.

3.1.1 Egypt, Libya and Tunisia

Libya, Egypt and Tunisia are all flourishing. Each country has become a blossoming democracy with effective institutions. Women's rights are upheld. This is partly due to the quota system in parliament and the insertion of specific clauses in the constitution to protect women from sexual violence, incest, slavery and other forms of exploitation.

For Egypt there were certain key factors that led to the positive outcome, these were:

- Decentralization of political decision-making and governance.
- Western NGO's effectively supporting Egyptian civil society at the grassroots level.
- Rural development through education, which negated radical sentiments.

For Libya, key factors were:

- Heavy involvement of European and Diaspora organizations in state reform.
- Sharing of oil wealth and wise investment
- Successful reconciliation and the healing of collective trauma.

For Tunisia the following factors played a big role:

- Technical assistance to democratic structure.
- Knowledge transfer to civil society.
- Economic growth in which local initiatives could be tied to the international market

Scenario A Powerful women in a peaceful region



Egypt Libya Tunisia



3.2 Scenario B: A tree that bears no fruit

In 2027 the MENA region is the ideal setting for gender equality on paper, but not in reality. This discrepancy is largely due to a lack of resources and funding necessary to implement changes made to national constitutions 10-15 years before.

Polarization, extremism, criminality, poverty, political instability and gender inequality in the region have increased instead of decreasing as new (and changes to old) constitutions intended.

Unfortunately, positively motivated efforts to reform countries in an equitable and sustainable way have left the majority of the population feeling resentful and disappointed about the legal/justice system. A profound sense of injustice, insecurity and despair prevails.

People feel betrayed and will not invest their trust in formal (national) institutions again anytime soon, preferring instead to depend on informal social and (extended) family structures as a safety net. Violence, including domestic violence, honor killings and sexual assault of women, is ubiquitous and formal/informal institutions offer women very few (if any) options for justice or reparations.

In the period 2012 to 2017, Civil Society lost its momentum. One Egyptian leader has been quoted as: "it seemed that all of civil society's energy went into planting the right tree, but failed to provide the water to allow the tree to bear fruit." Constitutional reforms did not receive the mandate from traditional elements within the countries. Successive governments failed to cooperate with one another. Economic stagnation and a lack of knowledge have resulted in a failure to mobilize key change agents like teachers, social workers, lawyers, judges and the police.

3.2.1 Egypt, Libya and Tunisia

Egypt:

In Egypt 2027 is a bleak reality. A political bargain between the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafists and the army has resulted in a lack of political inability to reach consensus upon institutionalizing women's constitutional rights. Fearing political fragmentation and societal unrest the central government has heavily restricted civil society. As a result, the needs of women are not addressed effectively. Although a token number of women have held political positions guaranteed by constitutional reforms, the Arab Spring's hope for full gender equality and female political inclusion has turned out to be a mirage. Lastly, Equal access to education has not been institutionalized, preventing women from becoming skilled laborers in the work force.

Libya:

For Libya it is a lack of experience in democratic governance which proved to be vital. Ineffective institutional arrangements leave women's rights unprotected. Civil society as well as the political leaderships is unable to stem the tide of corruption. This is partially because the international community insufficiently supported Libya in the early years. The temptation of wealth from oil revenues resulted in an entrenched patron-client system between the national government and the tribal leadership. Fortunately, this same relationship has also mitigated claims for radical Islamism. There are a few women who hold political office; yet they predominantly act out of self-interest and financial gain.

Tunisia:

In Tunisia successive governments have failed to be transparent and remain corrupt. Patronage and elitism seized the democratization process. This is partially because a failure of civil society. There is an absence of bottom-up initiatives. Overall with the international community there is a lack of local knowledge to guarantee effective support.

A tree that bears no fruit

Scenario B



Egypt

Libya

Tunisia



3.3 Scenario C: From grassroots to critical mass

In 2027 the situation in the MENA region still remains tense. Although women have gained a lot of ground in the informal/civil society sector and are more likely to receive satisfactory health care and education as a result, a lack of recognition of women and women's rights in national constitutions has left them excluded from formal government structures.

Throughout the region constitutional reforms have failed or stalled leaving very little room for women (or anyone but the conservative ruling elite) to substantially participate in the formal economic or political systems. In most places, women remain unprotected by law from sexual attacks, domestic violence or forms of exploitation by adequate legal or justice systems. Males are the dominant force in society and feel free to treat women as they please without the threat of punishment.

Political and economic structures and policies remain similar to what they were 15 years ago, despite calls for reform to favor democracy and grant women and minorities more rights. The social, judicial and governmental structures that existed fifteen years ago have prevailed against the Arab Spring's momentum toward change, but under the surface the strength of civil society and the progressive informal institutions it has built have grown to match that of many regimes in the region.

The tension is palpable: the power of these informal institutions is threatening to topple existing power structures and regimes are reacting accordingly by attempting to shut them down (in some instances with violence). The time is ripe for these powerful institutions to overtake formal government structures, but the risk of conflict with existing regimes is high.

3.3.1 Egypt, Libya and Tunisia

Egypt:

Uneven economic conditions throughout the region have driven Egyptian men to emigrate in pursuit of employment opportunities. Consequently, Egyptian women have assumed the role of head of household and increasingly take up economic and social responsibilities. Especially in rural areas women found a new sense of empowerment. Recognizing their new role they demanded guarantees of economic and political rights.

Frustrated with a democratic deficit for women in general, and realizing the difficult plight of their rural counterparts in particular, urban educated women created a movement to correct the imbalances. They sought help from foreign partners who were eager to help on the basis of local needs.

Libya:

In 2027, Libyan women are effectively ignored within formal economic and political government arrangements. Although, reformists elements are represented in the government the new political class has been mired in political infighting and conservatism. They are incapable to reach consensus on constitutional amendments in support of women's rights.

In response women brace themselves in a civil society that demands women inclusion. They are effectively supported by Diaspora organizations and NGOs. This is fuelled by the prolific spread of social media broadcasting an image of female empowerment.

Tunisia:

In 2027, Tunisian Women are not as heavily repressed as in some other MENA countries. However, they remain to a large extent excluded from the formal economic and political system. Tunisian political elites were unwilling to implement change and open up national governance to more women or civil society. In response, a plethora of Tunisian women's rights organizations have sprung from the barren democratic landscape. Supported by Western NGO's, working in partnership, they were able to effectively address local needs, thus enabling civil society to bypass national governance.

From grassroots to critical mass



3.4 Scenario D: A region on the brink of failure

Fifteen years after the Arab Spring, the situation in the MENA region is worse than before the revolutions started. The political participation of women is almost non-existent. Constitutional reforms have failed, and all of society is characterized by inequality and instability.

The ruling elite have shown a notorious lack of political will to implement change, much less provided a means to carry out and implement such reforms. Widespread exclusion of women is the norm in education, politics and the labor market, with males getting preferential treatment with regard to the limited number of jobs and resources available.

There is a situation of lawlessness, tension and violence that affects women in particular. Women often fall victim to the justice system. The judiciary is incapable to deal with domestic and/or sexual attack and honor killings.

Because of a dire economic situation, a massive 'brain drain' has taken place. Potential leaders have moved out of the region. Throughout the region fundamentalist elements have triumphed. Societies are more traditional than ever.

3.4.1 Egypt, Libya and Tunisia

Egypt:

Egypt is in a stranglehold of fundamentalist forces. The government does not have the institutional framework to protect women's rights nor are these guaranteed in a constitution. Women are fully subjugated to men without legal recourse.

Egypt's political impasse has resulted in prolonged periods of complete and total turmoil. Foreign interference has enflamed internal religious and political strife, eventually enveloping all segments of society. A region-wide economical malaise plunged Egypt into a vicious cycle of deprivation and radicalism, eventually resulting in a prolonged period of civil war. In 2023 a military coup ended this. However, their effective rule only extends to Cairo and the shores of the Suez Canal. Governance throughout the rest of the country is fragmented.

