



Development
Progress

Case Study Report

*Women's empowerment
and political voice*



THE ROAD TO REFORM Women's political voice in Morocco

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Cover image: Moroccan women at an event
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Protest in Rabat, Morocco. Photo: © Hasna Lahmini.

Abstract

Since the 1990s, women in Morocco have acquired progressively greater voice and representation in civil society and the formal political system, and they have become politically active in new ways. This political engagement has led to a series of institutional, legal and policy reforms that have strengthened women's formal rights. These reforms have, in turn, created further opportunity structures for women to exercise voice, both within formal politics and broader society. Women have mobilised, built alliances and campaigned for change,

responding to rapidly shifting political opportunities and positioning their claims within the context of broader political contestations. This iterative interaction between agency through mobilisation and institutional change through policy reforms is at the heart of the story of progress on women's political voice in Morocco. The study also shows that the socio-political context – in particular women's access to employment and social services – has both encouraged and constrained reform.

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, women in Morocco – led by a broad-based and politically skilled women’s movement – have acquired progressively greater political voice and representation in the political system and civil society, leading to a series of institutional, legal and policy reforms that have strengthened women’s rights. These reforms provide a critical framework within which women can make further claims on the state, and they send a powerful signal to society about the future direction of women’s public role and positioning in Morocco. This case study explores this progress.

1.1 Why women’s political voice in Morocco?

The history of women’s political mobilisation, and their demands for rights in Morocco, provides an important example of how excluded and adversely incorporated groups can achieve greater political voice, even in a context where they face serious obstacles. In Morocco’s case, this includes a highly restricted political space; significant structural barriers that limit women’s autonomy and action; and the co-option of their demands within broader political struggles over the very nature of the political settlement (grounded in a struggle between traditional elites and Islamist movements). Despite these obstacles, women’s mobilisation in Morocco has achieved levels of formal rights and political inclusion that women elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (with the exception of Tunisia – see Chambers and Cummings, 2014) have not been able to achieve. Women’s rights have also advanced more strongly than those of other marginalised groups in Morocco (such as the Berber community), both because of the effectiveness of their mobilisation and because of support from the monarchy.

This context makes exploring progress in political voice in Morocco worthwhile and likely to generate useful lessons for enhanced political voice elsewhere.

Since the 1990s, women in Morocco have mobilised to demand rights and political inclusion in a way that is largely unprecedented within the MENA region, and in a context of a constitutional monarchy with limited democratic space. This mobilisation has resulted in significant policy changes to expand women’s rights, increase space for women in political institutions and make budgetary provisions which enable social and economic progress for women and girls. These changes have taken place in the context of ongoing elite-led reforms, including some efforts to open up the political system, as well as a rise

‘It is unquestionable that over the past 20 years women have acquired much greater voice in the political system [in Morocco]. There has been a big change in the landscape compared to the 1980s’ (Female journalist)

in political Islamist movements that challenge the women’s rights agenda. Within this shifting political context, Moroccan women have been able to build broad and effective alliances, take advantage of emerging opportunities and create compelling narratives to gain public support.

Policy changes which seek to alter power structures, redefine the nature of the political settlement and enable greater equality are not simply a technical exercise, but require an adjustment to the political settlement and inevitably take time to take root. As such, it perhaps should not surprise us that the legal policy reforms achieved as a result of women’s mobilisation have taken time to filter through to changes on the ground. This can be explained by a high degree of contestation persisting around these reforms, resulting in slow and inconsistent implementation. This has been compounded by discriminatory social attitudes and structural barriers. However, there is no question that the policy reforms that began in the late 1990s provide a framework within which women can make further claims. Those reforms also send a powerful signal about the future direction of women’s rights and public roles.

1.2 The context: Monarchy, reform, rise of political Islam

Morocco is a monarchy in which the King and related elite – the *Makhzen*¹ – enjoy vast power. For the four decades following independence in 1956, Morocco was a highly authoritarian state in which the monarch controlled the executive, the judiciary and the legislature and acted as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, as well as playing a powerful religious and cultural role as ‘Commander of the Faithful’. But due to a series of top-down reforms made in the 1990s and 2000s to open some political space and improve the protection of human rights, Morocco is now considered to be one of the more liberal countries in the MENA region. The Freedom House assessment of political

1 The *Makhzen* is the traditional establishment centred on the monarch. It comprises members of the royal family, top-ranking military and security services personnel, leading civil servants, important business leaders and others.

Box 1: Understanding political voice

In this case study we understand political voice as encompassing citizens' freedom to express their opinions without fear of reprisal, the degree of responsiveness to these views and the possibility that citizens can influence policy decisions through public participation and engagement. Political voice therefore depends both on citizens' ability to mobilise collectively and on the government providing guarantees for a humane, fair and just society, implemented through the effective rule of law (Stiglitz et al. 2009).

Different groups in society have different experiences of what political voice means. Voice can play a crucial role in holding the state to account, but the power of citizens to influence political outcomes depends on the institutional context; the degree to which the state is receptive to the views being expressed; and whether it has the will and/or capacity to respond to citizens' demands and concerns (Gloppen et al. 2003; Moore and Teskey 2006; O'Neil et al. 2007).

rights and civil liberties, for example, has ranked Morocco and Lebanon joint second after Tunisia (Freedom House, 2013).² These reforms were prompted by international and internal pressure and Morocco's wish to become a key partner for the west.

Reforms were initiated in 1996 by Hassan II. However, when Mohammad VI acceded to the throne in 1999, he accelerated the reform process. These reforms included creating an elected Chamber of Representatives, enabling opposition parties to join formal politics, easing press controls, investigating past abuses by the state and decentralisation. Issues of women's rights featured within this reform agenda, as one of the reforms promoted by Mohammad VI was reform of the *Moudawana*, or personal status code. Although these reforms sent important signals and did partially open political space, in practice parliament remained unable to challenge the *Makhzen*, most political parties were co-opted by the palace, the party system remained dysfunctional, and until 2011 elections were not fully free and fair.

The main recent political threat to the monarchy and the establishment has come from Islamist movements. These reject the prevailing political system and the King's extensive powers – in particular his status as 'commander of the faithful' – and seek to promote an Islamic state based on Sharia. The palace has been unable to co-opt political Islamist movements as it had done with many of Morocco's more mainstream political parties and has

instead attempted to repress these movements or reduce their influence. For example, Morocco's most popular movement is the banned *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* (Justice and Charity), a non-violent Islamist organisation founded in the 1980s, which openly challenges the power of the monarch.

In 2011 the Arab Spring dramatically altered the political landscape in Morocco. As neighbouring countries overthrew authoritarian regimes, Mohammad VI reacted swiftly to the 20 February protest movement, promising wide-ranging constitutional reforms, including an elected government and an independent judiciary. A draft constitution was approved on 1 July 2011 via a referendum. The 2011 constitution enshrines the principles of cultural and linguistic pluralism, individual rights and the equality of citizens – including of women and men. However, the sovereign's powers are left largely intact. He can still by-pass parliament by making decisions through *dahirs* (decrees), he remains the country's supreme religious and military authority, and he retains the power to convene the cabinet and veto major decisions.

The reforms of 2011 brought a moderate Islamist opposition party, the Justice and Development Party (PJD), to power for the first time. This government has struggled to genuinely lead the policy-making process, as it remains dominated by the palace and *Makhzen* from behind the scenes. However, the fact that the PJD has been allowed to head the government shows that the boundaries of the political system are expanding.

This history of top-down reform, the rise of Islamist movements, street protest and further democratisation has been the critical context against which women's demands for rights and political inclusion have been made. By opening new political space and freedoms, the reforms of the 1990s and 2000s provided women with the opportunity to enter that space, organise themselves formally and make demands. During this period the women's rights agenda aligned well with that of the monarchy-led reform process. However, the rise of Islamist movements during this period challenged women's demands for rights, undermined elite support for reform and created a powerful narrative against women's rights to which the women's movement had to respond. Finally, the street protests of 2011 and the deeper reforms that have followed had particularly paradoxical outcomes for women. While constitutional reform enshrined women's equality and initiated institutional mechanisms to protect their rights, the first genuinely democratic election held in 2011 brought to power a moderate Islamist party – the PJD – that is opposed to progress on women's rights.

2 The Freedom House ratings use criteria such as the electoral process, the degree of political participation, and the functioning of government as components of political rights. Civil liberties are judged on the degree of freedom of expression and belief, associational and organisational rights, the rule of law and individual rights.

1.3 Methodology

This case study results from desk-based research undertaken between February and July 2013. It focused around the following research question:

- How and why have women in Morocco achieved greater inclusion in the political system and what difference this is making?

Sub-questions included:

- What policy-level progress has been made since the early 1990s in increasing women's political voice, as well as their representation in civil society and the political system?
- What institutional and legal reforms have strengthened their formal rights?
- How have women mobilised, built alliances and campaigned for change and what are the political drivers and constraints that have shaped their ability to do so?
- How have women responded to rapidly shifting political opportunities and positioned their claims within the context of broader political contestations?
- Which financing mechanisms have helped to support change?
- How has the socio-political context – in particular women's access to employment and social services – both encouraged and constrained reform?

The research team comprised international researchers led from the Overseas Development Institute in London and a local consultant based in Morocco. The team analysed primary and secondary data and literature and

conducted interviews with independent experts, politicians, civil society representatives, domestic and international NGOs, donor representatives, and academics involved in the women's movement policy and political reforms in Morocco. Unfortunately, despite efforts to do so, it proved impossible to interview any government civil servants.

This study seeks to explore the policy-level progress made since the early 1990s in increasing women's political voice, as well as their representation in civil society and the political system, and the institutional and legal reforms that have strengthened their formal rights. It examines how women have mobilised, built alliances and campaigned for change and the political drivers and constraints that have shaped their ability to do so. It assesses how women have responded to rapidly shifting political opportunities and positioned their claims within the context of broader political contestations. It also analyses the mechanisms through which financing has helped to support change, and how the socio-political context – in particular women's access to employment and social services – has both encouraged and constrained reform.

Following this introduction, Section 2 describes the main indicators of progress in women's political voice in Morocco since the 1990s. Section 3 goes on to look at the main factors that have enabled progress in four areas – women's political mobilisation, the opening of political space, wider socio-economic changes and gender-responsive budgetary reform – and the role of external support. Section 4 examines the principal challenges in making further progress in using political voice to achieve gender equality and women's rights in practice. Finally, Section 5 draws out the main lessons from this experience.

Political voice and women's empowerment

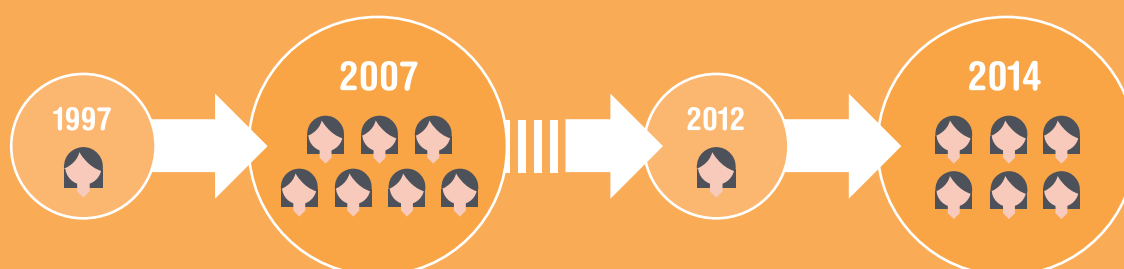


20 years ago, women were largely excluded from political institutions. Their representation in the political system has increased as a result of both the active role of civil society and women's groups and important legal and constitutional reforms.

Women in parliament



Women in government



1997 – 2007

Women first became part of the Moroccan government in 1997, when a woman was named Secretary of State.

2012 – 2014

After a considerable setback during the Islamist-led government (2012-2013), which only had one female minister, the most recent government has six.

1. Source: UN Statistics 2013.

2. Source: Press clipping www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/sections/analysis/2013/10/11/Morocco-second-Benkirane-cabinet-strong-women_9445955.html

2. What progress has been achieved?

Since the 1990s, women in Morocco have acquired progressively greater voice and representation in civil society and the formal political system, and they have become politically active in new ways. This political engagement has led to a series of institutional, legal and policy reforms that have strengthened women's formal rights. These reforms have, in turn, created further opportunity structures for women to exercise voice, both within formal politics and broader society. This iterative interaction between agency through mobilisation and structural change through institutional and policy reforms is at the heart of the story of recent progress on women's political voice in Morocco and is located within a wider political history of limited democratisation, as well as a more recent history of limited, top-down reform that has created new political processes and spaces that women have been quick to use or occupy. It also has deeper roots in the nationalist and anti-colonial struggle from which collective mobilisation for rights, democracy and women's rights in Morocco all emerged.

The progress achieved on women's political voice and rights also needs to be understood within the context of the broader MENA region. This region is characterised by entrenched gender inequality in which women face severe social, political and economic constraints on their agency and political voice. It is also largely characterised by authoritarian political systems and lack of political space for *any* citizen demands. In recent years powerful political Islamist movements have also risen, which have provided the main opposition to authoritarian rule, but which also reject many elements of the women's rights agenda. This context makes the ability of Moroccan women to promote their rights and influence policy all the more remarkable. Their campaign to reform family law in particular has been held up as a model for women's movements across the region.

Below we outline some of the key building blocks which have enabled women's increased political voice in Morocco, which include:

- political opening and increased numbers of women in politics
- legal reforms to advance women's rights, and
- women's place in broader economic progress.

We discuss these below and outline the drivers behind them in Section 3.

