

Men's Perspectives on Women's Leadership, Gender Equality and Positive Masculinity

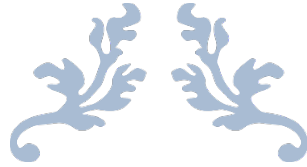
**REFLECTIONS FROM A REGIONAL
DIALOGUE BETWEEN MALE CHAMPIONS**

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The Global Network on Federalism and Devolved Governance



Men's Perspectives on Women's Leadership, Gender Equality and Positive Masculinity

Reflections from a regional dialogue between male
champions organized by the Forum of Federations' project:
*Empowering Women for Leadership Roles in the Middle East
and North Africa Region – Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia*

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INTRODUCTION

On February 6, 2024, the Forum of Federations organized a regional meeting focused on men's representations of gender equality and women's leadership.

The meeting aimed to address women's rights and their pioneering roles in various fields from an extraordinary perspective. Typically, the ordinary perspective entailed that gender equality has been primarily advocated by feminists, with most studies on the subject conducted by women.

Perhaps, understanding men's perceptions of women's rights gains significance due to historical precedents that established women's liberation in the Arab world, such as the writings of Qasim Amin in Egypt and Al-Taher Al-Haddad in Tunisia.

Therefore, the regional dialogue brought together nine “Champions of Positive Masculinity,” who are advocates for gender equality and female leadership in their countries. The goal of convening these individuals was to showcase their contributions to promoting gender equality and supporting women's leadership at the individual, professional, and societal levels. The meeting also aimed to:

- Create an opportunity to understand men's perceptions and views on gender equality.
- Gain a better understanding of men's perspectives on gender equality and inclusion issues.
- Provide male beneficiaries with the opportunity to discuss topics related to gender equality.
- Understand the challenges women face in accessing leadership and decision-making roles.
- Understand the challenges men face in supporting gender equality and inclusion.
- Provide good examples to young people of how men can support women's leadership and gender equality in various areas of society.

The goal of this meeting between Canada, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia was to understand and highlight what men in these countries can do to advance women's rights in their societies. This effort is encapsulated in the concept of positive masculinity.

Hence, it is crucial to recognize that masculinity is dominant in most societies today and manifests in various forms. Masculine societies often use biological differences to justify men's dominance over women in all fields. Masculinity is associated with power, control, aggression, and what Bourdieu describes as a kind of nobility that places men in a dominant position and renders women objects of domination.

Today, discussions about positive masculinity aim to dismantle the social patterns based on domination and the subsequent discrimination, exploring the extent to which men, or at least some of them, can overcome the social inheritance that defines a man's identity by his ability to dominate.

Some sociologists have analyzed "the feminine vision of the masculine vision."¹ Currently, we are reversing this approach through what can be termed the masculine vision of the masculine vision itself, which is positive masculinity.

We sought to understand the concepts of positive masculinity embraced by meeting interveners. Many of them stated that positive masculinity involves men not only being aware of the importance of women's rights but also actively defending women in practice.

When we asked Mr. Badno Joban about this issue, he considered that the question was difficult because it is related to psychological issues that were difficult to understand. Eventually, he considered the positive masculinity as the ability to look at the world, as it is, that is, our ability to get rid of the prejudice gained by the Society that created a certain societal division and stereotypes.

Whereas, Mr. Nour El-Din Al-Raji, who is responsible for programs in the Moroccan association "Youth for Youth," linked the concept of positive masculinity to the search for equality and stated that the concept of positive masculinity is also linked to the concept of masculinity that we find in several countries for some specificities (?) He also considered that the concept of positive masculinity carries challenges and opportunities that should enable us to search for different approaches to the relationships of women and men.

Whereas, Mr. Hisham from Morocco, considered that positive masculinity as a concept refers to "the champions of equality," which means sharing burdens and rights.