Libya:

Much like Egypt, Libya has also descended into anarchy. Tribal relations have deteriorated. In absence of rule of law and governance, the country is fragmented along sectarian lines. This is exacerbated by the lure of oil wealth and readily available arms. Porous and unsecured borders have led to an influx of mercenaries.

Consequently, a power vacuum has unfolded in Libya. For women this has meant that their plight has gone unheard. They have fallen victim to impunity, religious conservatism and gender-based violence. Widespread reports of mass rape and human rights abuses cite frequent occurrence of such travesties. The instigators of the 2011 revolution have fled and civil society has collapsed.

Tunisia:

Since the fall of Ben Ali, there has been a lack of political reform in Tunisia. This is mainly due to polarization between secularists and religious conservatives. National and international economic malaise has worsened the position of women were not able to take advantage of limited job opportunities. Investors and tourists have fled the country. Tunisia's intellectual elite has followed suit.

This brain drain provided an opportunity for fundamentalists to pervade society. These are financially and ideologically steered by radicals from more prosperous Islamist countries. Constitutional reforms regarding women's rights have been rescinded resulting in a full exclusion of women from the political and economic realms of society.

A region on the brink of failure



Egypt **Libya** **Tunisia**



4 Outcomes Expert Meeting 25 April 2012

The Expert Meeting “Egyptians, Libyans and Tunisians in The Netherlands, United for Women’s Rights” was one of the highlights of a process that started in August 2011. With the intensity of the Arab Spring in the background, and increasing concerns from women in the region about their participation in the reconstruction and upcoming democratization processes, Aletta E-Quality (former E-Quality) took the initiative of bringing together a group of concerned and highly motivated Egyptians, Libyans and Tunisians living in The Netherlands. Due to their daily contact with their countries of origin and frequent travels back home they were special witnesses of the recent changes but they were also in a unique position to raise the issue of the political participation of women because of their connections in both the West and within the region.



4.1 Gaining Support to Build the Scenarios

As explained in previous chapters, Aletta E-Quality facilitated a number of encounters in which this group of Egyptians, Libyans and Tunisians received information about the workings of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, on the role of women in conflict resolution, reconstruction and sustainable peace. Options were exchanged to start working on scenarios about the political participation of women in the region and in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia.

4.2 The Involvement of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs was involved in an early stage and supported the idea of building scenarios based on the experience and intrinsic knowledge of Egyptians, Libyans and Tunisians living in The Netherlands. During the intense months of preparation, Minister Rosenthal visited the (former) E-Quality head offices in The Hague on the occasion of International Women’s Day on March 7th 2012. During his visit he stressed the commitment of the Dutch Government to increase the participation of women in key leadership positions in the region within the framework of Security Council Resolution 1325.



4.3 Using scenarios during the expert meeting

Subsequently, Pax Ludens and Aletta E-Quality started working on the scenarios on March 29th. A number of participants at the Expert Meeting participated at the scenario building sessions. Some were involved in the design of the regional scenarios; others were involved in the design of the country specific scenarios. The scenarios are extensively detailed elsewhere in this report but it may be relevant to note here that most participants coincided in their ideas concerning the direction into which a specific country was heading.

Most Tunisians believed that Tunisia was heading towards scenario A. They believed that the basis for this future development had been established in times of Bourghiba, who was a staunch supporter of the education for women. Tunisians were certain that despite a tendency towards conservative Islam, the already existing numbers of highly educated women and a relatively strong civil society movement would make it easier for women to eventually access political leadership positions in the country.



The Egyptians and the Libyan participants actually amplified the possible use of the scenarios through the points of view they expressed. They believed that within one specific scenario you could have different grades. Both Egyptians and Libyans believed that their countries were heading towards scenario C. However, Egyptians believed that civil society movements would gain ground, but that the power balance between the strong military and more conservative Islamic movements would hinder the implementation of policies that would stimulate the political participation of women in significant numbers. Libyans believed that the traditional views on the role of women in their societies were infinitely more conservative than in Egypt. Thus, despite a booming civil society movement, it was

likely to take generations in order to change the perception of Libyans on the role women, thus allowing acceptance of widespread female political leadership.

It is with these thoughts in the back of their minds, that participants entered the discussions and made a number of recommendations to advance political participation of women in their countries of origin.

4.4 Recommendations

A strategic focus was given to three main issues during the expert meeting. These provided an overarching framework for the discussion of the scenarios and exploration of policy recommendations. In some instances, sub-topics that stem from these issues were considered and discussed. They are grouped under the relevant issue.

Recommendations were made on the following issues:

1. The role that Egyptians, Libyans and Tunisians in the Netherlands could play in order to get more women involved in the ongoing processes of social change in their countries of origin, especially where it concerns political participation of women.
2. The way in which Western organizations could contribute to the process of political awakening and political participation of women in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia.
3. The strategies that could be applied to ensure a larger constituency of male advocates for the cause of political participation of women in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia.

During the expert meeting, participants pointed out that there are significant differences between the three countries but also many similarities. For the sake of clarity, the recommendations have been formulated in a way that they apply to all three countries unless mentioned differently.

4.4.1 Recommendations for Netherlands-based Egyptians, Libyans and Tunisians

Egyptians, Libyans and Tunisians in the Netherlands could take on a vital role to get more women involved in the ongoing processes of social change in their countries of origin, especially where it concerns political participation of women.

Topic concerning the involvement of migrant organizations in The Netherlands:

1. **Managing distrust** – Despite the unique position of Egyptians, Libyans and Tunisians in The Netherlands, they are sometimes also viewed as outsiders and foreigners in their countries of origin. They may have limited rights as far as political participation is concerned.
2. **Bridge function** – Nevertheless, they usually understand both Western and local sensitivities and therefore, they can act as mediators and put Western donor organizations in contact with local partners and experts (outside the circle of “usual suspects”).
3. **Not only a money sending machine** – Policymakers often speak of migrant organizations in terms of remittances. Yet, Egyptians, Libyans and Tunisians in the Netherlands would also like to be involved in consultation rounds between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and civil society partners. At present there seems to be a (psychological) threshold to reach out to the Dutch government and larger Dutch NGOs and request to be included in policy making.
4. **Lack of funding for projects** – To some participants there seems to be a lack of funding for projects originating from migrant organizations. This could become a problem, especially if these organizations are not able to raise funds elsewhere. It hampers their quest for visibility and to contribute to the development in their countries of origin.
5. **Politics can be a tricky** – The lack of institutional guarantees and respect for human rights, especially in some countries of the Arab region, may deter some organizations from getting involved in projects with a marked political edge such as the political participation of women. Individual members could face repercussions. Participants also voiced concerns at the possibility of being discredited as Western spies or advocates of the Christian ideology in their countries of origin.

