

# SESSION 5:

## Mapping the Political Scene

(Approx. 4 hours in total)

### Session Objectives

- To map the challenges and opportunities for political action
- To explore which spheres of political power we should seek to influence—local, national, or international
- To consider what steps need to be taken to create a political platform

## 5.1

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### Exercise: Seeking Solidarity

(Approx. 30 min.)

Ask a volunteer or two from the group to read aloud the following news article on the Arab women’s nationality campaign.

#### **Nationality Is A Right For Me And My Family Campaign**

“My husband is Palestinian. He cannot live with me in Bahrain. We are separated most of the time. I love my husband but we have made the decision not to have children because we do not want to bring into this world a child who will be discriminated against and who will not have equal rights.”

– *Fatima, 25, Bahraini woman married to a Palestinian national*

“My sister died before being able to pass on her nationality to her family. I am demonstrating here today in her memory.”

– *Khadija, 58, Moroccan, speaking of her sister Saida who was married to a non-Moroccan national*

**“We will take action. The parliamentary elections will be held in June. We are calling for a boycott of all candidates who are not committed to reforming the nationality law.”**

**– Suraya, 32, Lebanese woman married to an Egyptian national**

In most countries in the Arab world, only fathers are allowed to transmit their nationality to their spouses and children. Nationality laws are among the most discriminatory in this region as they blatantly state that men can transmit their nationality while women cannot. Nationality laws in the Arab region are not only violating the principle of equality among citizens upheld by most constitutions, but are also ensuring that women remain second-class citizens enjoying far fewer rights and privileges than men.

In 2002, women activists from six Arab countries—Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, and Syria—joined forces to challenge such discrimination. Together they created a regional campaign calling for full and equal rights for women and men, and for the reform of nationality laws in all Arab countries. This reform, they said, was an absolute necessity as discrimination in nationality laws violates women’s basic right to provide their families with the same education, health care, and economic and political representation as men.

Campaign activists began by listening to women married to non-nationals, collecting their stories and transforming them into campaign messages. The stories were used to draw attention to petitions and attract media interest. Public events, testimonials, sit-ins, and direct discussions with parliamentarians, decision-makers, and the media sent clear messages about the impact of this injustice and the need for reform.

Solidarity among women in Arab countries involved in the campaign was and remains a critical success factor. In 2004, Egypt became the first Arab country to reform its nationality laws. “We are continually checking to make sure the law is being applied, and we have succeeded in taking to court and winning the right for women to give their nationality to their children if married to a Palestinian man,” says campaign activist Mirvat Abu Teej, a member of the Women’s Forum for Development in Egypt. Algeria followed suit in 2005, and more recently Morocco in 2008.

In 2006, the Lebanon-based regional coordinator of the nationality campaign, Collective for Research and Training for Development–Action (CRTD.A), and Women’s Learning Partnership launched the campaign on an international level. Since then, a Facebook presence was created<sup>9</sup> that now has more than 24,000 active members taking part in collective action to demand reform of nationality laws in the Arab region.

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9 [http://apps.facebook.com/causes/view\\_cause/17486](http://apps.facebook.com/causes/view_cause/17486)

To date, the Nationality Is A Right For Me And My Family campaign continues to lobby for women’s full and active citizenship rights using all available and innovative methods and tools such as ICTs, as well as building leadership skills of women and men affected by unequal and discriminatory laws. Though many Arab countries have yet to reform their laws, the nationality campaign is increasing the pressure on them by exposing their discriminatory practices and engaging tens of thousands of people in the debate across the region.



**Questions for Group Discussion**

Pose the following questions to the workshop participants, and ask a volunteer to record the answers on the board.

- Which women’s rights issues should be addressed nationally, or even internationally?
- What international mechanisms, commissions, or courts do you know of that will take up a local issue at the international level?
- How important to your legislators or other government leaders is what other nearby countries are doing? Are your government leaders influenced by other governments? Why or why not?