2.1 Political opening and increased number of women in politics

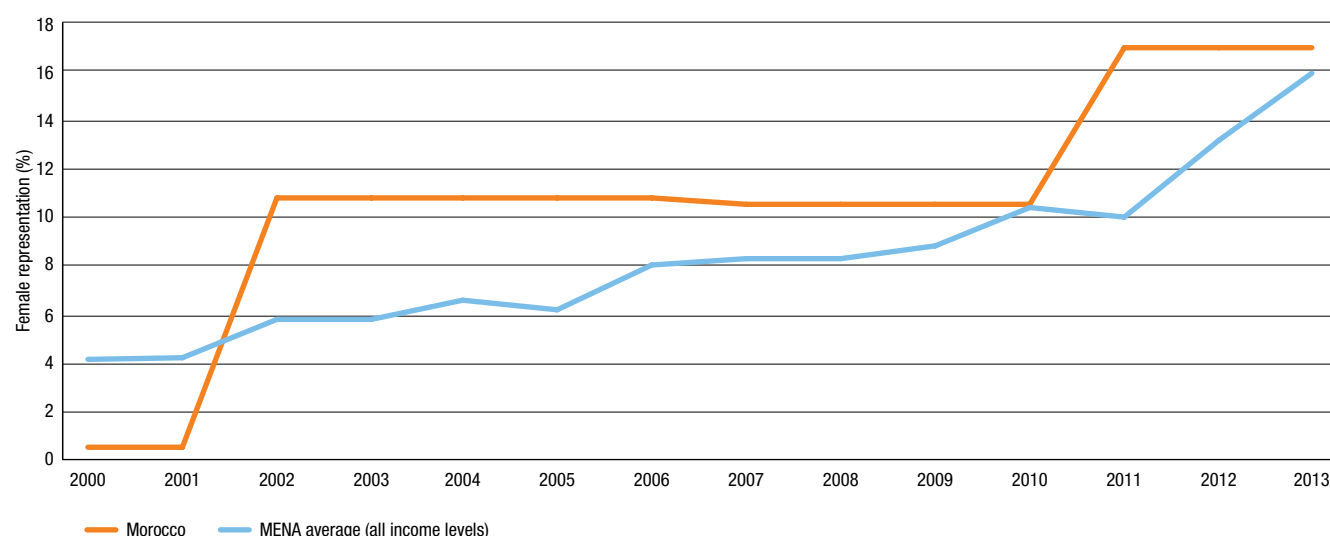
Pro-democratic reforms discussed in the introduction, if still limited, have opened up opportunities for at least some citizens to exercise greater political voice, including those who were previously excluded or adversely incorporated economically, socially and politically. For women in particular, even though there are important differences between them (socio-culturally, ideologically and politically and in terms of wealth and agency), the breadth of Morocco's women's movement and the agility of the movement's leadership in creating a 'broad tent' has meant that democratisation and the flowering of social movements and freedom of expression has contributed importantly to progress in women's political voice. This political opening has thrown up its own challenges, but these are discussed below in section 4.

One of the major accomplishments of this type of opening has been creating greater space for women's participation within political institutions. This has gradually increased since the early 1990s, starting from an extremely low base. A series of pro-democratic reforms have created opportunities for women to press for inclusion within newly opened formal political spaces and women activists have been effective in doing so.

Women gained the right to vote in Morocco's post-independence 1962 constitution. This was highly contested and Morocco's women's movement mobilised to ensure that the universal franchise was delivered. Women's ability to express their political preferences took another leap in 1993, when the first woman was elected to parliament. Women remained largely excluded from political institutions, though, until the 2000s when they mobilised to press for quotas and other policies intended to help women enter political institutions in significant numbers.

Morocco's 1962 constitution (Article 30) states that women and men should have equal access to elected office. Women activists used this constitutional right to lobby for parity on electoral lists or a minimum representation of 30%. This activism resulted in change in the form of quotas. The Communal Charter, introduced in 2008, provided a 12% quota for women's representation through the creation of 'additional election constituencies' for women. A 'support fund for the promotion of women representatives' was also launched, which also provided financial incentives to political parties to increase the number of seats held by women. These measures helped women win more than 12%

Figure 1: Women in parliament – Morocco and the MENA region



Source: UN Statistics, 2013.

of seats at the 2009 local elections (98% of which were in districts set aside for women), a substantial increase on the 2003 local elections, when women won less than 1% of seats (Quota Project, 2014).

The adoption of proportional representation in 2002 also opened new opportunities and political parties agreed to a voluntary reservation of 30 seats for women in the 325-seat Assembly of Representatives. Following the Arab spring, advocacy by the women's movement saw this increased to 60 seats (out of an expanded 395) and this was enshrined within the 2011 constitution.³ Women's access to political office has climbed and they now occupy 17% of parliamentary seats, more than the regional average (see Figure 2).

Despite the many constraints, women politicians have shown leadership and made an impact on policy, for example pushing parliament to reform the nationality law (key informant interview). And some women have achieved senior leadership roles, with the leader of the *Parti Socialiste Unifié* (Unified Socialist Party) being a woman.

2.2 Legal reforms to advance women's rights

Since the early 1990s there have been a series of legal reforms in Morocco that have gradually helped to advance women's formal legal rights.⁴ These have the potential to enhance women's agency, with positive implications for their political voice. Early reforms were limited in scope and impact but they played an important role in bringing

debates about women's rights into the public domain and building momentum for the more substantial changes, for example reform of the *Moudawana* in 2004.

In the remainder of this section, we outline the key policy reforms, which includes ratification of international conventions, changes to labour and family codes, reform of nationality law and the constitution, and amendments to criminal legislation.

2.2.1 CEDAW

In 1993, Morocco ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) following an extensive campaign by women's organisations. By signing up to this international agreement, the government acknowledged the universality of women's rights (although specifically excluded particular clauses of the agreement, which we discuss later). This gave the Moroccan women's movement leverage in their negotiations for progress in domestic legislation and as such was an important milestone in progress in women's political voice.

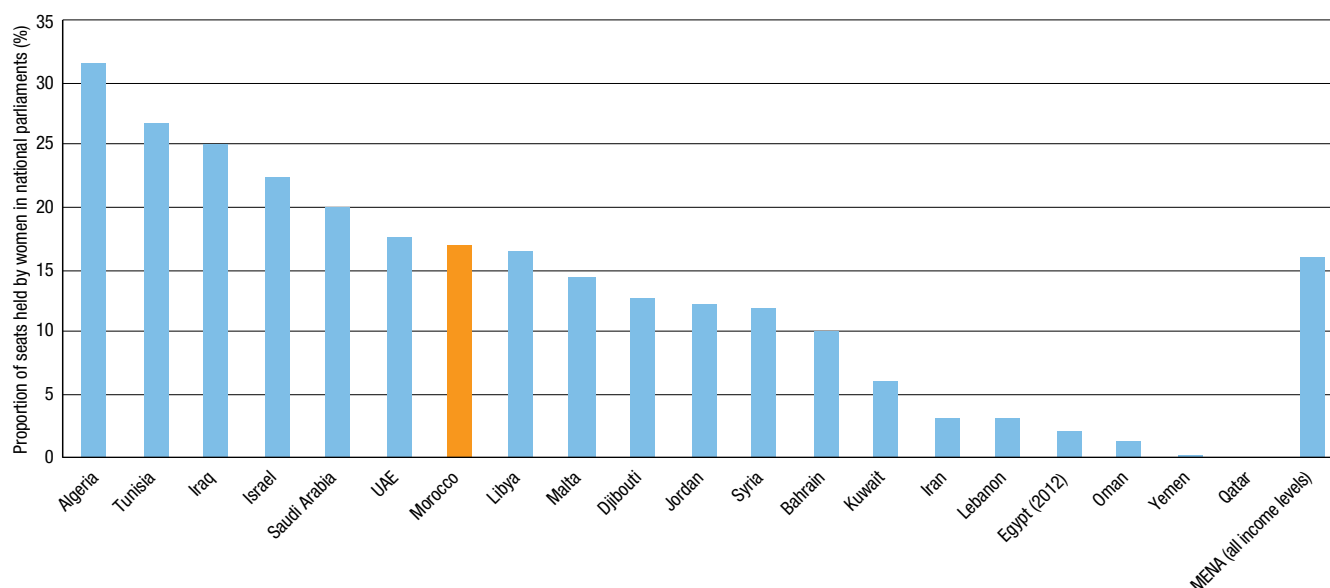
2.2.2 Labour code (2003)

The revised labour code of 2003 recognised gender-based discrimination and criminalised sexual harassment in the workplace.

3 Source: La Vie Eco www.lavieeco.com/news/politique/il-y-a-un-an-le-maroc-politique-faisait-sa-revolution-23699.html. The impact of this may have been somewhat watered down by 30 seats being reserved for Youth (interpreted as men under 40).

4 Alongside these legal reforms there were a number of accompanying policy changes. In the late 1990s a National Plan for the Integration of Women in Development (PNIFD) was formulated. Following extensive debate on gender issues, it was later dropped because it was deemed too contentious in the context of the wider political challenges.

Figure 2: Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%)



Source: Data from database: World Development Indicators. Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (www.ipu.org). (Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%). Women in parliaments are the percentage of parliamentary seats in a single or lower chamber held by women.) Last Updated: 11/06/2014.

2.2.3 Moudawana (personal status code) reform (2004)

At the heart of the debate over women's rights in Morocco – as in many other Muslim contexts – is the question of family and personal status law. The *Moudawana* was established in 1957 and was the only set of legal codes to be governed by Islamic law. It was highly discriminatory against women, giving them the status of a minor. It codified women's subordinate status within the family and in relation to issues such as divorce, marriage, child custody, inheritance and property rights. As such, it was seen by many as reinforcing women's limited physical, social and financial autonomy and increased their exposure to a range of human rights abuses, from forced and child marriage to various forms of gender-based violence. It also has a fundamental impact on women's agency, not just within the home, as it influences their ability to take on economic and political roles. Reform of family law has therefore been the central demand of the women's movement in Morocco over the last twenty years and so gaining this reform was another important milestone in progress for women's political voice.

'The (reform of the) Mudawana is the biggest reform over the last few years and a great step towards development. It has allowed women's issues to be brought into discussion on a societal level and that in itself was a milestone' (Female political party member)

Minor reforms were made to the *Moudawana* in 1993 following a sustained campaign by women activists. These were highly significant as they demonstrated that the *Moudawana* was not a sacred and unalterable text as opponents to reforms claimed. Substantial reform followed in 2004, which led to the *Moudawana* being renamed the 'Family Code' and included:

- Eliminating the principle of a wife being obliged to obey her husband
- Establishing equal parental responsibility for the household and children
- Giving women the right to decide legal matters without male guardianship
- Requiring consent from both spouses to dissolve their marriage, as opposed to a husband being able to repudiate his wife unilaterally
- Raising the age of marriage from 15 to 18 years of age
- Establishing more women-friendly judicial family divisions.

Morocco's 2004 Family Code is now one of the most progressive in the Arab world. The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) identified it as the second most liberal of six countries in the MENA region in terms of its treatment of women, placing it behind only Tunisia.⁵ The reformed legislation provides an important platform for transforming gender power relations within the family, strengthening women's rights, and improving their quality of life (Pittman, 2008).

⁵ The SIGI ranked only Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Tunisia, Syria and Yemen, representing less than half of the countries in the MENA region.

2.2.4 Nationality law (2007)

The reform of Morocco's nationality law meant that children could gain Moroccan citizenship through their mothers for the first time. Placing this within its regional context, similar reforms have been seen in Egypt and other countries in the MENA region. Nevertheless, 11 of the 29 countries that discriminate against women in the area of nationality are in the MENA region (Women's Refugee Commission, 2013).

2.2.5 Constitutional reform (2011)

The new constitution of 2011 responded to the demands of the Arab Spring uprising and strengthened and institutionalised women's rights. Women's rights activists mobilised and were able to strongly influence the drafting process, so that the revised constitution responded to many of their outstanding demands.⁶ The main gender-related provisions in the 2011 constitution include:

- Asserting equal political, civil, social and economic rights for women and men.
- Prohibiting all forms of discrimination, with specific mention of gender-based discrimination.
- Giving the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) constitutional status, independence and a judicial mandate to monitor the observance of human rights.⁷
- Providing for the creation of a specific authority to promote equality and fight all forms of discrimination, to be established by the NHRC.⁸
- Recognising the supremacy of international gender-related laws over national law, opening the way for lifting the reservations on CEDAW.

2.2.6 Criminal legislation (2014)

A parliamentary amendment to the penal code (Article 475) removed the proviso that a rapist could escape prosecution by marrying his victim, even if she was underage. This reform was in response to an intensive

campaign by Moroccan women's groups and international human rights organisations following the suicide of 16-year-old, Amina Filali, in 2012 after she was forced to marry her rapist. This important progress has been celebrated by Moroccan women's organisations, which are determined to push for the substantial overhaul of the country's laws dealing with rape.

'This is now the new arena of women's mobilisation – ensuring constitutional provisions are implemented. This will be a long struggle ahead and a key challenge for Morocco' (Female member, rights NGO)

2.2.7 Budgetary reform

Changes to the way that Morocco analyses its budget for its gender inclusiveness have also been made. These are discussed in Box 2.

2.3 Women's place in broader economic progress

Before the 1980s, the state played a key role in the economy, determining strategic sectors and providing generous investment incentives. The economy was largely dominated by large elite-owned farms alongside many smallholders, and was relatively closed to trade and investment. The fiscal crisis of the 1980s necessitated an IMF loan, which came with the standard structural adjustment programme (SAP). This led to substantial macroeconomic liberalisation and to more limited structural transformation. The reforms involved moving towards market-based financial and economic systems and reducing the role of the state, the financial sector was liberalised and GDP growth was stabilised.

'The good thing that the constitutional reform brought about, with regards to women's political voice, is the formal establishment of gender equality, which is very important' (Female political party member)

6 In this regard Morocco's experience was somewhat similar to that of Tunisia, where women took advantage of a much deeper reform process to strengthen parliamentary quotas and constitutional rights. In other Arab Spring contexts, such as Egypt, constitutional reform processes excluded women and resulted in a weakening of quotas and women's rights. The differences between the experience of Morocco and Tunisia and that of Egypt is in large part related to differences in political will to include women by those elites leading the constitutional reform process.

7 A Scientific Commission, established to prepare a decree for creation of this High Authority presented its draft decree in June 2013. Around 40% of NHRC members are women, some from women's organisations, giving some confidence that the High Authority may indeed be designed in such a way as to have teeth.