6. **Synergy** – Participants launched the idea to build on the efforts of the past few months and create a joint platform of Arabic migrant organizations within the framework of Resolution 1325 in order to form a united front that can attend to the information needs of Dutch partner organizations and the Dutch government on relevant issues.
7. **Other geo-political factors** – Participants point out that the broad range of challenges to be addressed cannot only be sorted out between the Dutch government and related partners but that there are many other geo-political factors at work that cannot be controlled in this arena. An issue that complicates matters in Libya for instance, is the presence of profitable natural resources such as oil. The (internal) fights for the control of these resources could be an important destabilizing factor in the future. Yet it is a (potential) problem that is difficult to address, especially from the outside.
8. **The effects of the War on Terror** - The events of 9/11 altered the perception of Western societies. The liberation of allegedly oppressed women in the Arabic world became a precondition to guarantee the freedom of all. Yet some point out that this policy stance is yet to be implemented on the ground.
9. **Western migrant policies** - Egyptians, Libyans and Tunisians in The Netherlands consider that their migration processes to the West and more specifically to The Netherlands, enhanced their personal development and enriched their knowledge and expertise. Yet with rampant poverty in the Arab world and European borders more strictly guarded under the pressure of Western extremist and anti-Islamic elements, it becomes difficult for Arab migrants to enter Europe. Thus, they migrate to richer countries in the region which accept migrants with fewer restrictions but who also host ideologists with ideas and projects that are contrary to Western interests. Therefore, in the end, the closing of European borders may end up working against European interests in the future. Because of their migratory experiences within their (temporary) countries of residence in the Arab region, returning migrants may help reinforce anti-Western and anti-European sentiments in their countries of origin.
10. **Dutch support within proper context** – The Dutch support to the region should be seen within its proper financial context. The current provisions to support the MENA region within the coming years are a small part of the total amount of funds that some wealthy gulf states are willing to pump within the region on a monthly basis. So in the end, there is a limit to what can be achieved with Dutch finances, despite high expectations from all parties involved. A solution could be that the Dutch financial support is offered in joined collaboration with other European nations with similar objectives for the Arab region, thus increasing the budget for political participation.
11. **Confusing messages from the European front** – In the eyes of the participants, there is a large and possibly uncoordinated response to the problems in the region. They observe that individual European governments, European NGOs and other institutions all have different interests and objectives. At times, this can be very confusing for the people on the ground.

Topic of bridge-building and outreach with possible regional allies through Egyptians, Libyans and Tunisians in the Netherlands:

1. **Nothing new under the sun** – The scenarios do not indicate in any way that the future of the region will be significantly different from the past, unless Western donors are willing to let go of the usual prejudice and pre-conceived ideas and invest in new relations with immigrant organizations, local experts, NGOs and women's groups. Participants call on similar scenario building exercises for Syria and Yemen.
2. **Imposed solutions** – Participants indicate that imposed solutions are unlikely to work. It is important to search for a broader perspective and a larger consensus by working on sustainable alliances with experts in the region and investing in relations based on mutual respect, understanding and trust. This approach should be based upon the needs of – and as indicated by - the women within the Arab region.

3. **Embassies within the region** – Participants feel that Dutch embassies in the regions could play a larger role in facilitating a new partnership between Western governments, Western migrant organizations, local governments and local partners.

Topic of challenges to the interpretation of democracy as a system in the countries of origin:

1. **The import of Western democratic rules** – The fall of the autocratic regimes in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia does not mean that the population is automatically able to shift into a democratic mode, because they do not know what the concept means. Therefore, it is important to be careful about the use of certain terms that for Westerners are a matter of habit, e.g. extremism or polarization, because there is ample room for misunderstanding. This point may have serious consequences for the political participation of women.
2. **Teaching democratic values** – As European nations have grown into the habit of democracy, Arab nations should be allowed the same time and space. It would be useful though to discuss training needs with local partners in order to reinforce and accelerate the process.
3. **Lower expectations** – Some Arab communities work with a different protocol when women participate at meetings. Even if the women attend the meeting, it is not always a matter of norm for them to speak up, especially on delicate issues (as their political participation is actually considered to be by some parties). So rather than wanting to reach certain percentages of female political participation as some Western parties would like to see, it would be better to redefine the objectives of political participation of women in the region. Sometimes, just making the issue an item which women and men can openly sit and exchange ideas about could be a huge achievement and a step in the right direction.
4. **Start on a regional scale** – Participants suggest to start training a group of motivated, potential female leaders by helping them to gain seats in municipal and regional councils. Progressively they may have more chances of gaining knowledge and confidence and reach national institutions.
5. **Reinforce the capacities of women organizations** – Regional women's organizations are bound to be the breeding ground for future female leaders. It may be relevant to invest in their institutional capacities based on their specific needs. Investing in regional contacts between experts from the region, can also enhance the exchange of knowledge and experience.
6. **Get young people involved** – It is imperative to work with the new generation of women and men, and try and involve them in the creation of more egalitarian and democratic nations. This could be done by involving young people in the development of specific training packages to be imparted at schools and other gathering places for the youth, e.g. sports clubs and online through the social media.
7. **The media** – Extremist groups seem to have hundreds of media outlets to broadcast their messages to a population that (especially in rural areas) sometimes has little reading and writing abilities. Yet moderate forces are struggling to get their message across with very limited means. Investing in education through the creation of media outlets for moderate groups could be an outcome, also for spreading democratic values. In addition, Journalists need awareness training to promote gender issues in the media. Also, there is a need to increase the presence of women in all forms of media (television, radio, print, and internet) which requires additional training specifically for women.

Topic of regional priorities - daily survival and basic needs versus political participation of women:

1. **Economic empowerment as a precondition for political participation** – Participants indicate that the majority of the population is more concerned with daily survival than political participation of women. Few women are completely economically self reliant, and depend on patriarchal family structures for social protection, status and survival. Especially for women

who do not belong to the political elites, it is difficult to access positions of power on their own. It is economic distress and tradition that make families forge marriage alliances for young girls. So in order to give political participation of women a serious chance, it may be more relevant to invest in a local economic infrastructure and a social mind frame that will allow women to become financially independent.

4.4.2 Recommendations concerning Western (non-)governmental organizations

Western (non-)governmental organizations could contribute to the process of political awakening and political participation of women in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, by:

1. **Managing distrust** – Many people in the region believe that Western NGOs may not always be neutral, and may operate with hidden agendas. Western migrant organizations could be consulted on ways to ease this manifest distrust.
2. **Top down versus a bottom-up approach** – Participants have signaled that the objectives of Western organizations sometimes seem to serve their own interests rather than the interests of the receiving parties. Involving local partners and migrant organizations in the process of drafting projects may broaden support for the initiatives of Western organizations.
3. **Invest in education** – Access to primary education is needed, but access of the middle class, lower classes and rural population to secondary education and (under)graduated courses may be crucial to the development of the Arab nations and the women in these countries. Western organizations could join with migrant organizations and local partners and discuss programs to stimulate and promote the access of women and men to (high level) quality education.
4. **Invest in democracy** – In this period of nation building it may be crucial to invest in education of broad constituencies in the Arab region about citizenship, equal rights, human rights, the CEDAW and other relevant (international) conventions. Western organizations, in close collaboration with (local) partners and governments could develop specific capacity building initiatives for women organizations, advocates, members of Parliaments, members of Constitutional Committees and other relevant institutional partners from the region. It may also be important to support initiatives that may ensure the participation of women in the processes of drafting a new constitution and other laws.
5. **Invest in women** – Western organizations could involve migrant organizations and local partners in the process of developing a comprehensive approach to address the challenges that women in the region face. Most of the time difficulties affecting women are related to other social challenges. A comprehensive approach may avoid one-sided interventions and prevent the creation of new problems while trying to solve existing ones.
6. **Adaptability of donor criteria** – The criteria of Western organizations are sometimes labeled as problematic especially for smaller, rural organizations with good initiatives which contain the potential to make an impact in rural areas but lacking time, personnel and expertise to engage in the rather technical process of drafting a project plan and fulfill reporting requirements as imposed by donor organizations.
7. **Money is not always required** – Participants estimate that strategic skills and other expertise are needed. Migrant organizations could be sent in as trainers because they speak the language, they know local customs and they are able to reach out to relevant local partners.

4.4.3 Recommendations for widening the constituency of male change agents in the region

There are several strategic considerations that could be applied to ensure a larger constituency of male advocates for the cause of political participation of women in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia.