Ask the group to brainstorm for which countries they feel a natural kinship with the women who live there, and with the human rights challenges these women face. Record the list on the board. Have participants explain why they chose those countries.

Consider what might be the advantages of undertaking advocacy, networking, campaigning, and alliance-building internationally. What are some of the disadvantages? Make two columns on the board and ask participants to brainstorm the pros and the cons of campaigning on issues with women from other countries.

Pros	Cons

## 5.2

### Exercise: Political Power in Our Community

(Approx. 60 min.)

Ask a volunteer to read the following quote from Rabéa Naciri<sup>10</sup>, leading women’s rights advocate in Morocco.



*“The lesson that I have drawn from my years of political organizing is that for a person or a group of people to bring about change, they must first have a clear vision. Secondly, they must develop their long-term and short-term action plans. And thirdly, they must build coalitions and attract media coverage to their cause. With these steps in place, it is possible to succeed in a political campaign.”*

Break the group into three teams (A, B, and C) and ask each team to make a list:

Ask team “A” to brainstorm the most powerful *local* people and governing bodies. Define “local” for the team to clarify the parameters of their inquiry.

Ask team “B” to brainstorm the most powerful people and governing bodies *regionally*. Define “regional” for the team to clarify the parameters of their inquiry.

Ask team “C” to brainstorm the most powerful people and governing bodies *nationally*. Define “national” for the team so as to clarify the parameters of their inquiry.

<b>Most powerful people and governing bodies locally</b>	<b>Most powerful people and governing bodies regionally</b>	<b>Most powerful people and governing bodies nationally</b>
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After ten minutes, reconvene the group and have each group record their list on the board, filling in three columns:

Ask the group to consider their Session 4 Goal , and then to identify those persons and entities in the three columns that could help or hinder their efforts. Circle the “helpful” entities in one color, and the “hindering” entities in another.

<sup>10</sup> Rabéa Naciri is a founding member of Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc, a WLP partner. She has served as the coordinator of the Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalité, a network of women’s associations and women researchers from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia committed to women’s rights, as well as the “Equality without Reservation” campaign for full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Naciri has written several articles and other publications on Arab women and poverty, women and Islam, capacity-building for women, and strategy development for the promotion of women’s rights. She is a Professor in the Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines at the University of Rabat in Morocco.

Together, the group should consider which persons or entities might already support the Session 4 Goal, and which persons or entities might be persuaded to support it. Record the results of this discussion on the board.



### Questions for Group Discussion

- In which political context do we want to press for our Session 4 Goal/s? Is it local, national, and/or international?
- Whom do we need to influence?
- What governing body/bodies do we need to join, appease, and/or persuade?
- Are there governing bodies/political frameworks we should work to influence? If so, what are they?

## 5.3

### Exercise: Why should someone vote for me?

(Approx. 60 min.)

Ask a volunteer to read the story below.



*Maria had to remind herself to breathe, she was so excited. Sitting on the stage with the other candidates, all old men in wrinkled suits, was a woman named Carla Hernandez. Months ago, Carla had come to Maria's church and met with many of the women parishioners to tell them about herself and to ask them for their vote. Maria liked Carla instantly. Carla was warm, articulate, and seemed to exude honesty. Even though Maria and the others donated money to Carla Hernandez's campaign, and had put up signs throughout the city to support her, Maria could hardly believe that Carla was up there, about to take the podium in a real political debate with the men who were also running for mayor.*

*The men went first. They each said the same things they always said, accusing each other of corruption, promising prosperity, and professing how much they loved their beautiful city. Finally it was Carla's turn:*

*"I am a new kind of candidate. I can really change the things that need to be changed in this city," she began. The audience, which had been drifting away in boredom, was suddenly very attentive. Carla went on to describe her experience and compare herself to the other candidates. She talked a great deal about the terrible poverty in the city, and how the current mayor was failing at his job. The audience was again starting to lose interest. Maria kept hoping that Carla would talk about what she planned to do, and why people should vote for her. Carla*

*finished her speech telling the audience why she loved the city so much. Maria looked around and could see that most of the audience had already left.*



### Questions for Group Discussion

- Could the audience understand what Carla Hernandez's plans were for their city?
- What would have been the advantage of her stating clearly her aims and what she planned to do if elected? What would have been the risk?
- What is a political platform? Did Carla present one?