8 In June 2013, a Scientific Commission set up to prepare the ground for this authority presented its draft decree.

Box 2: Gender Budgeting

In 2006, the Prime Minister backed proposed reforms to introduce Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) by issuing a circular requesting that gender be integrated where possible. This was followed by the collection of disaggregated baseline data and the production of Morocco's first Gender Budget Report, which was annexed to the national budget and analysed the budget for the likely gender-equalising effects of the pattern of expenditure commitments. Following this report, there was a commitment that each national budget would be analysed for its implications for gender equity and a number of ministries have substantial minority of ministries have voluntarily committed to engage with the process, with 21 ministries of a total of 49 spending units currently providing disaggregated data for analysis in the GRB report.

This process has been championed by key individuals in the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and by others such as the minister for gender equality. Women parliamentarians have also been influential enablers and advocates of GRB, as have women's rights NGOs and leftist political parties. It is likely that the introduction of GRB in Morocco has resulted from progress in women's voice. The regular production of a national Gender Budget Report will provide the Moroccan women's movement with evidence that they can use to hold the state to account on the delivery of enhanced gender equity in public spending and service provision. As such it is both an outcome of progress in voice and also a powerful enabler of further progress.

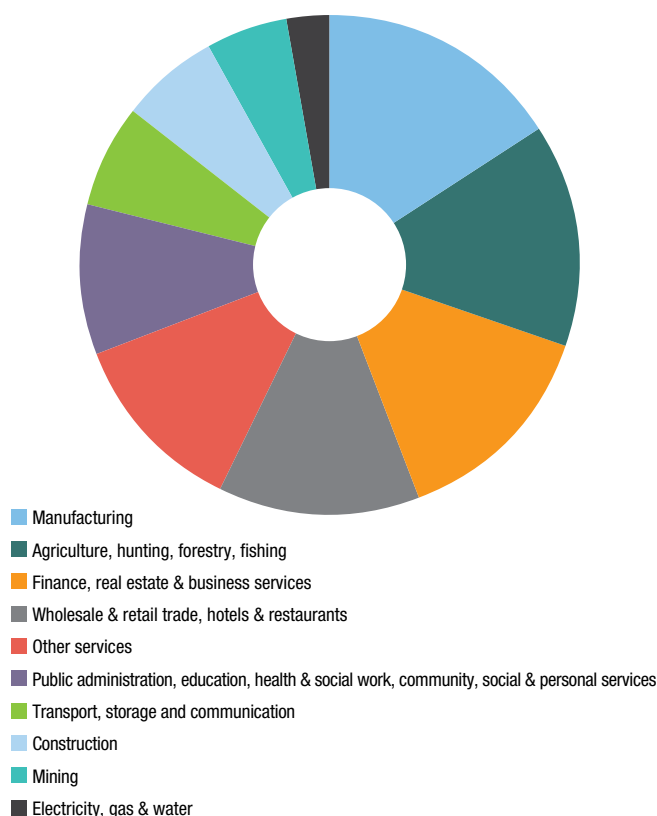
Morocco is now a lower-middle-income country (LMIC). Since 2008, the global recession and strong ties to weakened European markets have constrained growth.⁹ The new government responded with a programme for higher growth and macroeconomic stability, based on fiscal austerity.

Manufacturing and agriculture are the largest economic sectors (at 15.7% and 15.5% of GDP respectively), followed by finance and business services (13.5%) and trade and tourism (12.9%) (see Figure 3). The agricultural share of GDP growth has remained roughly constant at between 13% and 20% of total GDP (IMF, 2011; World Bank WDI). Women's economic participation is lower than men (28% compared with 77% in 2004), but higher than for Tunisia (24% and 50%) and Algeria (15% and 66%) (EUROMED, 2006). However, much of this work is unwaged work for family enterprises (ibid.).

Economic growth has been concentrated in lower-value activities and there has been insufficient credit to support private-sector start-ups (interview July 2013). This has particularly constrained women from starting their own businesses. The limited diversification of the last 20 years is a result of a strategy to support growth in the industrial and services sectors through training engineers, supplying infrastructure, and research and development (R&D). Since around 2000, Morocco has become the main location for French-speaking call centres, which may be an important employer for women (AfDB OCED, 2013).¹⁰

Morocco's geo-strategic location between Europe and the Arab world links political and economic interests and so increases the country's international diplomatic influence on the direction and nature of policy change. This space has been further enlarged by the Arab Spring and the economic and financial crises in Europe, creating trading

Figure 3: Percentage of GDP by sector, 2011



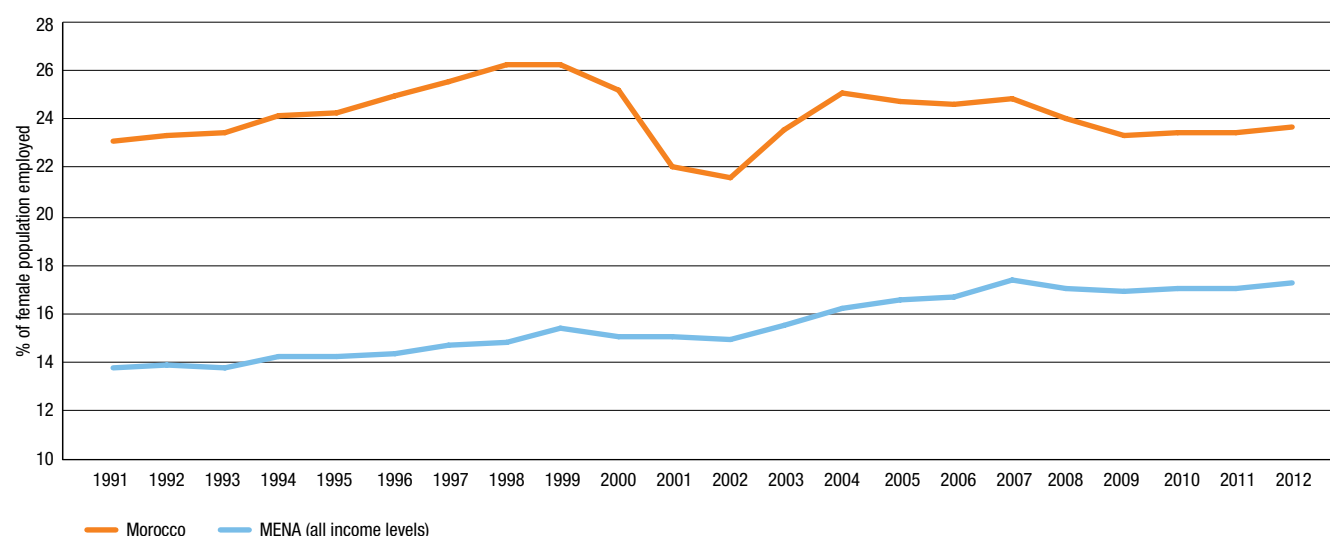
Source: *African Economic Outlook*, 2014.

opportunities and increased access to overseas development assistance (ODA). The economic growth resulting from Morocco's geographical position between Europe, the Gulf

⁹ Morocco is highly dependent on oil imports and is a large importer of wheat.

¹⁰ It is also notable that in 2011, 28% of Morocco's export earnings came from phosphate, a capital-intensive sector that creates few direct economic benefits for women (AfDB, OECD 2013). Note: there are no gender disaggregated data for the call-centres sub-sector.

Figure 4: Share of female population employed in Morocco and MENA*



Source: World Development Indicators, 2014.

* This refers to all types of employment (full time and part time) as recorded in from a variety of sources including labour force surveys, household surveys, official estimates, and censuses.

and Africa provides a financial motivation for balancing secular and religious interests.

Progress across a range of factors has made it more possible for women to engage economically and to express themselves politically. These include the evolution of family structures, girls' education, women's health and women's employment. We discuss these below.

2.3.1 Women's employment

Women's participation in the labour force is one of the highest of all MENA countries (see Figure 4).¹¹ A higher proportion of both women and men now work in paid employment (as opposed to unpaid work in the home or in household enterprises and family farms). Women's paid employment in the formal sector has increased from a low base over the last 20 years, with the proportion of women over the age of 15 in formal employment increasing to just under 23% in 2011 (see Figure 4). By comparison, around 70% of men are in formal employment (on average) (see Figure 5).

The economic reforms of the 1990s accelerated changes in the labour market, making new opportunities open to women, and women's employment shifted from predominantly agricultural labour to work in the textile sector. By 2005 work in textiles accounted for 80% of formal female employment (Hamri and Belghazi, 2005, cited in World Bank, 2006). Women are strongly represented in the services sector (65% of workers in the personal and domestic services sector, 62% in social

and community services and 50% in finance and estate agent services are women). In manufacturing over half of all workers are women (57%) and around a quarter of workers in agriculture, forestry and fisheries and in general administration are women (24% and 23% respectively) (EUROMED, 2006). They are less well represented in extractive industries (4%), transport (8%) (ibid.). Job opportunities for low-skilled women are largely limited to domestic service,¹² street vending and farm work and women are also strongly concentrated in microenterprises and small businesses, where they comprise 93% of the workforce (World Bank, 2006: 1).

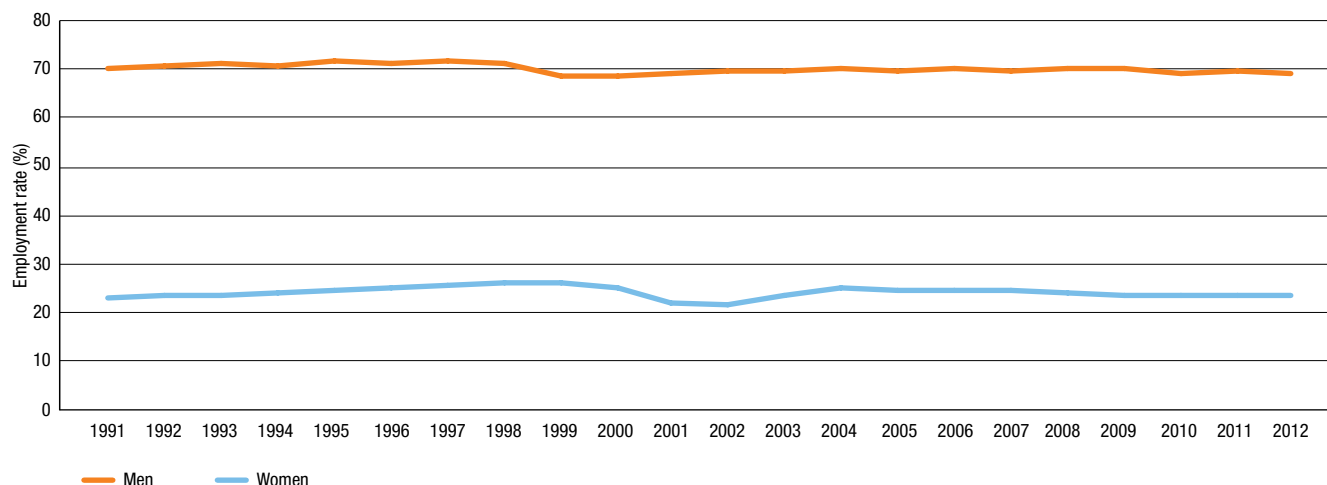
The importance of the informal sector in Morocco makes it the chief source of work for many women and men and their work contributes strongly to household and national income. Informal employment in Morocco has been growing since 2000, and now accounts for 66% of non-agricultural employment (Table 1, overleaf) and the ILO and Arab Employment Forum estimates that the average MENA country produces about one-third of its GDP and employs two-thirds of its labour force informally. The figures are likely to be higher in Morocco, where more people work in the informal sector than in other North African countries (see Table 1, overleaf).

For women, the informal sector is perhaps particularly important as they can work for themselves, circumventing gender-discrimination-based barriers to employment. Work in the informal sector also makes it possible to make use of

11 The employment ratio is the proportion of a country's population aged over 15 years who are in employment. A low ratio means that a large share of the population is not directly in paid work because they are either unemployed or outside the labour force. Labour force participation includes those who are currently unemployed and seeking work.

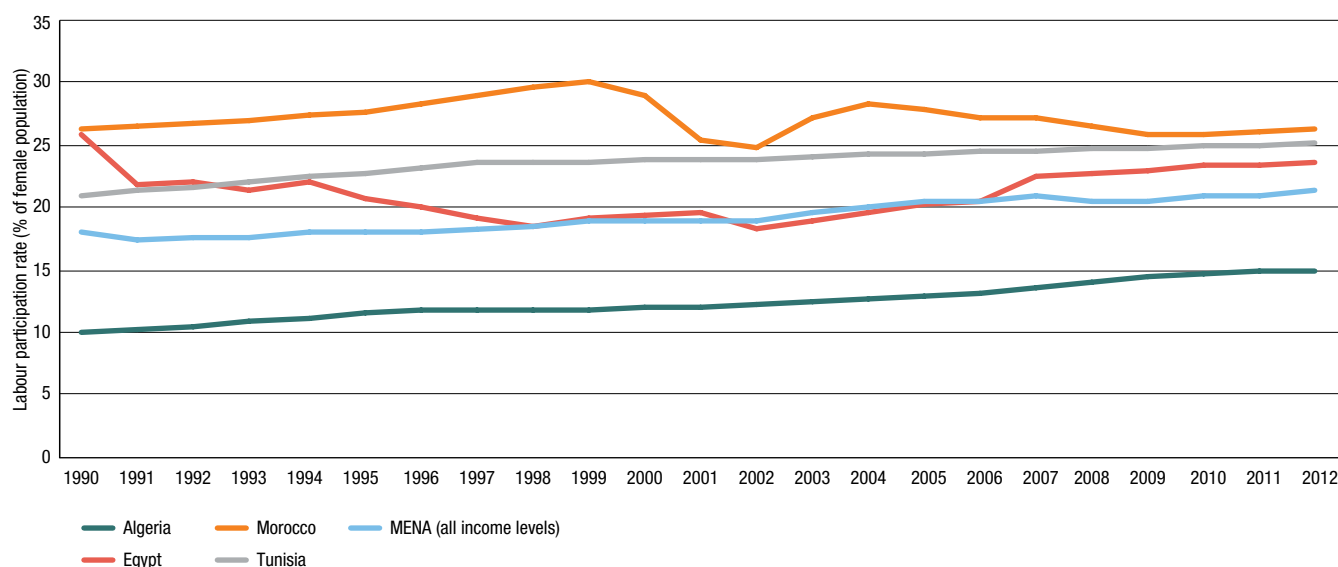
12 About 90% of domestic workers are women and girls.