1. **Specific capacity-building exercise for men** – Traditionally, most Arab men have been brought up with specific ideas concerning gender roles. These ideas do not always favor the

- (political) participation of women. In order to increase the number of male advocates for the cause of men, they need to be educated in a different way.
2. **The experience of immigrant men** – Participants explained that the perceptions of men are likely to change because of their migration process. Thus, Egyptian, Libyan and Tunisian men living abroad could be relied upon to use their experience in the transformative process of the men back home. Despite being abroad, most immigrant men can exercise considerable influence on male family members.
 3. **Put the Koran and the Hadith of the Prophet to use** – According to the participants, Koranic texts and certain Hadith (sayings of the prophet), contain passages that can be applied to convince men of the necessity of allowing women to participate in society.
 4. **Use male role models** – Not all men are against participation of women. Advocacy should also make use of male advocates for the cause of women, in different age groups and from different Arab countries.
 5. **Women's issues discussed with men** – Solutions to challenges affecting women should also include a dialogue with men. Exclusive support to female groups without including men, could work as a boomerang and create hostility.
 6. **Best practices from the region** – Western style female political participation may not be accepted as a frame of reference for reluctant men. Instead, best practices from the region in the area of female leadership could be used as examples (Bahrain, Tunisia).
 7. **Promotion of mixed schools** – It may be useful to promote mixed school projects, thus allowing the new generations to grow up together with respect and understanding for each other's position in society and for each other's abilities and talents.
 8. **Include local business partners and Western investors** – The workplace could also be an ideal place to promote cooperation between women and men especially if employers could be found that are willing to invest in these kinds of projects in order to increase productivity, internal communications and the well-being of employees.
 9. **Comprehensive approach to achieve gender balance** – In order to implement measures and policies to achieve gender balance, extensive research needs to be carried out both on the attitudes of (rural) women and (rural) men. Immigrant organizations could be helpful in this process because they may be better positioned to access certain target groups and translate certain local nuances into a context that can be easily understood by Western organizations. Local research will increase the understanding of local needs and interactions.
 10. **No flyers and posters** – Especially in rural areas, advocacy campaigns on this issue based on the distribution of flyers and posters may prove inefficient because larger parts of the Arab rural populations have limited reading and writing skills. Therefore, it may be more beneficial to use images and sound to transmit messages aimed at generating more male solidarity (television and radio).
 11. **Do not expect immediate results** – The transformation of male thinking should be seen as a gradual process that may take place in different stages. The most important issues here are collaboration, communication and involvement of the new generations of women and men.

5 Final Conclusions: Policy Recommendations

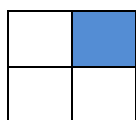
The final product of this report is a set of policy recommendations to further promote the inclusion of women in the political process throughout the MENA region. Highlighting the salient issues from the expert meeting on 25 April 2012 yields a practical policy guide for actors seeking to widen and deepen the level of female political participation. What follows is a list of critical elements and proposals on how to reinforce them. Taken together, these form pragmatic plans for affecting positive change.

1. **Act now** - First and foremost, the window of opportunity is rapidly closing throughout the region. With each passing day, the momentum which drove the revolutions in the region subsides. The hope it inspired retreats as the promise of a better future reverts to the doldrums of prior political activity. The focus needs to be placed on ways of giving the revolution back to the people (both women and men) so they continue to feel included in the political process.
2. **Strengthen existing frameworks** - The experts recognize the need to take a “bottom-up” approach – which takes account of local needs. Foreign NGO’s and governments would be most effective by strengthening existing frameworks on the ground rather than transplanting foreign structures over nascent – but developing – ones. This would entail assistance in building and running projects, as opposed to formulating or directing them in absence of local considerations/consultations.
3. **Support local actors through partnership** - In tandem with the previous recommendation, supporting local actors in both assessing their own needs and planning out how to best fulfill them is essential. The experts noted that there is a lack of training in this area – or at best it is insufficient. Training programs should also be focused at empowering local elites, allowing them to become stakeholders in the process. Building relationships based on trust and understanding is advantageous in promoting political inclusion. This is evermore so important when operating in regions where the traditional role of women remains outside of the political process.
4. **Prioritize empowerment on political agendas** - At the heart of advocacy is empowerment. It is the first step towards advocacy. Once empowerment is realized, it creates a tipping point and spreads beyond the initial stakeholders to reach an ever-wider audience. Fostering the conditions to create the tipping point is a crucial aspect.
5. **Give a voice to Diaspora communities/bridge-building** – Diaspora communities from the region understand both Western and local sensitivities. They can perform a dual function; assisting organizations and helping to foster change back in their country of origin. They can act as mediators and put Western donor organizations in contact with local partners and experts. This would expand the reach of funding and potentially reach areas where financing can be utilized for projects that would have otherwise been overlooked.
6. **Invest in media outlets run by moderates** - Extremist groups seem to have monopolized media outlets to broadcast their messages to a population that, especially in rural areas, suffers from low rates of literacy. Yet moderate forces are struggling to get their message across with very limited means. The creation of media outlets for moderate groups would be a means for promoting gender equality and also spreading democratic values. Choice is an intrinsic part of democracy. Widening the options available to the population allows them to discuss differing ideas and promotes fundamental building blocks of democracy.
7. **Promote legal quotas** - Quota systems are likely to be more effective if the constitutional imposition is combined with a reward system for those who uphold the quotas, for instance tax and social security benefits for companies. The danger is that the use of quotas does not guarantee the appointment of the right woman for the right job. Besides, women are not automatically favorable to other women’s interests. A quota system can also create resentment among certain constituencies that could have negative repercussions such as security risks for women in high positions.

8. **Finding ways to also include the non-elitist groups** – It is important to be aware of differences in social class as well as differences between urban areas and rural areas. There are occasions where women belonging to the elite classes claim to uphold the cause of all women, while in fact they do not always favor the interests of non-urban, poorly educated and illiterate women. Western migrant organizations can assist with the understanding of those subtle nuances that can significantly affect policy stances.
9. **Possible contamination of the issue of women's rights** – Under the former regimes, advocacy for the advancement of women's rights was a task that was assigned to women very close to the ruling class. Now, after chasing away the former leaders, the promotions of the rights of women is sometimes associated with representatives of the old regimes and may carry a negative connotation. It is important to be aware of these feelings under some constituencies.
10. **Women groups are not homogenous** – The different women's organizations do support or are (financially) supported by the different fractions that are currently competing for a share of power in the region. On occasions they have opposing interests due to their ideological affiliations. If policy is meant to have an impact on a differentiated population of women in the Arab world it may be important to be able to define these undercurrents in order to increase the effectiveness of inclusion policies.

Annex A: full scenarios

i. Scenario A: “Powerful Women in a Peaceful Region”



SCENARIO A: “Powerful Women in a Peaceful Region”
+ Institutional Capacity
+ Constitutional Reform enabling the political participation of women

2027: The MENA region has shown a great deal of progress over the past 15 years, and women in the region are increasingly taking advantage of opportunities and succeeding in the economic and political spheres. MENA countries are well on their way to achieving equal rights for all regardless of gender, religion or ethnic affiliation. Women’s political participation has become the norm; women constitute 50% of parliaments throughout the region and female leaders have also emerged in the private sector. Although some fundamentalist groups continue to insist that women’s rights should be restricted (especially in rural areas), MENA countries’ new/amended constitutions (firmly upheld by accountable institutions) ensure that such disagreements are resolved through public discourse and that women are protected by law from exclusion, violence and exploitation.

2012-2017: Encouraged by the momentum of the Arab Spring, citizens in the region recognized the urgent need to incorporate entire populations – women included—in national economies and politics. Having replaced old regimes or gained more influence in existing regimes, (new) political parties across the region overcame political infighting and internal conflicts and banded together to adopt formal measures of inclusion and empowerment in new or amended constitutions. These reforms were achieved thanks to the support of hundreds of organizations (women’s, human rights, and student groups, the Diaspora, the UN and other (I)NGOs) that lobbied consistently on national and international platforms. Using the objectives and reasoning from UN Resolution 1325, the Millennium Development Goals, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and other international standards related to women’s rights, they succeeded in persuading both old and new regimes of the importance of women’s protection and inclusion in politics. These groups also convinced regimes to prioritize health care and education (for both women and men), and to require at least 16 years of education for women and men alike in order to guarantee success and opportunities for future generations. Additionally, specific clauses were inserted to protect women from sexual violence, incest, slavery and other forms of exploitation and to provide adequate formal measures of justice and reparation for such crimes. Many countries adopted a proportional electoral system (favorable to women and minorities) and all opted to install a quota system to officially mandate women’s political participation, requiring women to comprise 50% of all branches and institutions of government by 2027. Fundamentalist/orthodox forces also took part in the public discourse surrounding constitutional reform, but were eventually satisfied by arguments that the measures taken would be for the common good (i.e. to restore peace and security to the region) and would merely give women opportunities and not force them to abandon their ideals or traditions.

