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Years of Challenge
Years of Change

Globally and nationally, UNIFEM has spearheaded efforts to increase women's political participation, a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and genuine democracy. In Morocco, UNIFEM assistance played a role in successful advocacy for the first political quota in the Arab world. The number of women parliamentarians soared from two to 35 in the 2002 elections. Training programmes for aspiring women politicians helped double the number of women candidates in five Pacific countries. Sustained UNIFEM support in Burundi helped women assume 30 per cent of decision-making positions in the legislature, while several years of training and advocacy helped Rwanda top the world in its percentage of women parliamentarians: 49 per cent in the lower house.

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Arab State



Budgeting for Gender Equality

In Morocco, every second woman does not know how to read or write. In rural areas illiteracy is yet more widespread, affecting three out of four women. The low status of women, combined with poverty, long distances to school and the lack of facilities, prevents girls living in the countryside from receiving even a basic education. To reverse this trend, the Ministry of Education has allocated additional funding to expand the school feeding programmes that have been proven to benefit girls in particular, extend medical services within schools, distribute books and other school mate-

rials, and provide transport for students who live in remote areas.

These measures are spelled out in the gender budget statement, the first in the history of Morocco. Presented as an annex to the national budget for 2006, the statement outlines how the allocation of public resources will address gender equality priorities. It is a result of the close collaboration between UNIFEM and the Ministry of Finance and Privatization that aims at incorporating a gender perspective into the country's ongoing budget reform process.

The new focus on gender concerns is not lim-



ABOVE: Women farmers in Morocco. The country's first gender budget statement has led to an increase in resources for producer cooperatives and women's access to micro-credit.

ited to education. To reduce maternal and child mortality, the Ministry of Health continues to increase spending on family planning and maternal health clinics. It has also committed to improving the quality and outreach of obstetric as well as neonatal medical care. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development identifies the establishment of producer cooperatives, vocational training and women's increased access to micro-credit as priorities in the gender budget statement.

National commitments are complemented at the local level, where UNIFEM has supported addi-

tional gender budget initiatives. In Essaouira, for example, a Women's and Children's Commission now works to sensitize elected officials on women's needs. As one of the first results of the Commission's work, a centre for women victims of violence was established.

- To ensure that national laws and policies reflect women's concerns, UNIFEM also supported the establishment of the Arab Women Parliamentary Network in 2005. Founded as a result of a UNIFEM symposium, the network provides women legislators in the region with an opportunity to seek advice and share experiences on how to overcome the hurdles they face - both in their function as female members of parliament and in trying to support legislation that addresses women's needs.

Learn more: www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/gender_budgets.php
www.gender-budgets.org



ABOVE: A parliamentarian in Iraq. UNIFEM helped establish the Arab Women Parliamentary Network. Members share experiences and provide advice to each other.

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*Years of Challenge
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Gender budgets analyse how women and men fare differently under revenues and expenditures in order to redress inequities. Since 1998, UNIFEM has supported the use of this ground-breaking method in 30 countries. Municipalities in Ecuador have used gender budgets to channel more resources into programmes to curb domestic violence. Kenya has eased tax policies to aid women's access to essential commodities. Mexico earmarked 0.85 per cent of the total national budget in 2003 for programmes to promote gender equality, while ministries in India have started in 2005 to provide detailed specifications on allocations benefiting women.

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UNIFEM pioneered some of the earliest demonstrations of how women's progress benefits families and societies. In 1979, the fund backed the first community development programme for rural women in Oman. It integrated income generation, health and literacy. Hundreds of women learned to profit from traditional skills such as sewing and embroidery, and an emphasis on such culturally acceptable activities gave women an entry point to assume new roles as wage earners and community leaders. The project eventually reached 135 villages and 54 settlements, upping family incomes by 15 per cent. By 1994, the Government had created a national community development programme covering half the country.

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Arab State



Working and Learning with Information Technology

When school is out in the Jordanian villages of Lib and Mleih, students feel little inclined to go home these days. Instead, they are gathering in the Computer Clubhouse or the Robotics Lab to playfully use information technology (IT) for their own engineering and design projects and put into practice what they have learned in class.

The extracurricular education programme is

part of a range of new activities in Lib and Mleih. Both communities are labs of sorts themselves since they have been designated 'e-villages' through a joint initiative of the Government of Jordan and UNIFEM that is supported by a number of private sector partners. The aim is to improve the quality of life for the 10,000 residents through modern information and communication technology. Training and hands-on application are



LEFT: Hands-on schooling: In the Jordanian villages of Lib and Mleih, girls use the robotics lab to put into practice what they have learned in class.

geared towards providing villagers, and women in particular, with a competitive edge for their economic activities and with new means for cultural expression.

This is a learning experience that taps the creative energy of children and adults alike: In the newly established film club, girls and boys are busy producing videos that will be screened during an international film contest. And at the first community radio station in the Arab region, another broadcast is getting ready to go on the air.

Not everything that's innovative in Lib and Mleih is also new: At the mosaic workshop, jobs are created by combining ancient craft with modern technology. Here, women learn not only how to produce colourful traditional tiles but also how to use the Internet to market their products. Women also benefit from the e-villages' IT Academy, where they receive training and can obtain certifications that improve their access to the labour market. The trainers are as enthusiastic as their students: "Training women of my village and giving them the opportunity to gain skills that can help them find better jobs is the best reward for me," says Mai Al Shora, who heads the IT Academy.

- UNIFEM support also enabled women in the West Bank to increase their qualifications. At the UNIFEM women's centres in Talfet and Allar,

women who dropped out of school years ago can attend classes preparing them for the tawjihi. Students must take this comprehensive exam at the end of their senior high school year to obtain a general diploma that enables them to proceed to university.

Learn more: <http://unifem.org/jo>
www.unifem.org/worldwide/arab_states.php

LEFT: At two UNIFEM women's centres in the West Bank, women can prepare for a comprehensive exam that enables them to proceed to university.



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UNIFEM turns to the milestone commitments of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as a powerful advocacy tool. In 1999, at a time when only a handful of Arab States had signed the Convention, the fund convened one of the first public discussions on CEDAW and Islamic Sharia. A network of CEDAW experts from six Arab States was formed and national initiatives began. After Syria ratified CEDAW in 2003, UNIFEM partnered with the Syrian Women's Union to work on national applications of the Convention with ministry officials.

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