Figure 5: Employment rates of women and men in Morocco, aged 15 years and above



Source: Data from database: Gender Statistics. Last Updated: 11/07/2014. Accessed 15th December 2014.

Figure 6: Women's participation in the labour force rate, aged 15 years and above



Source: ILO. Labour force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modelled ILO estimate). Data from database: Gender Statistics. Last Updated: 11/07/2014. Accessed 15th December 2014.

the skills that may not be recognised by formal employers. Access to credit for investment helps to remove another barrier to entry (see Box 3 overleaf).

In conclusion to this section we see that the opening of the political space, as the monarchy has balanced various complex and competing pressures and its own economic and political interests, has allowed the other drivers to effect change. The alliances among women's organisations have successfully campaigned for policy changes to improve women's rights.

Several important socio-economic changes have helped to create a context within which Moroccan women

can exercise greater political voice and make claims for their rights. Some trends that have been sustained over a number of years, such as rapid improvement in girls' primary education, improvements to women's health and greater involvement of women in paid employment and are likely to result in the greater women's empowerment and political voice over time. The legal, constitutional and policy changes enable women to hold government to account regarding their rights and improvements in women's political representation give women greater tangible representation in public fora.



Table 1: Percentage share of informal employment in total non-agricultural employment

	1980–1984	1995–1999	2000–2007
Morocco	56.9	44.8	67.1
Algeria		42.7	41.3
Tunisia	35	47.1	35
Egypt		55.2	45.9
North Africa		47.5	47.3

Sources: Charmes (2002); Heintz and Chang (2007) cited in Jütting and de Laiglesia (2009)

2.3.2 Evolution in family structures

Morocco has undergone a rapid demographic transition since the 1980s. The fertility rate (defined as the average number of children a woman bears) fell from 5.54 in 1981 to 2.24 in 2011, giving Morocco one of the lowest rates in the region (see Figure 7) (World Bank, WDI). The speed of this change in a socially conservative and Islamic country may be explained by broader changes in society, with substantial transformations to rural society following prolonged droughts and economic/climate shocks. These drove rural-urban and international migration and a shift in long-held attitudes and behaviours.

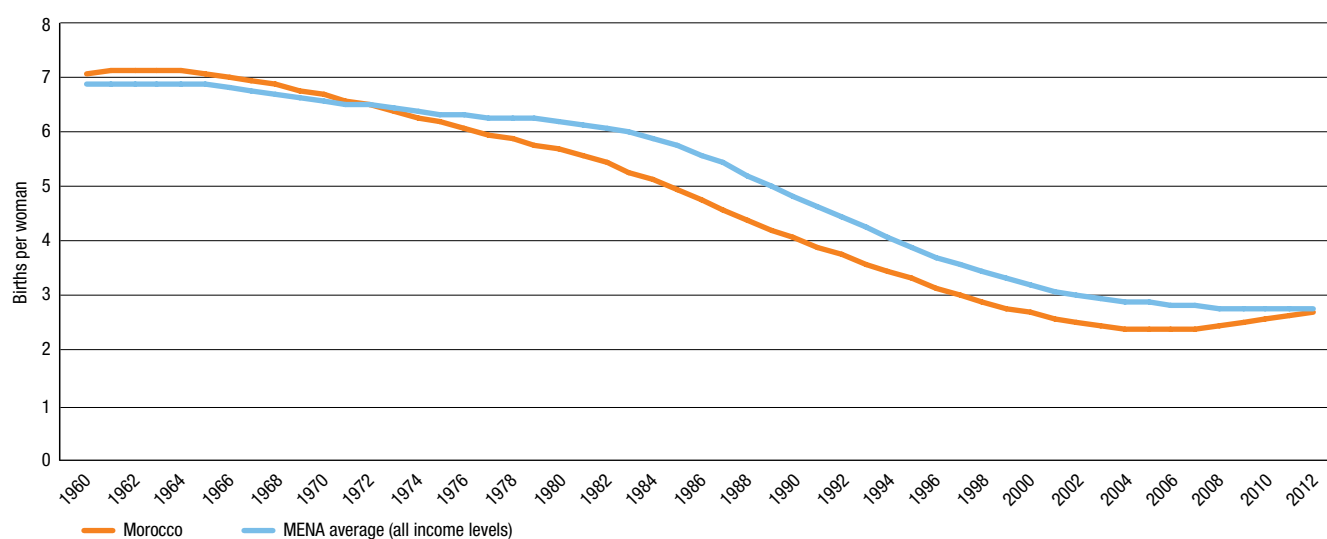
Box 3: Women's access to credit

Morocco is said to have some of the world's best-performing microfinance institutions (Reille, 2010) and in 2011 had the highest rates of SME lending as a share of total lending in the MENA region, at 24% (Rocha et al. 2011, cited in Al-Yhaya 2011). This matters because it placed Morocco at the top of the regional rankings in terms of women's access to finance according to the EIU's Women's Economic Opportunity Index, and experience elsewhere has shown that women's access to credit and economic autonomy through self-employment or business ownership can support the kind of radical structural transformations which are necessary if women are to see their agency increased (Kabeer, 2005) (particularly where they are members of borrower groups (Holvoet, 2005)). This can improve their backstop position in renegotiating the conjugal contract, shifting intrahousehold decision-making to allow them to have greater control over household assets and their own time, increasing their freedom of movement and ultimately their political voice.

A study of villages in rural Morocco analysed the impact of a new microfinance scheme, which lent mainly to men. It found no noticeable gender impact, given that unlike many microfinance schemes the one studied lent mainly to men but noted that while microfinance loans did not empower women directly, the effect may be indirect through women's increased engagement with education and health services and to this extent are in line with other studies finding improvements in women's empowerment in other contexts (Crépon et al., 2014). This implies that access to microfinance may have altered decision-making within the household, placing greater priority on human capital formation.

Another study in Morocco found that microfinance providers that prioritised women's access were able to improve the status of their women clients (Brandsma and Hart, 2004).

Figure 7: Total decline in fertility rate in Morocco and MENA



Source: World Development Indicators, 2014.

2.3.3 Girls' education

Girls' literacy has been on an improving trend since the 1970s and there has been impressive progress in enrolment in formal education since the 1990s (Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam, 2003). Although the 1962 constitution guaranteed the right to universal primary education, in 1991 only 52% of girls attended primary school. By 2012 this had increased to a gross female enrolment rate of 112% (due to re-enrolment) (Figure 8, overleaf), giving Morocco one of the highest levels in the region (Figure 9, overleaf).

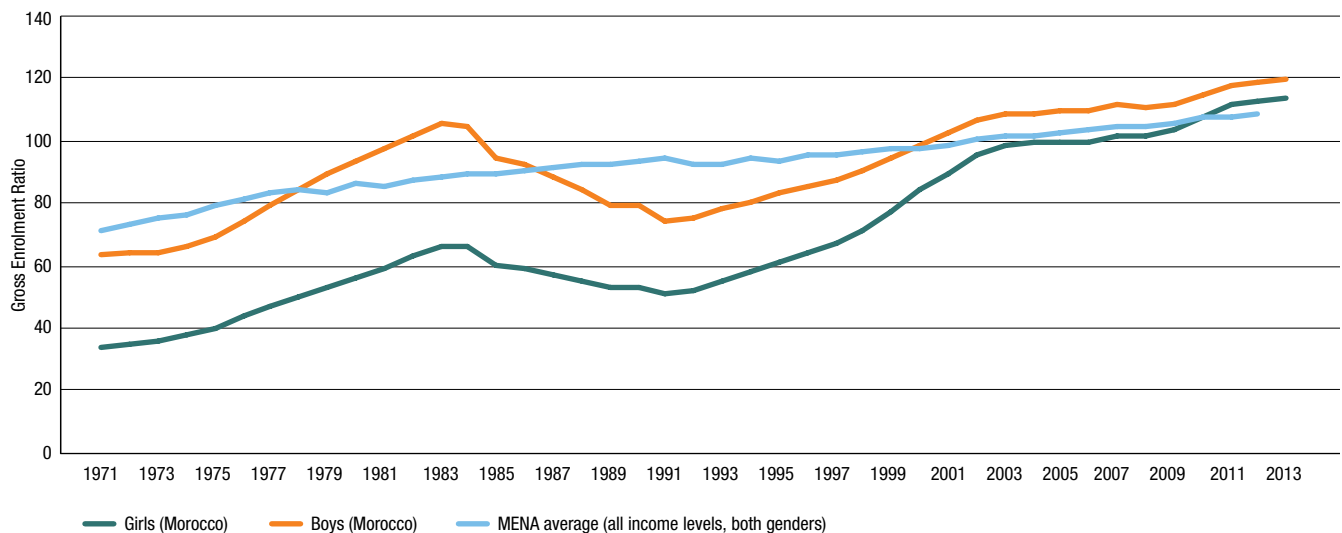
The gap between the primary enrolment rates for boys and girls also narrowed dramatically, from 40.6% in 1984 to 6% in 2012. At the secondary level, total enrolment figures are lower but the gender gap is low with 28% of girls enrolled compared to 32% of boys (World Bank, WDI; UN Statistics).

The 2012 *World Development Report* suggests that the increased enrolment is due to higher incomes making it more possible for families to educate their girls, and families seeing greater value in educating their daughters

because of women having greater access to higher return employment. Access to education has also improved, with greater state investment. Another factor which has perhaps reduced barriers to education has been the process of ‘Arabisation’, by which schools teach the curriculum in Arabic, rather than in English or French (Nalini Burn, personal communication).

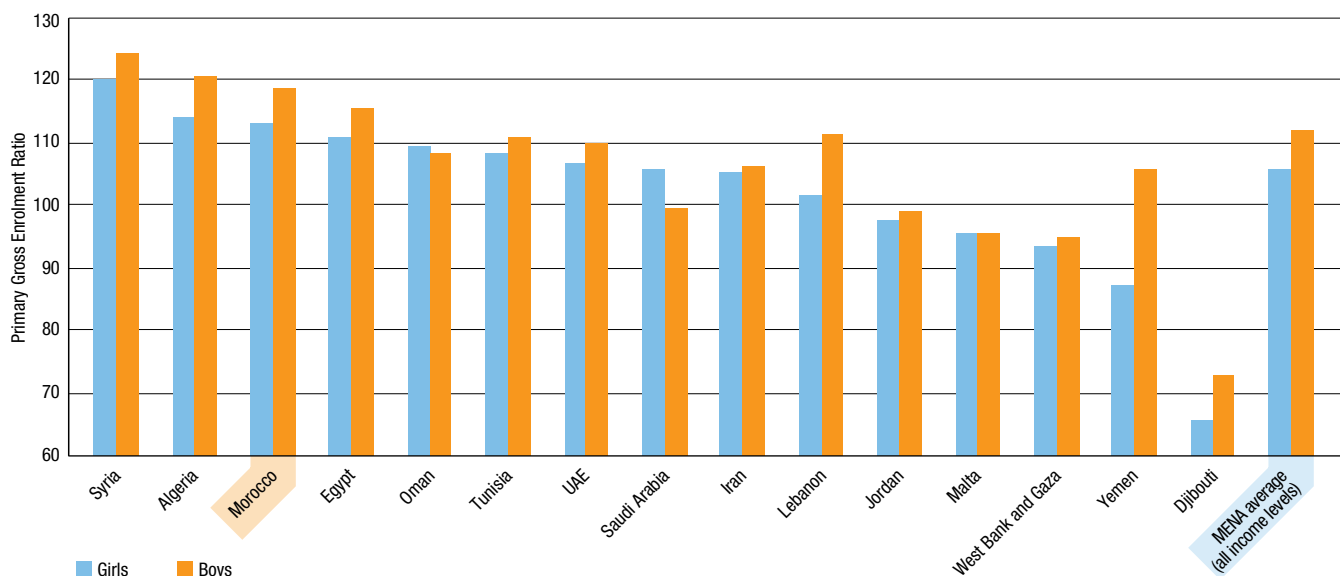
‘Education is primordial and the first solution to this problem as it will work on destroying the stereotypes and cultural ideology already engrained within the Moroccan society’ (Female politician)

Figure 8: Primary school enrolment rates in Morocco and MENA



Source: World Development Indicators, 2014.

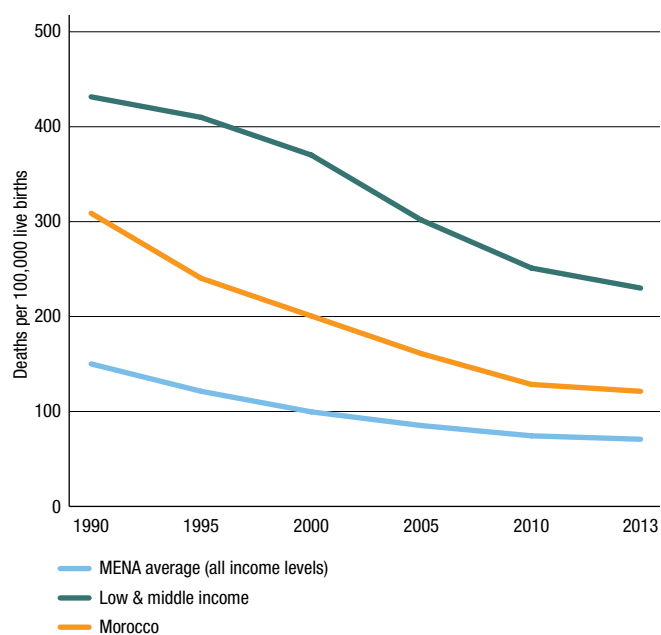
Figure 9: 2011 Primary school enrolment rates across MENA



Source: World Development Indicators, 2014.