2017-2022: In the years following the Arab Spring, governments overcame some initial conflicts and instability through effective, inclusive public discourse (supported by civil society groups) and adjusted effectively to the significant constitutional changes. Government branches and their underlying institutions (both formal and informal) were able to effectively enforce the quota system and the amendments made to the judicial, education and health care systems shortly after the Arab Spring, thanks to sufficient resources for implementing the constitutional changes and training relevant parties. Rural communities tended to adapt at a slightly slower pace due to stronger fundamentalist influence and, in some instances, funding and training delays. Additionally, cultural traditions related to women’s roles in society remained strong in both urban and rural areas; many women found it difficult to take advantage of new opportunities to contribute to the public or private sphere without giving up other culturally essential aspects of life such as marriage and raising a family. Thus, while constitutional reforms and effective institutions supporting these reforms were successfully put into place, only a limited set of women from relatively progressive backgrounds initially chose to pursue a career in the public or private sector.

The reforms continued to have positive effects. By 2022, consistent enforcement along local and national lines gave women in rural and urban areas equal access to health care, education and justice

and equal opportunities to actively engage in politics. The political participation quotas really began to take effect, and by 2022 women made up an average of 30% of parliaments across the region. While female politicians were initially only reluctantly accepted and/or seen as illegitimate by their (male and/or fundamentalist) peers and communities, they proved to be successful leaders and high-level policymakers and increasingly gained support from voters and institutions. Thanks to the higher levels of health care and education, more women also began to enter the labor market and to emerge as leaders in the private sector. Many of the same groups who had succeeded in convincing regimes to make earlier constitutional changes pressured governments to introduce quota systems for proportional representation of women in the private sector and such quotas were indeed adopted by a few countries. However, conservative opposition and differences amongst these groups on the exact quota requirements for private sector quotas – including differences in women’s (groups’) opinions on the subject—prevented these from becoming reality. Nevertheless, educated women became accepted as a valuable part of the (urban) business world, encouraging many young rural women to move to the city to seek work. Rural areas changed on a smaller scale; women in these areas received better health care and education but those who stayed were largely expected to maintain traditional family structures and were unlikely to break into the labor market in a significant way without moving to a city.

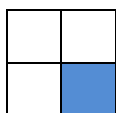
2022-2027: Slowly but surely, top-down and bottom-up changes (through formal and informal institutions) contributed to a shift in the mindset of the region. As the first ‘round’ of female political and business leaders emerged after the Arab Spring, more and more women throughout the region were inspired by these role models. With the help of women’s groups and other informal institutions, women everywhere began convincing their families and communities that female leaders and women with (political) careers were a positive development for all. The region saw an influx of women playing an important role in both business and politics. Working mothers/wives increasingly became the norm in cities and to a lesser extent in rural areas, though many stopped working after their first child was born. The general population moved toward the acceptance of women’s independence and the idea that women are free to play an important role in both the home/family structure and the public sphere.

In this way, women began to be seen as an integral part of national public and private sectors, with or without quotas requiring their participation. While the shift occurred primarily in urban populations at first, it spread to rural populations as (women’s) health and education standards improved and progressive voices from younger generations became increasingly influential. There was still a marked difference between the attitude in traditionally conservative rural areas and the liberal cosmopolitan cities in the region, but this was not viewed as a source of conflict because of the freedom and opportunities granted to all. Institutions continued to uphold consistent standards of inclusion, justice and freedom across the region and citizen base. Women trusted these institutions to carry out justice fairly if they became the victim of a crime, including crimes of a (sexually) violent nature. Thus, the youth that had instigated Arab Spring protests emerged as a new generation of leaders—both male and female—promoting equality, inclusion and everyone’s right/responsibility to actively engage in society, politics and national economies through both formal and informal structures.

i.i. Country-specific scenarios: Powerful women in a peaceful region

Country	2027 Scenario	Critical Push Factors
<p>EGYPT</p> 	<p>Regional stability and economic growth enabled Egypt to become a democratic multiparty state. It now has effective institutions that respect and uphold women's rights. Women are represented in parliament and are political leaders. The success of Egypt is largely due to its decision to decentralize governance. As such, citizens were able to take ownership over local problems, addressing them effectively. Rural initiatives centered around education and economic development successfully closed the traditional gap between them and their urban counterparts. As this process evolved, radical agendas lost their legitimacy as a solution to inequality. This also opened a space for women to take up political and economic responsibility that they had aspired to. In tandem with this, public perception with regard to women's role in society changed. Consequently, women in Egypt enjoy now constitutional recognition of their rights as equals and the institutional capacity to enforce these rights.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralization of political decision-making and governance • (Western) NGO's effectively support Egyptian society at the grassroots level • Rural development through education, negating radical sentiments
<p>LIBYA</p> 	<p>Despite a tumultuous start, Libya has democratized with the help of significant support from European governments. Women hold seats in parliament and in the top tiers of government. The abundance of oil revenue has led to nationwide economic rejuvenation and development. Female literacy rates have reached 95% and girls have gained equal access to education. Tribal tensions have been negated by the success of democratic representation. This has also lessened the appeal of radical Islam. Women's rights have been enshrined in the constitution and the government has the institutional capacity to protect these. Civil society is able to hold the Libyan government accountable, thus preventing all form of corruption and insecurity. The political process has reconciled Libya's societal trauma caused by the Qaddafi regime.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergence of female leaders propagating a liberal agenda • Oil wealth • Successful reconciliation and the healing of collective trauma
<p>TUNISIA</p> 	<p>Tunisia's tradition of secular norms continued unabated, preventing radical Islam from gaining a foothold in the country. Equal access to education provided a skilled work force without gender distinction. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) supported economic development and job opportunities flourished, both in rural and urban areas. Social mobility is now based on meritocracy and this equal access to employment has empowered women. Family dynamics changed as paternal structures dissipated. This empowerment opened a new space for civil society to grow and further promote the cause and institutionalization of women's rights. Constitutional reforms have guaranteed women's inclusion and equality in society, providing access to the judicial system. Diaspora organizations aided this development. Tunisia is a country where women enjoy gender equality and play a key role within the political process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance to democratic structure • Knowledge transfer to civil society • Economic growth tying local initiatives to the international market

ii. Scenario B: “A Tree that Bears no Fruit”



SCENARIO B: “A Tree That Bears No Fruit”

- Institutional Capacity

+ Constitutional Reform enabling the political participation of women

2027: Society in the MENA region is the ideal setting for gender equality on paper, but not in reality. This discrepancy is largely due to a lack of resources and funding necessary to implement changes made to national constitutions 10-15 years before. Therefore polarization, extremism, criminality, poverty, political instability and gender inequality in the region have increased instead of decreasing as new (and changes to old) constitutions intended. Unfortunately, positively motivated efforts to reform countries in an equitable and sustainable way have left the majority of the population feeling resentful and disappointed about the legal/justice system. A profound sense of injustice, insecurity and despair prevails. People feel betrayed and will not invest their trust in formal (national) institutions again anytime soon, preferring instead to depend on informal social structures and (extended) family as a safety net. Violence, including domestic violence, honor killings and sexual assault of women, is ubiquitous and formal/informal institutions offer women very few (if any) options for justice or reparations. Women’s groups, Diaspora organizations, and human rights (I)NGOs are now trying to use strategic litigation in order to obtain in real life the rights they have on paper. Countries are negotiating with others in the region and with other world powers to come up with a plan in order to save themselves from extremist/fundamentalist victory. Once again, the region seems on the brink of (violent) revolution.