### Circle Activity

Imagine that you are running for political office. As the facilitator, pick the political office that makes the most sense for your group: municipal council, local congress, Parliament, trade union council, president, or other, and tell the participants that they are, collectively, a single candidate for this office.

Beginning with yourself, finish this sentence: "If I were elected, I would . . ." and name one goal or activity. Continue around the circle so that everyone has a chance to build the political platform of the candidate.



### Questions for Group Discussion

- Did you like the candidate's platform? Why or why not?
- If you were really running for office, how would you shape your platform?
- Would you already know what your political platform would be? Or would you want to talk to others (your family, your advisors, your core constituents) to get their perspective? Why or why not?

Give everyone paper and pencil. Ask participants to write down what political office they might consider seeking. If some participants feel that they would never want to be a politician, just ask them to choose a political office for the purpose of the exercise.

Next ask participants to write down four principles and/or aims of their candidacy. After five or ten minutes, ask for volunteers to read their political platforms. Keep going until everyone who wants to share her platform has had a chance to speak.

## 5.4

### Exercise: Quotas. What are they? Why use them? Why not?<sup>11</sup>

(Approx. 45 min)

Ask volunteers to read this information on quotas and the news article that follows:

Women face unique challenges to their political participation. Among these are cultural expectations and the burdens of caring for their families, less access to high paying jobs and powerful social networks, lower education, and higher rates of poverty. To leapfrog the incremental advancements of women in the social and economic arenas, some governments have adopted quota systems as a strategy for inserting a higher percentage of women into seats of political power.

#### What is a Quota?

A quota is a numerical goal that represents a target minimum or maximum. In politics, gender quotas set a minimum threshold for female representation. Quotas are a solution to the historical problem of under-representation of women in politics related to a variety of traditional, socio-cultural, religious, and other reasons.



25 December 2009, WLP

#### Women Hold Up Half the Sky, But Not Parliament

*“Women hold up half the sky,” goes the Chinese proverb, but women aren’t even half way to achieving equality with men in national legislative bodies. In 2009, 18.0% of the legislators in Parliaments were women, up from 17.7% at the end of 2006 and 15.7% in December 2004. The progress is incremental. Inter-Parliamentary Union Secretary-General Anders Johnsson noted that at this rate, “We will not achieve parity in Parliament before 2050.”*

*According to IPU<sup>12</sup>, eight countries have no women legislators at all, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, and the Pacific island nations of Micronesia, Nauru,*

<sup>11</sup> Please see Appendix H: Quotas as a Gender Equity Measure for additional information.

<sup>12</sup> [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)

*Palau, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu. In Lebanon, Iran, Egypt, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Yemen women represent 3% or less of Parliament.*

*Half the countries above 30% are from the developing world including Burundi, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. Rwanda is at the top of the list with 56.3% women members followed by Sweden at 46.4%, South Africa at 44.5%, and Cuba at 43.2%.*

*Although quotas remain controversial, many political scientists are quick to note that in most countries where more than 30% of parliamentarians are women, there is some form of quota in place. Notable exceptions are Finland, Denmark, and Cuba.*

*As the debate about the use of quotas to increase the political participation of women gains momentum, the impact is being felt at all levels of government, from local councils to national Parliaments. The visible presence of women in political office sends a message to young people that women can and should contribute to the legislative process.*

*Still, the politically-charged question remains: what does it imply to be elected to Parliament as a 'quota woman'?*



### **Questions for Group Discussion**

Take a few minutes for a general discussion on quotas using the following questions to guide the discussions:

- What is the percentage of women in the house of Parliament and in the cabinet in your country?
- Have there been any changes during the past decade? Are more women running for elections?
- Does your country have a quota system? Since when? What result did it have on women's political participation?
- Have you ever voted for women in your country? Why or why not?