Note: The conflict in Syria is likely to have resulted in a dramatic fall in enrolment rates, as with a range of other development statistics and indicators of well-being.

Figure 10: Decline in MMR in Morocco, MENA, and LMICs overall



Source: World Development Indicators, 2014.

2.3.4 Women's health

Women's health indicators in Morocco have improved significantly since the 1990s, and the most rapid changes have taken place in recent years in a deliberate effort to drive up standards. For instance, there has been public investment in providing skilled birth attendants and encouraging women to have regular ante- and post-natal check-ups. The maternal mortality rate (MMR) fell from 300 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 100 in 2010 (a 67% decline), as shown in Figure 10. This performance is significantly better than most MENA countries and represents the single largest decline in the region (World Bank, WDI). It is also substantially higher than the LMIC average of 44%, and places Morocco 9th out of the 45 countries in the group in terms of relative decline. Although Morocco's current MMR remains higher than the MENA average of 46 deaths per 100,000 live births, it is less than half the LMIC average.

Infant mortality rates have also fallen consistently, reaching 26 per thousand in 2013 from 66 per thousand in 1990 (World Bank indicators).¹³ Having fewer, healthier children is known to benefit women's health and improved child survival has also no doubt contributed to couples choosing to have fewer children.

¹³ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.IMRT.IN> (downloaded 23/10/14).



Rally at International Women's Day 2011 in Rabat, Morocco. Photo: © Nacho Fradejas Garcia.

3. What are the factors driving change?

Progress in achieving women's political voice and rights has been driven by a dual process of top-down political reform and women's greater political agency, which itself results from socio-economic and structural changes that have altered women's position in the household and in the wider economy. This section looks at some of the main factors that have driven progress under four main headings: (1) effective and broad-based political mobilisation of women; (2) political leadership and support from the monarchy; (3) international engagement and funding, and (4) socio-economic changes. In reality, however, these factors are intertwined, with changes in one area affecting the position of women in others in an iterative fashion.

3.1 Effective and broad-based political mobilisation of women

The strongest women's movements in the MENA region have developed in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. These have been led by well-educated women, with strong domestic and international networks, skills in strategic leadership and the willingness and ability to engage with grassroots concerns.

A small feminist movement emerged from Morocco's anti-colonial struggle in the 1950s, allied to the country's leftist political parties that were pressing for reform and democratisation. However, this was largely an elite movement with few grassroots links (Outaleb, 2011). But the political and economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s opened new space for civil society, giving women new opportunities to exercise the leadership largely denied to them by political parties. Women's rights activists left party politics to build independent and broad-based women's organisations. A flowering of feminist NGOs increased the popularity of the feminist movement amongst the general population and helped women advocates to develop their knowledge and skills. It also gave them an entry point into ordinary women's lives, allowing them to understand the real problems and obstacles they experienced (Al Figuigui, 2007), which injected some realism into the movement's priorities.

Both the feminist and the Islamist women's movements took off in Morocco in 1992, when *L'Union de l'Action Féminine* collected a million signatures to petition for the

ratification of CEDAW and reform of the *Moudawana* (Basch-Harod, 2012), which activists perceived as the 'prime locus of legal and civil discrimination against women' (Sadiqi, 2010). This amazing show of strength saw CEDAW ratified the following year, although with several important reservations,¹⁴ including to Article 16, which states that states 'Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations', which Morocco argued was incompatible with Islamic Sharia. Despite this disappointment, the success of the CEDAW campaign helped to motivate Islamist women, few of whom had previously exercised political voice, to acknowledge their marginalisation and become involved in the national debate on the status of women (Basch-Harod, 2012). Morocco's women's movement has continued to push for the removal of CEDAW reservations, improved representation of women in parliament, greater parity with men in employment pay and conditions and the revision of the constitution.

'Women in Morocco were able to go to the streets and fight for their demands and they actually were heard as they were able to put on a lot of pressure' (Female political party member)

The vibrancy and tenacity of Morocco's women's movement is striking. Despite the deeply conservative socio-religious context and wide social and economic inequalities, and despite the powerful contestation around every aspect of progress in policy reform, the women's movement in Morocco has been successful in communicating the need for improved rights for women across society. People have not all agreed but there has certainly been a discussion. Improved knowledge, even where there is active contestation about what should happen next, is an important and necessary starting point when thinking about shifting age-old customary practice,

¹⁴ Implementation of international conventions requires domestic legislation and the implementation of that legislation. Where a state makes reservations to an international convention, it means that although the state commits to adhere to the convention in general, it has expressed in advance that it does not intend to adhere to a particular clause.

‘The woman’s movement is not monolithic. There is a struggle between women fighting for universal rights and those fighting for rights within a Muslim framework. However, the one issue they all agree on is the need to have greater participation of women in politics’ (Female academic)

particularly in a context like Morocco, where such practice has deep roots in patriarchy, supported by conservative interpretations of the Qur’an.

A strong and well-organised national women’s movement has established broad coalitions, developed successful campaigns, and been skilful in adapting to shifting challenges and opportunities. Leading women activists have showed great skill in evaluating and responding to the shifting political dynamics it created. They were able to gain political ground and support for their agenda in public debates and institutions, and successfully pressed for reform. In many ways this illustrates that progress often happens because of a temporary convergence of interests and bargaining processes, rather than because of ideological commitment on the part of the leadership. The women’s movement has played a significant part in promoting all of the major policy reforms related to gender equality and women’s rights we discuss in this case study. The discussion below outlines how the women’s movement succeeded in achieving this.

Three main factors contributed to the success of women’s campaigns for reform. First, women succeeded in building broad coalitions and networks and established links with other political and rights-based actors. Second, they established close links with ordinary women and familiarised themselves with their concerns. Third, the women’s movement showed great flexibility and agility in responding to the situation on the ground. These are discussed in greater detail below.

3.1.1 Broad coalitions

The women’s movement in Morocco broke new ground in uniting religious (Islamist) and secular women (more on this below), though this relationship has since suffered (see below) (Basch-Harod, 2012). It also brought together women who promoted a feminist agenda across diverse fields using a range of methods. One leading woman activist interviewed for this report suggested that the feminist movement in Morocco has been most successful when its three strands – academic, activist and political – have acted together, each contributing different approaches and skills. In some cases, of course, women embody all three strands simultaneously and are activist academics who are involved in politics. Additionally, there are many ties between some women’s organisations and the political parties they are broadly associated with. Beyond this, Moroccan women activists linked up with the international

feminist movement and obtained international funding to pursue their agenda.

Women activists ensured that they were well networked with other sympathetic social and political movements, establishing organisational and practical links with national human rights organisations, unions, political parties and broader social actors. By and large, the women’s movement adopted an approach to policy engagement which saw them as lobbying for change from within the establishment, rather than fighting for reform using confrontational and oppositional tactics. This ‘within the tent’ approach has made it possible for the networks of (largely elite) women leaders to include the Palace, and for some of them to be appointed to positions on relevant boards and councils. This regular interaction with key decision-makers has provided an important lever in negotiating institutional change.

3.1.2 Links with ordinary women

In addition, women activists ensured that they were well connected with ordinary women’s daily realities. They tapped into local values to justify their demands for reform. They developed a sophisticated and agile approach to communicating with different audiences, based on their well-developed understandings of those audiences, for instance crafting ‘arguments in favour of *Moudawana* reform using religious, constitutional, sociological and human rights discourses for use with different audiences’ and adapting these arguments in response to criticism (Pittman, 2008).

During the 1990s some women activists moved away from the primarily secular discourse they had preferred when closely associated with leftist parties, and which had been viewed as elitist. Their new approach involved strategies like adopting an Islamic frame of reference in their demands for reform, as well as seeking to address issues which concerned ordinary women, such as gender-based violence. Both changes saw their grassroots support grow. Other changes included their communications being in Arabic rather than French, and demonstrating an in-depth knowledge of religious scripture related to women. They stressed the need to distinguish between true Islamic values and local patriarchal customs and justified their demands for reform with the notion of *ijtihad* (meaning diligence, or independent thinking), the Islamic legal process of (re)-interpreting religious texts.

Box 4: Coping with backlash and tensions

Legal advances in providing women with greater rights have been highly contested and the Moroccan women's movement has had to respond to the conservative backlash against reform. Opposition has come from both conservative Islamists who believed reform was un-Islamic and from political Islamists who saw women's rights and gender equality as a western-imposed agenda (Pittman, 2007). The anti-reform campaign included disseminating conservative ideology through mosques and cultural spaces, political lobbying and using morality discourses to discredit women activists.

The Islamist opposition succeeded in mobilising large sections of the population against reform of the *Moudawana* embedded in the National Plan for the Integration of Women In Development. The *Organisme national pour la protection de la famille Marocaine* (National Group for the Protection of the Moroccan Family), an umbrella organisation of Islamist movements, organised a massive anti-reform demonstration in Casablanca in 2000. The demonstration included many Moroccan women who were not Islamists but did not agree with the agenda on women's rights, and the demonstration undermined political support for reform from the King and prime minister.

This was countered by a large pro-reform demonstration in Rabat at around the same time, and the tension between the two forced more secular-inclined (and western-educated) men to focus more on issues of gender equality than they might otherwise have done. Meanwhile, women activists reinforced their use of religious language and Islamic frameworks and developed media campaigns to build public sympathy for reform. These campaigns featured personal stories of abuse of women and asked viewers how they would feel if their daughters were treated in this way.

A terrorist attack of 2003 enabled the tilting of the scales in favour of the emancipatory forces and led to the 2004 reform of the *Moudawana* even without much change in the composition and relative strengths of opposing forces on the ground or within the administration, including within the judiciary. And as demands for democracy grew in Morocco, women activists highlighted their commitment to democracy and respect for human rights, seeking to demonstrate the link between equality and non-discrimination and broader democratic values. This discourse tapped into popular aspirations.

3.1.3 Flexibility on the ground

Women activists were highly adaptive in responding to changing circumstances, both to take advantage of opportunities and to respond to challenges. They adapted their networks and campaigns in response to 'challenges [that] arose from the surging conservative Islamist opposition and from the shifting political opportunity structure' (Pittman, 2007). For example, in response to opportunities provided by the more supportive political leadership following the election of the socialist Prime Minister El Youssoufi in 1997 and the accession to the throne of reformist King Mohammed VI in 1999, the women's movement enhanced its local and national reform campaigns. It worked to strengthen its support base, adapt its campaigning strategies and make greater use of an Islamic framework. Using these tactics the women's movement was ultimately able to win the necessary social and political support to make reform possible. In particular women activists developed, campaigned for, and gained government support for the comprehensive *Plan d'Action pour l'Intégration des Femmes au Développement* (PANIFD) (Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development) – based on the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, and again for the more substantive reforms of the *Moudawana* in 2004.

As part of this response to shifting political opportunity structures and new opportunities for influence, women activists formed two NGO networks to spearhead different aspects of the reform campaign. The *Réseau*

d'Appui au PANIFD (Network of Support for PANIFD) brought together over 200 NGOs and aimed to mobilise nationwide grassroots support. The *Front pour l'Intégration des Femmes au Développement* (Front for the Integration of Women in Development) included more than 50 women's organisations and worked on obtaining backing for key rights from trade unions, women's groups and cultural organisations. These networks were central in mobilising the large pro-reform demonstration in Rabat in 2000 (which, as noted, was countered by the Casablanca anti-reform demonstration). Likewise, women responded to the new opportunity that resulted from the establishment in 2001 of a Royal Commission to investigate reforming the *Moudawana*, by creating 'Spring of Equality' coalition. This was a smaller and more flexible group drawn from the two broader networks. This group linked up with progressive establishment figures and lobbied the commission.

3.2 Political leadership and support from the monarchy

Women's mobilisation in Morocco took place against the background of broader processes of political opening. These processes of reform and opening were encouraged by both international pressure from Morocco's US and western European allies and IMF loan requirements. They were an explicit element of the policy dialogue and programmatic measures of EU-Moroccan relations, and

have been included as the EU's criteria for Morocco's Advanced Status.

Morocco attaches considerable importance to its international relations and geopolitical links and it wishes to appear to be a reliable partner and ally both in Europe and in the MENA region. As a result, Morocco had a high degree of motivation to demonstrate a commitment to political and economic reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, and these helped shape the context for greater individual freedom, created space for civil society to develop, made it easier for women to enter formal politics and facilitated progress in women's political voice and gender equality more widely.

Until 1992 power was concentrated entirely in the monarchy. In response to national and international pressure, constitutional reforms in 1992 and 1996 provided for the prime minister to appoint government ministers and for the election of a bi-cameral parliament. Although most power still resided in the monarch, there was new space for civil society activity. Women's organisations were established and pro- and anti-reform voices were institutionalised in formal political structures.

Democratic reforms enabled leftist parties with historical links with the women's movement, and which were sympathetic to gender-equality reform, to enter formal politics. In 1997 the previously exiled socialist leader El Youssoufi was elected prime minister. In 1999 he gave official support to the women's campaign for *Moudawana* reform, although he later retracted it in the face of Islamist pressure and public opposition.

Political reform enabled women to enter formal political institutions. As highlighted in Section 2, women's rights activists responded to the establishment of national and local elected bodies by pushing for women's quotas. These were finally achieved in 2002 for national elections and in 2009 for local elections, and have recently been doubled in the National Assembly.

As discussed earlier, the 2011 Arab Spring generated a deeper process of reform in Morocco. Women took advantage of this by pressing for broad constitutional commitments to equality and a stronger legal and institutional rights framework. In effect the Arab Spring accelerated reform processes that had been underway in Morocco since 2001, especially regarding the inclusion of women and minorities (particularly Berbers) and the realisation of their rights (Abou-Habib, 2011). King Mohammed VI's interest in promoting gender equality was a key factor in achieving progress. This needs to be seen in the context of his strategic commitment to (limited) political opening and economic liberalisation, the threat posed by the rise of political Islam and external pressures from Morocco's western allies.