2012-2017: Following the events of the Arab Spring, countries in the MENA region started reforming institutions and constitutions with the best of intentions. They moved very quickly, taking advantage of the regional sense of urgency and using the momentum and goodwill of the population and powerful (national and international) stakeholders. Political parties who had recently gained influence or replaced old regimes set up constitutional reform commissions and within 3 years democratizing political and economical reforms were passed ensuring human rights and gender equity. Such reforms were encouraged by the concerted lobbying efforts of (I)NGOs, women’s groups, human rights groups, student groups, media, artists and the Diaspora. In many cases, fundamentalist parties and forces were strategically left out of reform processes, allowing the more progressive parties to make changes as they saw fit. An excellent framework for meaningful change in the region was put into place, including:

- New (or amended) constitutions based on *trias politica*, human rights (including freedom of religion, free press, freedom of speech) gender equality and non-discrimination (on the grounds of gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, family status);
- Compliance with international contracts of human (including women’s and children’s) rights, such as the International Declaration of Human Rights;
- New family laws, ensuring the same inheritance rights and property rights for women and the same rights for children of married, divorced, unmarried couples, same sex couples and single parents;
- The introduction of quotas for 50% female representation in all relevant organizations and institutions/political parties to restore the deficit of previous years;
- The introduction of proportional electoral systems more favorable to minorities and women;
- Laws providing equal payment and social security benefits for women and men;
- Laws requiring the improvement of women’s health care, including information about reproductive rights and the provision of (in some countries free) contraception;
- Mandatory gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting in all levels of governance;
- Free and required education for men and women until 18, no segregation

Plans were put in place for these changes to trickle down to the level of local governance and to civil society, taking into account rural and urban differences.

2017-2022: Regrettably, these promising measures were not kept in place because there was no money to establish implementation programs or to train people appropriately. Countries in the region failed to cooperate with one another and many failed to adequately evaluate and budget for the costs of implementing such significant changes (or to seek external funds to do so). Thus, they failed to effectively mobilize key change agents like the police force, lawyers, judges, teachers and social workers. This lack of resources and adequate background knowledge amongst those tasked with

implementing laws and educating the population meant that the new laws were practically unenforceable. Given this stark reality, regimes came to be seen as unreliable and some governments in the region were even replaced or (again) overpowered by (at times violent) extremist Islamist forces.

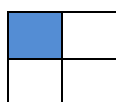
2022-2027: This political instability made it even more difficult to implement the constitutional reforms adopted after the Arab Spring. Domestic violence and other attacks against women increased but remained unpunished regardless of the new laws prohibiting such acts. During this time, many (new) regimes set out to overturn the majority of the new laws and/or render them useless by stripping (women's portions of) health care, education, and legal institutions of most if not all resources and funding. Despite protests from the groups that had brought the constitutional reforms to life years before, the lack of funding and resources to implement the reforms made it impossible to do much about these developments. External parties like INGOs and Diaspora organizations were sometimes able to gather funding to help institutions implement reforms, but most regimes were not open to their reformist objectives and used strict funding and policy restrictions to prevent such groups from influencing the region through other (informal) channels. People began to accept the harsh truth that these reforms had been promising ideas disseminated by a sector of the population that no longer (if ever) held the power to implement them. In hindsight, many came to see the reforms as inappropriate and unenforceable for the MENA region.

Women remained uneducated and unable to join the work force, due to insufficient funds for more schools and school supplies and the persistent attitude among powerful conservative and fundamentalist groups that such equality would not benefit society. As a former Egyptian party leader recently put it, "it seemed that all of civil society's energy went into planting the right tree, but failed to provide the water to allow the tree to bear fruit". The Arab Spring did make it abundantly clear that people in the MENA region were ready for change, but the ineffective implementation of reforms showed that countries in the region may not have been ready to accept the responsibilities and challenges that come along with such change at every level of government (from local to national) and institutions (both informal and formal). (I)NGOs, women's groups, human rights groups, student groups and media forces began searching for alternate methods to fight for the chance to try again.

ii.i. Country-specific scenarios: A Tree that Bears no Fruit

Country	2027 Scenario	Critical Push Factors
<p>EGYPT</p> 	<p>A political bargain between the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafists and the army resulted in a political inability to reach consensus upon institutionalizing women's constitutional rights. Fearing political fragmentation and societal unrest, the central government heavily restricted civil society. As a result, the needs of women have not been addressed effectively. Although a token number of women hold political positions guaranteed by constitutional reforms, the Arab Spring's hope for full gender equality and female political inclusion has turned out to be a mirage. Equal access to education has not been institutionalized, preventing women from becoming skilled laborers in the work force. The economy continues to stagnate in light of this reality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denying women access to education • Centralized government preventing effective knowledge transfer • Political fragmentation resulting in ineffective institutionalization
<p>LIBYA</p> 	<p>Initially, Libyan society's intense enthusiasm for political freedom led the Libyan transitional government to draft constitutional guarantees of democracy, freedom, and gender equality. However, the political leadership had little to no knowledge of or experience in democratic governance. This resulted in ineffective institutional arrangements, leaving the rights of women unprotected from the start. Civil society, in its nascent form, was unable to stem the tide of corruption. The temptation of wealth from oil revenues resulted in an entrenched patron-client system between the national government and the tribal leadership. This same relationship also mitigated claims for radical Islamism. There are now a few women who hold political office, but (like their male counterparts) they predominantly act out of self-interest and financial gain.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient support from international community for Libyan civil society in the wake of regime change • Lack of experience in democratic governance and reform • Historical legacy of patronage and corruption
<p>TUNISIA</p> 	<p>Attempts from foreign partners to bring about effective democratic change were aimed at the national level but failed to reach the local level. This fostered widespread corruption in political and economic spheres and prevented democratization of the country. Disillusion with reforms created tensions between the rural poor and the urban rich, allowing radicalism to spread among the deprived. This tension polarized the political process, creating a lack of cohesion needed to institutionalize and implement reforms. Women's rights and gender equality are enshrined in the constitution but remain weakly enforced, as they are not institutionalized. This lack of institutional capacity to prosecute offenders means that women are still victims of domestic and sexual violence. Furthermore, women find few opportunities for political inclusion and employment. As such, the current status quo is reminiscent of the pre-Arab Spring period.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of bottom-up local initiatives and outreach to local partners to address their needs • National government's continued corruption and failure to be transparent; democratization process seized by patronage and elitism

iii. Scenario C: “From Grassroots to Critical Mass”



SCENARIO C: “From Grassroots to Critical Mass”

+ Institutional Capacity

- Constitutional Reform enabling the political participation of women

2027: The situation in the MENA region is tense. Although women have gained a lot of ground in the informal/civil society sector and are more likely to receive satisfactory health care and education as a result, a lack of recognition of women and women’s rights in national constitutions has left them excluded from formal government structures. Throughout the region, constitutional reforms have failed or stalled, leaving very little room for women (or anyone but the conservative ruling elite) to substantially participate in the formal economic or political system. In most places, women are still not protected by law from sexual attacks, domestic violence or forms of exploitation by adequate legal or justice systems; males remain the dominant force in society and feel free to treat women as they please without the threat of punishment. Political and economic structures and policies remain similar to what they were 15 years ago, despite calls for reform to favor democracy and grant women and minorities more rights. The social, judicial and governmental structures that existed fifteen years ago have prevailed against the Arab Spring’s momentum toward change, but under the surface the strength of civil society and the progressive informal institutions it has built have grown to match that of many regimes in the region. The tension is palpable: the power of these informal institutions is threatening to topple existing power structures and regimes are reacting accordingly by attempting to shut them down (in some instances with violence). The time is ripe for these powerful institutions to overtake formal government structures, but the risk of conflict with existing regimes is high.