## **5.4 (Continued)**

### **Quota Exercise**

Ask volunteers to read the following story from Lebanon:



*In February 2010, the Lebanese Cabinet discussed and approved a women's quota of 20% to be applicable during the country's forthcoming local municipal elections planned for June 2010. Women's representation in local municipal councils in Lebanon is very recent (since the 2004 local elections) and has never*



*exceeded 1%. Lebanon did not fare better in parliamentary elections where women's representation does not exceed 3%. For the past three decades, women's organizations have been lobbying for a women quota in parliamentary and local elections and for the application of the Beijing Platform for Action which recommended provision of a 30% quota.*

*As most women's organizations celebrated the Lebanese government's baby steps in putting in place a women's quota, they were nevertheless surprised by an article published in the local press and written by one of their own.*

*Farida Hajjar, a well-known veteran of the women's movement and a lifetime president of an association which supports poor women in remote areas, launched a vociferous attack on the new law. According to her, "Women in rural areas as well as in poor urban areas are ill-prepared to enter the world of politics. The quota system will force them into politics and will result in having incompetent women in politics simply because they are women." According to Hajjar, "A quota system is artificial and non-democratic. Women will enter politics when they are ready. There is no need for such measures."*

*Shortly after this article was published, several parliamentarians known for their position against the women's quota declared to the local press that, "They would certainly be reluctant to vote for the law especially since there is no consensus on the quota system amongst women themselves!"*



### Team Activity

After reading the story, break the group into two or three teams. Ask the teams to brainstorm the following questions:

- What do you think about the arguments put forward by Farida against the women's quota?
- Do you think that the lack of consensus on the quota among women's organizations will affect women's political participation?  
What do you think will happen in the case of Lebanon?
- What are your views and position vis-à-vis the women's quota?
- Do you think it would help if a women's quota is proposed as a temporary measure until approximate parity is reached?

## 5.5

### Exercise: When there is no support....

(Approx. 45 min)

Ask volunteers to read the following story from Turkey:



*Gulser Esim was born in 1939. She has established the Tomurcuk Cooperative in Istanbul to serve disabled children and their families.*

*Gulser participated in a conference on women and politics in the mid-eighties. The conference was organized on the occasion of International Women's Day by a local political party to which she belonged and as a precursor to upcoming local elections.*

*Women party members were weary of the men. According to them, their male colleagues were simply "piggy-backing on their votes." Back then, Gulser felt quite happy about women awakening to the fact that their battles will not be fought by men in the party.*

*Strengthened and motivated by this realization, she decided to run for the local elections. She felt greatly concerned for and totally committed to her community. She was particularly aware of the need to fight for women's rights, equality, and dignity and she was ready for that fight.*

*Once Gulser's candidacy was made public, the women who were complaining about their fellow male party members came to see her. One of them, Ayse, tried hard to convince her to withdraw. Ayse said that if Gulser would withdraw, she would convince the party to give her husband a seat on the party's executive bureau. In any case, Ayse added, nobody would really vote for Gulser.*

*These arguments convinced Gulser that she should run for these elections regardless of her chances to win. She recalls that the pre-elections campaigning was one of the most exciting periods of her life. There were eleven candidates of whom two were women. Gulser lost the elections with a 15% margin but she was not deterred.*

*She remained convinced that more and more women should engage in politics. As an active member of the Tomurcuk Cooperative, she remains actively engaged in mobilizing women for political participation.*



### Questions for Group Discussion

- Do you think that Gulser should have gone ahead with her candidacy even though she knew that she would not have political support from her party?
- What was the point she was trying to make?
- In your opinion, why would Ayse and other women from the party try to deter Gulser from running?
- In your experience, do women vote for women candidate? Why or why not?
- What is the position of political parties in your country regarding women's participation in elections?
- Gulser seems to have been empowered and motivated by this experience. Even though she has not won, people voted for her. What do you think she has learned?