Immediately upon his accession in 1999, King Mohammed VI publicly championed women's rights. A 2010 Euromed report underlines the critical nature of

this support given that royal discourse sets the path for policy trends in Morocco. The King used his legitimacy as 'commander of the faithful' and the concept of *ijtihad* to justify reinterpreting the *Moudawana*, which was based on Islamic law. In 2001 he created a Royal Commission to draft the Family Code to replace the *Moudawana*, deflecting criticism by including both modernist and traditionalist experts. The King also encouraged political parties to adopt quotas for women in the 2002 national elections and the 2009 local elections. He backed the removal of Morocco's reservations to CEDAW, declaring them 'obsolete', and played a central role in promoting gender equality in the 2011 constitution.

The King's promotion of women's rights appears to have been largely driven by the need to deflect international pressure regarding human rights and to ward off the growing Islamist opposition. In particular, many observers, such as Pittman (2007), suggest that the 2004 *Moudawana* reform was, at least in part, a response to the rise of political Islam, which threatened the power of the palace, and in particular to the 2003 Casablanca bombing by fundamentalist opponents of reform, which prompted the King to join the US-led 'war on terror', create new alliances with the USA and western Europe (which in turn demanded more action on human rights), and initiate a backlash against the Islamist movement. The King's position must also be understood in context of broader trends in the MENA context that saw Islamist forces becoming the main challenge to autocratic, often western-backed regimes (e.g. Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia). The result of this has been that in a number of MENA countries – including Morocco – women's rights have been a political pawn in power struggles between Islamist opposition forces that espoused a traditional view of women's role in society, and autocratic regimes seeking to curtail this growing Islamist agenda and gain international credibility on human rights.

Given this context, Sadiqi (2010) suggests that women's rights reforms 'have allowed the government to promote a modern and democratic image of Morocco at the international level'. This background to gender-equality reforms has led to some criticism of them as a top-down agenda that flows from anti-democratic interests.

Some experts, such as Mouaquit (2009), also maintain that the King's support for gender reform is motivated by a broader economic agenda. One Moroccan academic interviewed for this report suggested that the King sees a more liberal culture and society – including one with greater gender equality – as necessary in order to deepen economic liberalisation. Mouaquit (2009) argues that the state's political commitment to improving the status of women stems from a desire to achieve Morocco's broader development gains, for instance its ranking in the Human Development Index, rather than as an end in itself. He argues that this explains the high priority given to girls'

Box 5: How socio-economic changes enable women's political voice in Morocco

A number of socio-economic changes have empowered women, enabling them to engage with the world outside the home more on their own terms. These changes include the socio-cultural changes to rural Moroccan society, following years of drought and rural-urban migration. Others include changes to family structure, improved girls' education, better women's health and greater opportunities for paid employment outside the home. How this latter group of factors has supported progress in women's political voice is discussed below.

Changes to family structure in Morocco

Increased women's agency both within the family (including choice in who they marry) and in the public sphere have occurred alongside the long-run improvements in female literacy (from a low base), a long-run trend of more women gaining paid work outside the home (albeit in insecure and poorly paid work) and a shift towards a nuclear rather than an extended family unit (Euromed, 2010; Nalini Burn, personal communication), which may all have contributed to women having fewer children. Combined, these changes have given women greater freedom to express themselves politically.

Girls' education

Improved literacy amongst women and girls is likely to contribute to higher levels of agency. It gives them greater access to paid employment outside the home. In addition, simply going to school exposes girls to new ideas. Schools are sites for the potential nurturing of more Islamic strands of feminism or at least of negotiating family and broader influences (Nalini Burn, personal communication) and this too may lead to girls being more confident and empowered, ultimately providing them with greater levels of political voice. This may contribute to women being more likely to demand their rights and the more effective implementation of gender equality reforms.

Women's health

Improved health for women, including them having greater choice over the number of children they have, has been an important building block for women's enhanced human capital in Morocco and, as such, an important factor in freeing them for greater economic and political engagement.

Women's employment

Having greater access to paid employment outside the home matters for women's empowerment. It provides them with legitimate access to the public sphere and gives them money that may increase their negotiating power and autonomy within the home. Greater social interaction can expose women to new ideas and provide opportunities for self-expression. Coupled with enhanced agency within the home, this may provide women with an important stepping stone to enhanced political voice.

In conclusion, it appears that several important socio-economic changes have helped to create a context within which Moroccan women can exercise greater political voice and make claims for their rights.

rights to education, compared to continued resistance to achieving progress on issues of women's personal status or participation in politics, which were less directly related to achieving basic development goals.

Regardless of the motivation, the palace's promotion of gender equality issues provided an important opportunity for Morocco's women's movement.

3.3 International engagement and funding

The international women's movement was important in providing intellectual and practical support to its Moroccan counterparts. Activists drew on international feminist discourses to develop campaigns for gender equality and they linked with international and regional feminist networks to mobilise their support in pressing this cause. In 1992, women's organisations from across the Maghreb created a regional women's network, *Collectif*

'The international community has played an important role in fighting for women's rights and increasing women's voice in the political system. This has been done both directly, in terms of support to women's organisations and initiatives to promote greater inclusion of women, and indirectly through measures to combat poverty and focus on education' (Female journalist)

95 *Maghreb Egalité* (Collective 95 Maghreb Equality), in order to share experiences and create resources that could be adapted for use across the region to promote gender equality reform. Moroccan women were thus able to point to more progressive gender equality frameworks in neighbouring countries, such as Tunisia, to illustrate the compatibility of women's rights and Islam.

Moreover, the political reforms that began in 1992 (described below) gave women new opportunities to travel and study overseas and improved their access to a broader range of media, all of which supported the development of the Moroccan women's policy agenda (Basch-Harod, 2012). In particular, this exposure to new ideas enabled Moroccan women to engage in international debates about the role and status of women in Muslim contexts and to build the types of international networks described above.

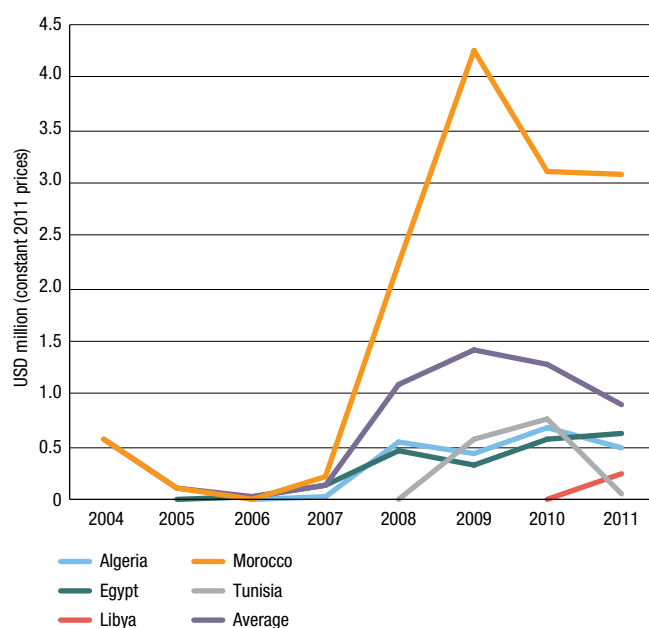
Funding for women's organisations working on gender equality has fluctuated. It began to increase from 2003, peaking at almost US\$16 million in 2007 following a one-off US\$12 million contribution from Spain. In 2009 it resumed a lower and more typical 0.3% of total ODA receipts, falling to less than US\$5 million in 2011. This decline follows global ODA trends. Figure 11 shows that Morocco received the highest external funding for gender equality and women's rights projects in the MENA region, amounting to twice the average for the region since 2004.

Funding channelled through NGOs working on gender equality and women's rights accounts for 66% of the total support for the sector, compared to a pre-2008 level of 1%, similar to other countries in the region (Figure 11). In 2008 it rose sharply and remained high, probably a result of Spain's increased support to the sector via NGOs, its preferred channel.

Funding for NGOs is highly fragmented. The *Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc* (ADFM) (Democratic Association of Moroccan Women) has 18 funders, ranging from several UN agencies – such as UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to French, Italian and Spanish agencies and NGOs, and a number of European embassies in Rabat. Although receiving funding from various sources permits some flexibility it also increases transaction costs and administrative demands. While larger organisations have the administrative capacity to meet the demands of funders, including the application process and reporting requirements, smaller or rural organisations tend not to do so and are therefore excluded from funding, despite often having greater access to more marginalised women.

Domestic efforts to adopt gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) (see Box 6, page 34) and other gender-related policies and interventions have received international support.

Figure 11: ODA to MENA countries for gender equality and women's empowerment through NGOs (US\$m)



Source: OECD-DAC CRS, accessed 2013.

Table 2: Financing of GRB reforms

Donor	Description	Funding
Belgian government	GRB reform 2001–2008	More than €5 million over phases I and II
UNIFEM funded by the European Commission	Local Level Gender Responsive Budgets Programme 2003–2006	€700,000 to India, Morocco, the Philippines and Uganda
United Nations Capital Development Fund, UNIFEM and UNDP	Gender Equitable Local Development launched in 2008	More than US\$6 million
UNIFEM and UNFPA	Application of GRB in the context of Reproductive Health 2006–present	US\$730,000
UNIFEM funded by the European Commission	GRB and Aid Effectiveness 2008–2011	€2.61 million

Source: Adapted from UNIFEM, 2009.

European development assistance, for instance, supported government champions of the reform process to counter some of the domestic inertia. GRB reforms have been directly supported by Belgium, UNIFEM (funded by the European Commission), UNDP and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (Table 2.) The OECD provided more general support for reforms in this area through its efforts to link GRB, public financial management reform and aid effectiveness (key informant interview). The Moroccan government did not provide counterpart funding.

Gender is a priority for the EU in general and for Spain in particular in relation to the MENA region. Through a relationship outlined in the Association Agreement of 2000, the Free Trade Agreement (2004), the European

Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the EU regards gender as a cross-cutting issue and has a gender focal point in the Moroccan delegation. Gender and development is also one of Spain's four priority sectors, and its funding is channelled mainly through NGOs. The EU funded UNIFEM's technical support to GRB which was fundamental to the reforms.¹⁵

This shows that although the Moroccan women's movement has been the key actor in driving gender reform in Morocco, external donors have also played a role by placing women's rights firmly on the negotiating table with government by funding certain key reforms and civil society organisations.

15 In addition, Morocco has received multilateral funding, through the UN MDG Equality Fund, financed by Spain and EU sectoral budget support for the Gender Equality Action Plan (Key informant, 2012).

4. What are the challenges?

This section looks at the challenges Morocco has faced achieving progress in the political voice of women. It focuses on the challenges implementing the policy reforms that have been achieved and the resistance to further policy reform. We identify that progress has been limited by factors including the rise of Islamist forces, the lack of progress in implementing budgetary reform, the nature of women's employment and social attitudes. These are grouped below under separate headings for clarity, although in reality they interlink and are mutually reinforcing.

4.1 Partial democracy limits women's political voice

Despite political opening and the advances outlined in the 2011 constitution, most power continues to be invested in the monarchy. Parliament has little influence, elected governments have little autonomy and some opposition forces remain effectively banned. The King directly established some of Morocco's political parties and this and his co-option of others (including some leftist ones) further limits the effectiveness of Morocco's democracy. Although progress has been made 'power still ultimately lies with the King... The constitution gives him exclusive control over all matters of strategic importance – and he is the judge of which matters are strategic' (Ottaway, 2012). In addition, the King also controls important sectors of Morocco's economy. This, combined with his strong historical connections with business leaders, means that he has a significant stake in the direction taken by economic reforms, with a distortive effect on democratic decision-making.

Well aware of where power lies in Morocco, women activists have focused on getting the King's support for gender-related reforms such as the *Moudawana* reform. The downside of this strategy is that it has given rise to criticisms of the women's movement being co-opted and the reforms being top-down and serving the monarchy's interests.

Other major governance challenges include widespread corruption, continued human rights abuses, particularly of opposition groups, and restrictions on freedom of expression and the media. Freedom of expression is limited in Morocco, particularly around politically sensitive issues or where expression would challenge the establishment. Civil society

is also systematically restricted by the authorities. However, women's organisations have deliberately limited their demands on contentious issues such as inheritance rights – a compromise that means that despite not facing direct restrictions on their activities, their agenda has been partly dictated by establishment sensitivities.

More broadly, unaccountable and non-transparent governance, the lack of a separation of powers and the absence of an independent judiciary have limited the scope for women's organisations to hold the state to account regarding its implementation of gender-related policy commitments. According to Sadiqi (2010), '[m]any feminists argue that the new family law can be adequately implemented only in a democratic context, while some advocate a purely secular government system'.

The perceived co-option of women's issues by the palace and the establishment has led some to view women's organisations as conservative and pro-monarchy and as having failed to go beyond a limited focus on gender-based inequalities to question broader issues of power and freedom. However, there is no doubt that, by pursuing reform from 'within the tent', rather than attempting to force reform through radical opposition, the women's movement have been able to help stimulate considerable legislative reform.

'The Islamists' march [against reform of the Moudawana] was just a way for them to show their existence and presence in Moroccan society' (Female politician)

4.2 Tensions between Islamist and secularist interpretations of women's rights

Increased tensions between secularist and Islamist women's movements have emerged rooted in different perceptions of women's rights (the secular feminist adoption of the universal definition of women's rights versus a relativist and culturally specific definition preferred by some Islamist women, which does not accept gender equality within the family). These tensions have become particularly visible

'Polygamy, for example, shouldn't exist anymore. But the reason for not changing this specific law is that it is part of the Sharia, so changing it would mean changing God's law, which is clearly not accepted in a Muslim country' (Hayat Tiji, member of the political office of the Unified Socialist Party)

since the Arab Spring and the formal entry of Islamist parties into governments across the MENA region. This has raised concern among secularist women's movements of a backlash against hard won-rights (as seen under the brief rule of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt).