2012-2017: Despite calls for change during the Arab Spring, opposition forces—including political parties and the media, women’s groups, student groups, human rights groups, and other (I)NGOs that supported and lobbied for them—failed to agree on the kinds of changes they wanted to implement or how they wanted to implement them. Old and new regimes as well as traditional social/family structures proved very resistant to this weak, divided pressure. A few women were initially voted into some government roles based on their high-profile participation in national revolutions, but these roles were largely symbolic and their power was, practically speaking, extremely limited. By 2015, the initial enthusiasm and engagement felt by populations during the Arab Spring was slowly replaced by fatigue and disinterest. Disillusioned with political inaction and infighting and afraid to oppose strong regimes after witnessing Assad’s defeat of the opposition’s rebellion in Syria, citizens preferred to return to make the best of an inconspicuous daily life. Civil unrest still came up intermittently, but regimes were able to control the situation; they tended to strategically allow insignificant, symbolic policy changes to appease the majority with no sign of allowing for real reform.

2017-2022: Some countries in the MENA region returned to the status quo that existed before the Arab Spring; regimes used small-scale policy reforms and the power of their formal institutions to implement existing policies/laws in order to keep the population sufficiently satisfied and under control. Very little changed with respect to women’s rights in such countries.

However, in many countries, the Arab Spring had whetted the population’s appetite for change. Where the population saw an absence of adequate government institutions to meet their needs, civil society began to look for its own solutions. In such countries, traditional family life returned to the forefront and local communities took on a greater responsibility in taking care of their members. By focusing on entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency and with support from Diaspora organizations and (I)NGO’s, communities found ways to provide the education and health care their members needed without achieving constitutional reforms. Women and women’s organizations were heavily involved in providing these services. They took on an important role in local economies by working as trained teachers or health care providers, starting their own small food or clothing companies, or earning income by fulfilling other community needs. The women not only profited financially from the results of their work, but the improved local standards of health care and education benefitted women as well.

Over time, women began to be regarded as valuable assets to these community programs. It was difficult for some (including women, and especially in more conservative rural areas) to accept this shift, as it forced them to adjust some cultural traditions and social/family structures to accommodate the change. However, the majority of communities saw the benefit of their new programs and women’s involvement therein. They adapted accordingly while allowing traditional (extended) family

structures to remain firmly in place as a reliable safety net for community members. The motivation that the Arab Spring had given women and men to change the status quo and improve their quality of life seemed irreversible and an increasing number of women (with the exception of those in traditionally fundamentalist communities) became more financially independent. Regimes seemed to accept this as a harmless development, as long as women did not become formally involved in the private or public sector.

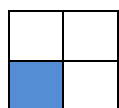
2022-2027: The continued development of effective civil society programs, combined with improvements on a macroeconomic scale, afforded many people (including women) in the MENA region new opportunities. These included access to high-quality education, health care and technology and travel to foreign countries. A new relatively wealthy middle class began to emerge. The economic conditions also allowed for adequate funds for existing local programs providing health care and education to expand, with support from (I)NGOs and the Diaspora. One by one, these institutions developed into highly effective regional/national institutions with the ability to help entire populations. Countless local and (inter)national student, human rights, and women's organizations had started these institutions at the grassroots level, but their objectives were tied together by overriding liberal Islamist and democratic ideals. Their shared goals enabled the institutions to expand across regions and nations and to emerge as unified and influential (yet still informal) forces in the region. As the institutions' influence and resources grew, countries and (rural and/or conservative) communities that had been excluded from or resistant to earlier developments on a local level now also gained access to better education, health care and the opportunity to contribute to such programs. Women in such communities were still hesitant to definitively change their role in society, but were increasingly convinced of the benefits the programs could offer. Gradually, more and more chose to take advantage.

During this process, the women who had played a significant role in setting up these institutions from the beginning continued to be accepted as important and necessary for their success on a regional and national level. However, they (like other non-members of the ruling elite) remained officially excluded from politics and the economy. The ruling elite and fundamentalist/ extremist groups began to regard these institutions as a potential threat. Moreover, the absence of a legal framework protecting women from violence or exploitation put women involved in these institutions in a risky position across the region. Some female leaders found themselves the victims of violent attacks or smear campaigns and many began to step down from their positions within these institutions for safety reasons. However, substantial funding and resources (both from internal and external sources) made these informal institutions across the MENA region difficult for regimes to repress. Women and men involved in these institutions remained steadfast as regimes attempted to contain them. As the rise of these institutions showed, the many governments no longer reflected the will and needs of the people (including the freedoms/rights that they felt women deserved). Most governments remained unwilling to incorporate the informal institutions or their objectives into formal government structures or policies, fearing that adopting such inclusive and democratic ideals would mean both the loss of their power and an unacceptable change to their conservative national policies. The foundation for a well-planned, well-funded, unified popular movement had been laid, and slowly but surely the situation began to reach its critical mass.

iii.i. Country-specific scenarios: From Grassroots to Critical Mass

Country	2027 Scenario	Critical Push Factors
<p>EGYPT</p> 	<p>Uneven economic conditions throughout the region drove Egyptian men to emigrate in pursuit of employment opportunities. Consequently, women assumed the role of head of household and increasingly take up economic and social responsibilities. This led to a new sense of empowerment among women, particularly in rural areas. Recognizing their new role, they demanded guarantees of economic and political rights. Frustrated with a democratic deficit for women in general, and realizing the difficult plight of their rural counterparts in particular, urban educated women created a movement to correct the imbalances. Foreign partners became eager to assist where necessary for the movement to achieve its objectives. This provided the necessary inject for a influential women's rights movement that is now growing and gaining serious momentum throughout the country.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformation of self-perception of the role of women and the acknowledgement of female capabilities • Financial emancipation of women • Local ownership of external support for women's rights movement
<p>LIBYA</p> 	<p>There is a functioning government with the capacity to implement laws, policies, and programs. However, equal rights are not extended to women. Women are effectively ignored within formal economic and political government arrangements. Reformist elements that try to include women's rights in the constitution are represented in the government. However, the new diverse political class has been mired in political infighting and is not able to reach consensus on constitutional amendments in support of women's rights. In response women have found support in a civil society that demands the inclusion of women in economic and political reforms. This civil society is becoming increasingly strong, fueled by the prolific spread of social media – supported by Diaspora organizations and Western NGO's – broadcasting an image of female empowerment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salafists in government fore-stalling progress with regards to gender equality • Diaspora organizations and Western NGO's exchange knowledge and skills, playing a key role in strengthening civil society • Social media raising awareness and a vibrant and diverse public sphere
<p>TUNISIA</p> 	<p>Women in Tunisia did not gain their rightful place in the country's constitution or the country's formal political and economic systems. While civil society embraced women's rights, elites were unwilling to implement change and open up national governance to civil society. This gave rise to a strong civil society effectively institutionalizing parallel local governance. A plethora of Tunisian women's rights organizations have sprung from the barren democratic landscape. Supported by and working in partnership with Western NGO's, they were able to effectively address local needs, thus enabling civil society to bypass national governance. Recognizing civil society's critical mass, political elites have now been forced to start a process of real constitutional reform.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media and social networks used exclusively to form informal networks • Civil society flourishing at the local level with the help of foreign partners, circumventing national government and elites • Knowledge transfer and capacity building key to rise in civil society

iv. Scenario D: “A Region on the Brink of Failure”



SCENARIO D: “A Region on the Brink of Failure”

- Institutional Capacity
- Constitutional Change

2027: Fifteen years after the Arab Spring, the situation in the MENA region is worse than before the revolutions started. The political participation of women is almost non-existent. Constitutional reforms have failed, and all of society is characterized by inequality and instability. The ruling elite has shown a notorious lack of political will to implement change, much less provided a means to carry out and implement such reforms. Widespread exclusion of women is the norm in education, politics and the labor market, with males getting preferential treatment with regard to the limited number of jobs and resources available. There is a situation of lawlessness, tension and violence that affects women in particular, as women are likely to be victims of domestic/sexual attacks and honor killings but justice systems are not set up to protect them from such acts. We see a massive ‘brain drain’, with potential male and female leaders moving out of the region. Society is more conservative than ever, and the fundamentalist elements have triumphed.