Critically, Islamist and secular women's movements have different starting points in terms of what they believe are the routes to empowering women as well as the desired outcomes in terms of gender relations. These differences of opinion have, so far, been managed successfully by the Moroccan women's movement, which has managed to push for progress in terms of legislative reform while keeping the movement broad enough to embrace different views. However, it is possible that managing these complex internal negotiations has slowed progress.

The resurgence of Islamist groups in Morocco since the 1990s poses a major challenge for the women's movement. Their opposition to greater political voice for women has been intensified by the political opening following the 2011 Arab Spring. The Islamist discourse which opposes women acting in the public sphere (CIDDEF and UNIFEM, 2006) appeals to young unemployed men, who are easily led to believe that women's paid employment robs them of opportunities (Sadiqi, 2010). It is ironic that the opening up of the political system has given greater political voice and representation not only to women but also to Islamist groups who seek to limit women's political space and rights.

Despite greater access to political office, women are still to reach leadership positions in any numbers. Morocco has fewer women ministers than the average in the MENA region (UN Statistics; World Economic Forum, 2012). In 2007 Morocco had its highest ever number of women ministers, with a total of seven, including key portfolios such as Foreign Affairs, Mines, Energy and Education. But the rise of political Islam in Morocco has had a direct impact on the presence of women in senior decision-making roles in government, and there have been few high-visibility women in government since the democratic elections of November 2011, when the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) party was returned to power. Initially there was only one woman minister – leading the Ministry of Social Development, Family and Solidarity – suggesting that the PJD's coalition partners did not prioritise a better gender balance in their negotiations. A new government was formed in October 2013 following a political crisis and there are now six women ministers and four junior (delegate) ministers, possibly in response to pressure on the PJD from civil society and the palace.¹⁶

Several leading Moroccan feminists have expressed deep concern about the possibility of a curtailment of women's rights under the PJD and they certainly support a

relativist and culturally specific (as opposed to universalist) interpretation of women's rights. This has been seen elsewhere in the region, with similar debates in Tunisia (see Chambers and Cummings, 2014) and profound social and political conflict in Egypt between Islamist and secularist visions of the state and society, including women's role in them.¹⁷ So, for instance, the Minister responsible for women's affairs in Morocco claims not to oppose women's rights but opposes international treaties defining such rights in Morocco and the lifting the reservations on CEDAW. The PJD has also opposed the National Plan of Action to Integrate Women in Development (PANIFD) and the reform of the *Moudawana*, which they see as a threat to traditional family life.

Political Islamist groups have strong international links and deep pockets. Although direct international funding of political parties is forbidden, the reliance on generous personal donations is well known. For instance, it is generally believed that the state did not prevent individuals from making donations in order to influence the outcome of the 2007 elections (Walecki et al., 2008). In addition, civil society organisations (CSOs) affiliated to political parties can receive funding and this channel has helped to ensure a steady flow of financial backing to Islamist groups, especially from Gulf States. The use of this and other funding channels means that the arrangements regarding funding are highly uneven and although political parties are required to submit their accounts for auditing, no information about election accounts is made public (key informant interview; Walecki et al., 2008).

Islamist social movements influence the national debate on the rights and public role of women. Women are significantly involved in these movements, including many who are well educated and in employment. For example, the Islamist Justice and Charity Association has a strong women's wing and has had women in leadership roles. Women members seek to influence thinking on gender issues within these movements but their internal activism is not visible from the outside (key informant interview). One interviewee affiliated to the Islamist Justice and Charity Association stressed that she believes that women should play a major role in shaping Moroccan society. She suggested, however, that this role should be defined by a 'less misogynistic' reading of the Qur'an rather than being based on an international rights framework.

Following Morocco's 2011 reforms, there is a paradoxical situation in which constitutional reforms have created a stronger gender equality framework, but increased democratisation has brought to office a government that apparently lacks the political will to implement it. Many of the feminist activists interviewed

16 In terms of women's leadership at the local level, in 2009, the first two women mayors were elected, in Marrakech and Esaouria.

17 In Egypt conflict over gender relations, within the context of this broader ideological battle between Islamist and secularist visions, has been one of the factors driving increased harassment and violence towards women in public spaces.



May Day protests in Rabat, Morocco. Photo: © Katie.

‘The new family law is not applied completely, as the cultural and socio-economic realities are complicated and do not allow for its application word for word’ (Latifa Bennani Smires, ex-member of the Istiqlal party and one of the first women MPs)

for this report suggested that the priorities for the women’s movement should now be to prevent regression on existing rights and to press for meaningful implementation of constitutional commitments, including the creation of an equalities body. Some interviewees also suggested that other social movements share the concern about a regressive Islamist agenda, including human rights and Berber rights groups. This could provide common ground for collaboration as has been seen in other MENA contexts, most notably in Egypt where a broad coalition emerged to oppose Islamist leaders.

The reforms of the 2000s have brought about significant progress in many aspects of women’s rights but resistance to change continues in some areas. One of the most important is the question of inheritance. While the 2004 Family Code made some minor changes to inheritance law, major inequalities remain. For example, daughters typically inherit half of what sons receive, and widows’ inheritance rights are very limited. Moreover, in practice social norms often result in women giving up their already limited share of inheritance to male relatives. Women’s groups have recently raised this issue in public debate but have not launched a concerted campaign for inheritance reform in view of the widespread and entrenched resistance to it, based on a conservative interpretation of the rules on inheritance in the Qur’an. Other Muslim nations have reformed their inheritance laws (e.g. Indonesia), so it is possible that Morocco could in the future.

Other important aspects of women’s rights that the 2004 Family Code failed to address include polygamy and a husband’s unilateral right to repudiate his wife, and issues related to alimony in the case of separation. Again, these issues are particularly sensitive as the current provisions are also based on a conservative interpretation of the Qur’an. This resistance led to women activists making the strategic decision not to press for reform in these areas as to do so would have risked jeopardising *Moudawana* reform as a whole (Sadiqi, 2010). This nicely illustrates the role of public opinion in allowing a faster or slower rate of progress, as in Tunisia reform has progressed more rapidly in these sensitive areas (see Chambers and Cummings, 2014).

Further reforms are also needed in the area of labour protection. The 2003 Labour Code, which protects women from discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace, does not apply to domestic or agricultural

workers. Women are strongly concentrated in these sectors and their roles make them vulnerable to abuse. A law setting the minimum wage for domestic workers was passed in 2013 and may improve their pay and conditions despite being set at half the national minimum wage and failing to set maximum working hours. In addition, Morocco’s failure to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 87 on freedom of association and collective bargaining obstructs workers seeking to organise to defend their rights.

It remains to be seen if the commitments set out in the 2011 constitution to gender equality and to the precedence of CEDAW over national laws will open the way for women to press for change on the sensitive issues outlined above. The PJD’s resistance to the application of universal women’s rights frameworks in Morocco and the fact that current laws are based closely on the Qur’an makes reform under the current government seem unlikely.

4.3 Failure to fully implement reforms

Legal advances which codify women’s rights in Morocco have been implemented weakly or not at all, due to a lack of political will, limited capacity and an inadequate commitment to gender equality in the institutions responsible for implementation. This means that improvements in women’s wellbeing have been slow to materialise, with limited progress in gender equality indicators, which remain amongst the worst in its sub-region.¹⁸ However, the existence of the new legislation provides a strong basis for Morocco’s effective women’s movement to lobby for improved implementation and following the success in pushing for reform of the *Moudawana*, this is where many women’s groups have turned their attention.

Unfortunately, inadequate disaggregated data on women’s social and economic status limits the extent to which the state can be held to account regarding progress. Effective GRB could provide useful ammunition, but not enough progress has been made with budget reforms, and sector level monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is still too poor to provide the necessary data for effective monitoring (UNIFEM, 2009). In addition, ministry-level capacity and ownership of the reform process is still too weak for confidence that budget reforms will be sustained. Gender

18 Morocco comes 84th on UNDP’s 2013 gender inequality Index, with a score of 0.444 which is worse than all other Maghreb countries apart from Mauritania and closer to the scores of the Gulf States. However, there has been some limited improvement. Morocco’s gender inequality index dropped from 0.687 in 2000 to 0.543 in 2005, presumably because of the legal reforms of 2004. Between 2011 and 2013 it fell from 0.51 to 0.444, reflecting improvements in women’s status as a result of the 2011 constitutional and political reforms.

focal points, a key mainstreaming tool, are under-resourced and lack meaningful status (Euromed, 2010). In addition, the institutional structures for including women's interests in policy-making are largely cosmetic and have little impact beyond ameliorating the most visible aspects of inequality (CIDDEF and UNIFEM, 2006).

Policy implementation is hampered by poor administrative capacity in the key ministries and a failure to 'sell' the reforms to those responsible for delivery, leaving 'street-level bureaucrats' unconvinced and unsupportive of the changes.¹⁹ Reform fatigue, deepened by 'the complexity and slow pace of the reform' further dampens enthusiasm for further change.

This lack of follow-through is not surprising given the need to maintain political equilibrium in Morocco, especially since the clientelistic context strongly resists reforms.

An example of partial implementation is the case of Gender Responsive Budgeting in Box 6.

4.4 Broader discriminatory norms and social practices

4.4.1 Political and judicial failures

Reform is being hampered by institutional failures. This is particularly true of the judiciary where a lack of knowledge of and commitment to women's new rights, particularly amongst male judges, results in an unwillingness to uphold women's rights. Women's organisations have spearheaded training for judges, lawyers and the police force on women's rights issues but there is a long way to go. A patriarchal bias is possibly compounded by a lack of women in the judiciary: although numbers are rising, of over 3,000 judges in 2010, only 559 were women (Euromed, 2010). Women's attempts to seek justice are further hampered by corruption in the legal and judicial system, as women often lack the material resources to 'buy' a favourable outcome. In addition, the family division, which one might expect to be more women friendly, is 'hindered by a lack of human and material resources and cannot operate effectively' (Euromed, 2010). Not only that, but the implementation of family law is highly variable across the country and outcomes which might benefit women have been met with resistance by local structures of customary power (Sadiqi, 2010).

Quotas have enabled women to enter political institutions, including the executive, parliament and

Box 6: Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB): enabling transparency but not equitable resource allocation

From 2010 the GRB reforms began to lose credibility as a means of injecting gender equity into budget allocation processes. External drivers included the global economic and fiscal crisis, which drove down ODA from the OECD-DAC countries and with it their policy influence. In addition, the reorganisation of UN agencies to form UN Women in 2010 saw planning and budgeting subsumed under governance, reducing the focus on gender-budgeting. Internal drivers have included active political resistance to reform, and momentum has slowed as a political settlement is sought that balances secular reformist and Islamist interests. Implementation challenges (as outlined above) have further slowed progress. The economic and fiscal crisis facing the government means that policy-makers' attention is now entirely focused on firefighting, leaving little energy for driving forward capacity building or structural reforms such as GRB.

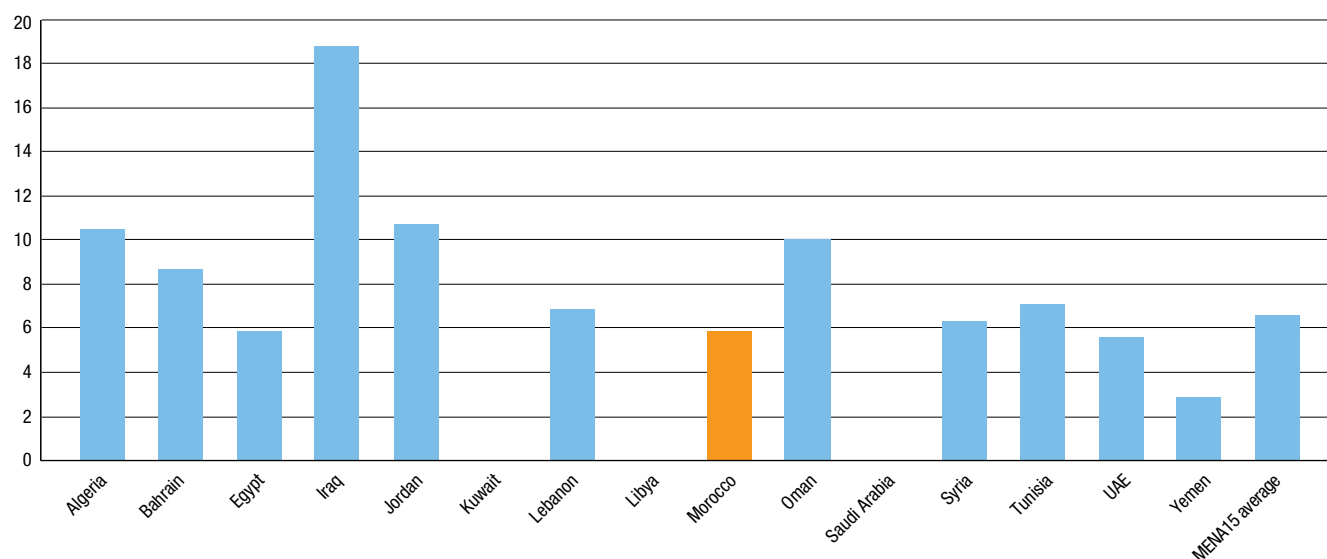
As a result of these constraints GRB has not yet helped drive more gender-equitable resources allocation in Morocco. However, it has helped to increase transparency in terms of what is being spent where, on what and on whom. This information is valuable for holding the state to account, and its value will increase further when the quality of the M&E data improves. GRB has allowed technical progress to take place at a time when hostility to reform has blocked controversial changes to inheritance law (key informant interview, 2012) and it is possible that GRB will move closer to fulfilling its potential in the future, although this depends on reduced hostility to reform.

political parties but they have found it difficult to translate their presence into policy influence. This is similar to experiences elsewhere (Castillejo, 2013) and so should not surprise us. In the Moroccan context the lack of a critical mass is an important impediment (for example, only 15% in the Assembly of Representatives, well below the 30% quota), combined with a range of other factors. For instance, one woman MP interviewee described how women are excluded both from party central committees and national bureaux and from grassroots structures, meaning that although women occupy reserve seats as

'The issue of women's political voice is manipulated by political parties as it serves as an alibi for political parties to show that their party is a modern one' (Aziza Sakharji, Justice and Charity movement)

¹⁹ Drawing on Lipsky's (1980) observation that in practice policy depends on those who implement it, which may differ from formal policy.

Figure 12: Women in ministerial positions, as percentage of total ministers



Source: OECD, 2010.

party candidates, they remain excluded from local and central party debates and decision-making processes. Guessous (2012) stresses that ‘the male leadership of leftist and progressive parties, in particular, has relied for too long on a contrast effect with Islamists and conservatives to hide its own sexism’.

In addition, while some of the women on party lists are women activists or credible party members with a genuine policy agenda, others lack credibility and have been appointed to serve nepotistic or clientelist interests (key informant interview). The political culture also acts a barrier to women’s full participation (UN-INSTRAW, 2010). For example, political meetings are frequently held late in the evening, ignoring the fact that women’s culturally determined gender roles mean that they almost certainly have caring responsibilities that make their attendance at evening meetings difficult.

Most parties, when in power, have shown little willingness to promote women to leadership positions either internally or in the executive. Compared to other countries in the MENA region, in 2010 Morocco had the fifth lowest share of women ministers in parliament, at 5.9%. This was not only below the average of 6.6%, but was significantly lower than the most closely comparable countries, Algeria (10.5%) and Tunisia (7.1%) (see Figure 12).

As a result of the many barriers to effective influence, many women are disillusioned with politics and women are less likely to vote than men, although the gap is narrowed when parties make a concerted effort to mobilise women (CIDDEF and UNIFEM, 2006). Pervasive patriarchal norms in political parties have meant that women who want to exercise public voice have done so through NGOs (Sadiqi, 2010). Sadly, even there women gain fewer leadership roles than men (Abdul-Latif and Serpe, 2010).

4.4.2 Implementation of gender reforms

In addition, discriminatory social norms and practices pose a major challenge to the implementation of the gender reforms. Patriarchal attitudes are widespread in Morocco, with women seen as subordinate to men, belonging to the domestic realm and unsuitable for leadership positions. While these social and cultural attitudes are deeply entrenched and shared by many women and men, it does appear that more women are questioning them and are more likely to hold more progressive views (although this does vary with level of education) (Abdul-Latif and Serpe, 2010). For example, in a study of the status of women in the Middle East and North Africa (Abdul-Latif & Serpe, 2010) most Moroccan men demonstrated little support for women’s rights while women were strongly supportive. Likewise, although only a minority of Moroccan men believed that women should be involved in politics, most women supported their involvement.

An attitude survey found widespread awareness of the new Family Code (ibid.), which suggests that although implementation has been poor and although current behaviour may not have changed, reforms such as the Family Code are changing attitudes. For example, some of those surveyed suggested that the Family Code has encouraged women to take a more progressive view of their role and to assert themselves in the family. Unfortunately, challenging social norms is stigmatised, and this is an important barrier to the implementation of the new Family Code (Sadiqi, 2011). This is perhaps, in part, because the reform has been top-down, driven by an elite agenda, and not connected to any broader social change (Monjib, 2009). There have been some efforts to counter this and to encourage women to take up their new rights, for example through Arabic and Berber language

education campaigns and the establishment of information centres for women. These have, so far, had limited impact and a profound cultural shift is necessary before women will feel empowered to take advantage of these reforms. Such a shift will require communication with both women and men via the education system and a sustained media campaign (Sadiqi, 2011).

4.4.3 Inequality in the labour force

Turning now to employment, we find that about half as many women as men are in employment and they experience discrimination, poor working conditions, lower pay and longer hours. The ILO (2006) notes that overall ‘women face a series of specific problems, including wage discrimination, reduced access to on-the-job training, long working hours and poor working conditions’. Combined, these issues negatively affect gender power relations. Earning more, for instance, would increase women’s ability engage in household decision-making and so challenge patriarchal norms.

The heavy concentration of women in the textiles sector means that they are highly exposed to any risks facing the sector, which is losing out in an increasingly competitive global market.²⁰ Indeed, between 2000 and 2011, women lost jobs in the urban textiles and clothing sector as it contracted following the loss of competitiveness due to the phasing out of the WTO’s multifibre agreements.

Women are not strongly represented in other sectors and an important factor driving their exclusion is employers’ perceptions that women (particularly married women) are less productive. This is compounded by the absence of institutional and legislative support for working women (such as maternity leave or affordable, or subsidised, childcare). Indeed, a married man is more likely than an unmarried man to acquire a good job but a

married woman is less likely to do so than a woman who is not married (Serajuddin and Verme, 2012). Married men are seen as more stable because they have family responsibilities whereas married women are more likely to be seen as a liability because they will want maternity leave and to take time off to look after sick children.²¹

Employment in the informal sector, textiles and microenterprise is likely to be insecure and have poor conditions of service. It is almost certainly an indication of women’s limited negotiating power in the labour market that they are so heavily concentrated in sectors that are known to have low pay and poor conditions of service. So, while their jobs are probably an improvement on those that they would have traditionally had in the agricultural sector, and they are an important entry point to employment outside the home (and farm), they do not indicate that women have achieved parity with men in Morocco’s labour markets. Insecure employment may also mean that women have to invest more time in maintaining their employment prospects, leaving less time for them to participate politically. The limited availability of high quality work for women in the formal sector and the strong concentration of women in the informal sector may also limit the instrumental value of secondary and tertiary education for girls.

Women’s heavy concentration in certain sectors means that they have had a high level of exposure to economic shocks and between 2000 and 2011 they increased as a proportion of unemployed people from 25.7% to 30.6% (Haut Commissariat au Plan, 2012a). Fewer urban women were employed (21.7% dropping to 19.6%), partially driven by job losses in manufacturing, which has limited options of paid employment for urban women, although this was partially offset by more rural women working (31.6% increasing to 33.3%) (Haut Commissariat au Plan, 2012b).

Women earn less than men in Morocco. In 1991, over two-thirds (69.1%) of the gender wage gap was driven by pure gender discrimination (excluding other factors) and by 2007, although it had dropped to 63.8%, discrimination still explains women’s lower pay, which presents a substantial constraint to the economic independence of women (Doudich, 2011 ; HCP, 2011). This is even more acute in rural area, where pure gender discrimination accounts for 92% of the gender wage gap. The share of women in permanent informal sector employment was 10.8% in 2007, compared to 12.7% in 1999 (HCP, 2007).²²

‘Parallel to these legal and political developments there are other real problems that still require efforts: the illiteracy rate among women, the rate of poverty among women, the rate of female-headed households’ (Female politician)

20 This largely follows from the end of the Multi-Fibre Agreement in 2005 and problems with sourcing inputs domestically (AfDB and OCED 2013).

21 Disturbingly, there has been a rise in the reported number of underage marriages, from 30,685 in 2008 to 34,777 in 2010 (according to the Ministry of Social Development, Family and Solidarity figures). These marriages not only violate the Family Code, but also suggest that more young women will be particularly disempowered as child brides, impacting upon their economic autonomy and political voice.

22 This definition of the informal sector excludes agriculture, own household production and domestic work, all of which are strong employers of women.

Economic policy can enable or undermine women's ability to participate in labour markets, with implications for their economic independence. Policies that enhance the access of women and girls to education and health services can be important in improving women's access to paid employment, as can public investment in infrastructure.²³ However, despite improvements, women's literacy rates in Morocco are still poor and spending on health services remains low. Some infrastructure programmes have increased access to social services but progress has been stronger in urban areas, with rural areas lagging behind compounding the inequality created at independence when rural areas were excluded from the expansion of mass education. Addressing these gaps in service provision would make it more possible to improve women's participation in the labour force.

Fiscal policies affect household's disposable income. Direct taxes, such as income tax, influence wages from formal employment, and indirect taxes such as sales tax affect the cost of goods and services. The impact of fiscal policies on women's financial status is mixed. Women

face higher direct tax rates than men because they cannot claim deductions for dependants – which are allocated to men, even if the woman's income is higher. Balancing this is the use of indirect taxation in Morocco, which is commonly regressive in other countries, because those on lower incomes spend a larger share of their income on taxed goods, but in Morocco is progressive and may help to promote gender equality (UNDP, 2010) because of the basket of goods selected for taxation. Where fiscal policies increase the resources under the command of women, they have implications for their agency within the household. This has the potential to allow women to negotiate greater space to manoeuvre, resulting in greater social and political freedom and enhanced political voice.

In summary, the structural barriers that prevent women from exercising the opportunities for political voice are grounded in their limited financial autonomy, which in turn are rooted in limited educational opportunities and compounded by some public policies. Gender inequality both limits women's access to education and their participation in the labour force.

23 For example, in 2004 the government decided to establish an obligatory and comprehensive health insurance scheme (*Assurance Maladie Obligatoire*) and social assistance (known as *Ramed*). These prioritise reducing maternal mortality, increasing access to medicine, and extending medical assistance to disadvantaged groups (MoF 2012a). The Social Cohesion Support Fund was created in 2012 to allow companies to contribute to healthcare costs and other social initiatives (MoF 2012a).

5. What lessons can we learn?

A broad and united women's movement that has been able to build strategic alliances across religious divisions has been instrumental in driving progress in women's political voice in Morocco. Support from strong local, regional and international networks has been crucial. This has been coupled with partial democratisation and the opening of political space; effective political leadership and support from the monarchy; and some important socio-economic changes.

Women's increased voice and participation in political processes have been instrumental in bringing about significant reforms in both the policy and legal realms. However, policy change is slow and incremental. Implementation can be slower still and changes to socio-cultural practices even more so – and this is as true in Morocco as it is elsewhere. This suggests that policy-level progress in women's rights in Morocco must be seen as a critical first step in what is likely to be a prolonged struggle for their substantive realisation.

Women's voice in Morocco has been influenced by the profound changes the MENA region has undergone in recent years, including the rise of political Islam, the 'war on terror' and the turmoil of the Arab Spring, as well as the strategic response by the Palace to these challenges. Women's rights and gender equality in Morocco (and other countries in the region) have become a political battleground within broader struggles between traditional elites and Islamist movements over the very nature of the political settlement underpinning the state.

The limited political opening that Morocco has experienced over the past two decades has shaped opportunities for women's political voice. The pre-2011 reforms did not significantly dilute the power of the monarchy, but they created formal political institutions and spaces in the political arena that women could occupy. The women's movement used these opportunities to campaign for measures, such as quotas, which would guarantee their continued representation in these arenas.



Moroccan women at an event commemorating International Women's Day. Photo: © UN Women / Karim Selmaoui.

The key lessons emerging from this case study include:

- **Inclusive and well organised social movements that can reach across divides and respond strategically to changes in the national and regional context can be effective in driving policy change.** Morocco's women's movement has shown how a flexible and responsive leadership has been able to build a broad coalition among women coming from different traditions and perspectives, driving change from 'within the tent' and making the most of windows of opportunity. For instance, King Mohammed VI introduced policy-level reforms to foster gender equality, in part to stem support for the Islamist movements. Foreign donors then helped to maintain momentum on Gender Responsive Budgeting, including support for its champions in the Ministry of Finance. The Moroccan women's movement was quick to take advantage of these opportunities and others following the Arab Spring, to push for improved rights. To increase its cross-cutting appeal, the women's movement also reached out to ordinary women, sought to understand their issues and improved the way that it communicates in order to broaden its appeal and gain wider recognition.
- **Even highly effective social movements cannot drive change on their own: they need influential champions involved in the decision-making process.** In Morocco support from the King for reforms to enable gender equity has been essential in enabling the reform process. The King's position gives him strong influence over the national policy debate and has been able to push through specific equalising reforms. For example he publically championed women's rights and used his legitimacy as 'commander of the faithful' and the concept of *ijtihad* to justify reinterpreting the *Moudawana*. This, and the opening of political space that he allowed, has enabled subsequent reforms.
- **A pragmatic, strategic, and gradual approach to sensitive areas of policy reform may be more effective, at the early stages, than direct political confrontation.** Feminists in Morocco have avoided falling into the trap of pursuing a radical agenda with vocal opposition to the status quo. An oppositional narrative, backed by aggressive demands for legal reforms and changes in women's day-to-day lives would have been likely to divide women and provoke and stubborn opposition. Instead, the women's movement in Morocco has networked with senior establishment figures. They have taken an 'inside the tent' approach to lobbying for change and delayed pushing for certain sensitive areas of reform (for example inheritance law) in order to gain progress on wider reforms. This has helped to ensure that the women's movement remains intact, incorporating women with very different interpretations of Islam and life experiences, and has allowed for a gradualist approach, which has delivered results.
- **Democratisation processes provide avenues for increased political voice, but this can, paradoxically, empower actors that oppose progressive change.** This helps to illustrate that 'all good things' do not always go together and that democratisation may throw up challenges that need to be addressed. In Morocco's case, its new constitution of 2011 gave women important new rights. It also opened the way for more democratic elections, the most recent of which brought to power an Islamist-led government that rejects the universal definition of women's rights.
- **Progress in political voice is rooted in broader changes in society. In Morocco socio-cultural changes in rural areas have combined with a range of other socio-economic changes to enable greater political voice for women.** Improved education outcomes for girls, women having smaller, healthier families and being healthier themselves, and women having greater access to paid employment outside the home have all empowered women, making it more possible for them to claim their rights by engaging in political processes and social movements.
- **Progress in women's political voice is not experienced equally. Urban, educated women from upper income groups are more able to participate publically in the political arena.** They are more likely to run for and be elected to political office, especially parliament. They are also more likely to work in the media and to work for NGOs and rights organisations. Despite welcome improvements in health and education, which support women's improved human development and enable women to access better employment, the more tangible effects of increased political voice remain elusive for poorer, more rural and less well educated women.

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A young Moroccan woman protesting the right to greater dignity and equality. Photo: © Julien Guyard.

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