2012-2017: After the Arab Spring, there was a deliberate refusal to embody the principle of equity into the constitutions from the start. In many countries, regimes that maintained power throughout the Arab Spring became more strictly fundamentalist and/or authoritarian than before as a backlash of national revolutions led them to opt for stability over democratization. In countries that experienced regime change, the new parties that took over also tended to be fundamentalists or be highly influenced by fundamentalist forces. These powerful conservative, orthodox and fundamentalist actors were opposed for different reasons to any major measures introducing changes. Together they were able to defeat any opposition using violence, intimidation and clever political tactics to delegitimize and silence political parties and (national and international) civil society groups calling for constitutional reform. Division between the opposition parties made it difficult to create a strong front to fight these powerful radical groups. Options for women remained limited or non-existent within national legal, political and economic frameworks. Some women who had taken part in the revolutions of the Arab Spring were even imprisoned or killed to deter other women from taking part in such activities. The lack of legal rights for women made it impossible for female victims to demand justice or for female political aspirants to demand a voice.

Due to the existent electoral system (regional representation) women remained underrepresented in parliament, and the political parties were reluctant to appoint them to high-level positions in political, institutional and judicial spheres. Even in countries where women were allowed to run for office, they failed to gather the necessary support or funding due to strong influence of fundamentalist forces opposing their candidacy and the general population’s tendency to believe women were unsuited for such positions. On some occasions, women who stood a chance of winning an election were eliminated from the race through the use of violence, intimidation and funding cuts (often by the ruling elite or affiliated extremist groups). The appointment of women to higher positions in institutions of higher education and research was restricted in order to prevent the dissemination of new reformist ideas. The Diaspora and other external parties (including the UN and INGOs), were willing to give such reformist developments a chance and participate in and/or fund such institutions, but their influence was limited or completely blocked by vigilant regimes.

2017-2022: Even where there was a great momentum towards inclusion and democratization from within national political parties or civil society, the groups lobbying for such change did not manage to gather the necessary funds to support their objectives. In 2020, the (then) ruling elite officially refused to sign and ratify new international instruments against discrimination and exclusion of women in all spheres of life. Internally, regimes prevented the development of initiatives coming from civil society groups (including women’s groups, student groups, human rights groups and related media campaigns) aimed at advocating reforms on a national level. These groups and the political parties they supported found themselves overpowered by external funding coming from some fundamentalist, orthodox and conservative actors from wealthy countries in the region, which began to determine nearly all national political agendas and institutional policies. These powerful actors opposed meaningful efforts towards socio-economic innovation, repeatedly preventing improvements to the education and health care of women and girls. They also staunchly opposed any proposed incentives for female participation/leadership in labor market and politics, including the introduction of quotas to

balance gender inequalities in either sector. Dissident NGOs and other internal opposition voices were imprisoned, and external voices (such as those in the Diaspora) were silenced through state censorship and increasingly thorough immigration/visa policies.

During this period, countries suffered from economic instability, partially due to a regional increase in civil conflicts. As a result, there was a general lack of local financial means and resources to maintain institutional capacity, even with external funding from wealthier sources. In these difficult economic times, the ruling elite had a tendency to use any available resources and funding towards policies and programs favoring only those close to them (based on familial/tribal ties and/or religious affiliation), thus excluding the majority of their populations from meaningful roles in the national economy and politics. This served to create even more civil conflicts, which perpetuated the cycle of poor regional economic performance.

2022-2027: Due to insufficient national institutional capacity, there was a tendency to concentrate on the urban environment and leave behind the rural segments of society. The deteriorating labor market led to economic policies that gave decisive preference to males, preventing the vast majority of women from contributing to the economy. Women were forced to return almost completely to the informal economy, increasingly exposing them to unethical and even violent situations (e.g. abuse, exploitation, human trafficking, rape) without any means of protection or reparations aside from extended family networks. The hopelessness of the situation eventually led the Diaspora to turn its back on the home countries and encourage those inclined to reform to move abroad. Nobody dared to hope that women's rights, let alone women participating in politics, would ever become a reality in the MENA region.

iv.i. Country specific scenarios: A Region on the Brink of Failure

Country	2027 Scenario	Critical Push Factors
<p>EGYPT</p> 	<p>The country is in a stranglehold of fundamentalist forces. Women are excluded from political decision-making as well as civil society. Their rights are unrecognized. The government does not have the institutional framework to protect women's rights nor are these guaranteed in a constitution. Women are fully subjugated to men without legal recourse. Egypt's political impasse has resulted in prolonged periods of complete and total turmoil. Foreign interference has enflamed internal religious and political strife, eventually enveloping all segments of society. A region-wide economical malaise plunged Egypt into a vicious cycle of deprivation and radicalism. Civil war was ended by a military coup in 2023. However, their effective rule only extends to Cairo and the shores of the Suez Canal. Governance throughout the rest of the country is fragmented. A range of warlords and religious fundamentalists rule local communities, applying Sharia and radical Salafism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign support for radical and conservative elements in Egyptian society • Political impasse and inadequate functioning of civil society • Economic malaise
<p>LIBYA</p> 	<p>Libya has descended into anarchy. Tribal relations have deteriorated and in absence of rule of law and governance, the country is fragmented along sectarian lines. This is exacerbated by the lure of oil wealth and readily available arms. Porous and unsecured borders have led to an influx of mercenaries. Consequently, a power vacuum has unfolded in Libya. For women this has meant that their plight has gone unheard. They have fallen victim to impunity, religious conservatism and gender-based violence. Widespread reports of mass rape and human rights abuses cite frequent occurrence of such travesties. The instigators of the 2011 revolution have fled and civil society has collapsed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tribal allegiance over state allegiance leading to a power vacuum • Lack of experience in governance and institution building • Lack of international commitment to transitional government
<p>TUNISIA</p> 	<p>Tunisia's lack of political reform after the fall of Ben Ali polarized secularists and religious conservatives. National and international economic malaise has worsened the position of women as men took the limited job opportunities. Investors and tourists fled, taking with them Tunisia's intellectual elite. This brain drain provided an opportunity for fundamentalists to pervade society, financially and ideologically steered by radical Islamists from more prosperous Islamist countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Constitutional reforms regarding women's rights rescinded, leading to the full exclusion of women from the political and economic realms of society. The result is pervasive domestic oppression and social abuse of women, who have no access to judicial relief. Tunisia's full subjugation of women often manifests as sexual abuse, honor killings and a denial of basic human rights for women as a national norm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power vacuum • Diaspora boycott • Financial support for radical ideologies

ii. Annex B: Acknowledgements

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Ambassade van Tunesië in het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden <i>Embassy of Tunisia to The Kingdom of The Netherlands</i>	Marokko Instituut <i>Morocco Institute</i>
Arabesk Culturele Stichting <i>Arabesk Cultural Foundation</i>	Multicultural Women Peacemakers Network (MWPN)
Arabisch Nederlandse Vrouwen Kring (ANVK) <i>Arabic-Dutch Women Circle</i>	Nederlands Koptische Stichting <i>Dutch Coptic Foundation</i>
Defensievrouwen Vereniging <i>Defense Women Association</i>	Raad van Egyptenaren in Nederland <i>Council of Egyptians in The Netherlands</i>
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ICC – International Criminal Court Office of the Prosecutor	Stichting Vond <i>Vond Foundation</i>
Libisch Nederlandse Gemeenschap <i>Libyan Dutch Association</i>	Unie van Soroptimisten in Nederland, Suriname en Curacao <i>Union of Soroptimists in The Netherlands, Surinam and Curacao</i>
Libische Liga voor Mensenrechten <i>Libyan Liga for Human Rights</i>	Vereniging van Tunesiërs in Nederland <i>Association of Tunisians in The Netherlands</i>
	WO=MEN, Dutch Gender Platform

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