On the other hand, some of those involved tried to define positive masculinity through the actions carried out by a man to achieve greater equality between women and men. For example, Alaa' Al-Shamayleh from the Jordanian Ministry of Interior, who is head of the Public Funds and Government Property Department, spoke about helping to solve the problems of his female colleagues and being aware of the difficulties they face. He also considered that supporting women is a form of positive masculinity.

Based on these elements, positive masculinity can be defined as men embracing the principle of women's equality, actively working to achieve this equality, and resisting violence directed at women without feeling that their identity as males is compromised. Positive masculinity does not negate a man's identity, masculinity, or even his virility.

¹ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Male Dominance*, Translated by Salman Qaafarani, The Arab Organisation for Translation, 2009, P 107

Many contemporary studies have focused on what is termed the “transformations of masculinity”² or the “new faces of masculinity”³. These studies highlight the importance of evolving societal concepts related to gender and emphasize that differences between women and men should not be a basis for discrimination in rights and duties.

At the legal level, despite the numerous national and international laws that recognize women’s rights and condemn gender-based discrimination, women remain in an inferior position at all levels.

The latest World Bank report showed that women enjoy about two-thirds of the rights of men, and that “there is no place in the world where women enjoy the same legal rights as men in all indicators measured.”⁴ This means that patriarchy is a cross-societal phenomenon, albeit to a varying extent, which was observed in the regional meeting that brought together Canada, Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan.

On the African continent, since 2019, the AU Strategy for Gender Equality has been announced as part of achieving the sixth goal of the 2063 Agenda and the fifth goal of the Sustainable Development Goals. On November 25, 2021, on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls, the African Union adopted the “Kinshasa Declaration and Call to Action of African Union Heads of State on Positive Masculinity in Leadership to Eliminate Violence against Women and Girls in Africa.” This initiative recognizes the contributions of heads of state and government who are champions of the women’s cause, officially expanding the circle of champions.

The Heads of State and Government of the African Union Member States courageously expressed their readiness “to dismantle patriarchal systems that create inequalities and promote positive masculinities. Their goal is to rebuild the African social fabric through processes that address and rehumanize individuals, institutions, leaders, and communities, embodying the values of human dignity, equality, freedom, and self-determination.”

On November 10, 2022, the African Union organized the second conference on positive masculinity in Dakar, where the President of the African Union stated that it is necessary to make positive masculinity “a new state of mind to achieve a society that is more equitable and welcoming to women and girls.”

² **Castelain-Meunier C.** *Les Métamorphoses du masculin*, Paris, Puf, 2005.

³ **Castelain-Meunier C.** *Les Hommes aussi viennent de Vénus. Forts et sensibles. Les nouveaux visages de la virilité*, Paris, Larousse, 2020.

⁴ *Women, Business and the Law, World Bank Report, March 2024*,
https://www.albankaldawli.org/ar/news/press-release/2024/03/04/new-data-show-massive-wider-than-expected-global-gender-gap?fbclid=IwAR1s0BXkVxFBmTBFcCnTg1gE0DBVj-04MHUQsOqx_gPK9a5LASfEQEG6DPE

This new state of mind was therefore the focus of the regional meeting organized by the Forum of Federations, which is the subject of this paper.

The discussions, which lasted for nearly three hours, showed diversity not only in the topics of (expressing positive masculinity), the second section, (but also in the areas of expressing it), the first section.

First Section: Multiple Believers of Positive Masculinity

The regional meeting on equality and women's leadership brought together numerous male and female participants. Some female participants, such as Dr. Hayat Al-Nadishi from Morocco, addressed the work done by civil society on positive masculinity and the importance of convincing men to support women's issues across all fields.

We can examine positive masculinity based on the location of the actors and the nature of their interventions. Therefore, we will discuss the positive masculinity of political actors (in the first paragraph), the positive masculinity of civil society actors (in the second paragraph), and the positive masculinity that manifests within the framework of private relationships (in the third paragraph).

First paragraph: Positive Masculinity of Political Actors

Equality between male and female citizens requires that women have the same opportunities as men to enter the public space.

Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights stipulates that “everyone has the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives,” and “to have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.” The article also addresses equal representation, stipulating that “everyone has the right to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors.”

However, all international reports today have proven the difficulty of women being able to hold political positions and assume a leadership role in this field.

The Forum of Federations had previously published in 2022 a report entitled “For A Meaningful and Effective Political Participation of Women,” in which it studied the difficulties experienced by women in Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia.⁵ This report demonstrated the

⁵ <https://forumfed.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/VF-19.04.2022-Rapport-forum-participation-pol-corrigé-19-avril.pdf>

difficulty of women's leadership in representative councils and in senior and leadership positions, despite the development of legislative texts in this field.

Many interveners touched on the development of political will in their countries.

This was confirmed by the speakers, Nour al-Din al-Raji from Morocco, Alaa al-Shamayla from Jordan and Dr. Rafik Boujdaria from Tunisia.

Indeed, upon examining these various countries, we notice that the development towards equality between women and men and towards actual leadership for women was not always a popular demand but rather the product of the political will of the men who ruled or are ruling these countries.

Perhaps the Tunisian experience is important in this field. During the discussion, Dr. Rafik Boujdaria addressed the issue of modernization and its role in advancing women's rights. Those who deal with modernization mention the pioneering role of many men, including Al-Taher Al-Haddad, who published the book "Our Women in Sharia and Society" in 1930, in which he defended women's rights and the necessity of getting rid of traditions that deny these rights.⁶

The same applies to Morocco, where we cannot forget the role played by Allal Al-Fassi and, before him, Muhammad Al-Mahdi (Al-Hajjwi) in the 1960s. In his book "Women between Sharia and the Law," Al-Mahdi addressed the political rights of women, including their right to vote, hold public office, head the government, and the presidency of the republic. He also discussed women's civil rights, such as adulthood, guardianship in marriage, actions and donations, power of attorney, will, custody, and testimony. Furthermore, he extensively covered women's employment and their practice of public and free professions.

At the level of political decision-making, it is impossible to discuss the positive masculinity of political actors without mentioning President Habib Bourguiba, the founder of the post-independence state. President Bourguiba had a personal conviction that the development of societies depended on the development of women. Consequently, the Personal Status Code was issued in 1956 following an order on August 13 issued by Muhammad Al-Amin Pasha Bey and sealed by Habib Bourguiba, who was Prime Minister at the time. Thus, women's rights in Tunisia were established even before the adoption of the Tunisian Constitution in 1959.

The Personal Status Code marked a turning point in the history of Tunisian men and women by prohibiting polygamy, requiring women's consent to marry, approving court-based divorce, and granting other rights that reshaped the family structure and, consequently, society.

⁶ Al-Taher Al-Haddad, *Our Women in Sharia and Society*, Muhammad Ali Al-Hami Publishing House, Tunisia 2010.

We saw an example of the results of these reforms during our dialogue with Mr. Quraish Jawehdo. In response to our question as to whether his support for women's rights was influenced by personal reasons, he explained that he grew up in a family where women played an essential and strong role for several generations.

Dr. Boujdaria also presented another example of positive masculinity related to President Beji Caid Essebsi's project on equality and individual freedoms. Despite the fact that the project was unsuccessful, it did demonstrate President Caid Essebsi's commitment to continuing reforms aimed at liberating women by getting rid of discriminatory laws, in particular, the law related to discrimination between women and men in the field of inheritance.

What can be concluded from at least these two examples is that positive masculinity transcends time and geographical boundaries. Both presidents belonged to a generation in which the push to empower women in leadership roles and recognize their full rights sparked significant and sometimes tense social controversy. This controversy stemmed from its impact on identity and the opposition it faced from conservative factions.

In Morocco, numerous reforms aimed at advancing equality between women and men were implemented, driven by a royal will that was manifested in constitutional reforms in 1992 and further reinforced in 1996. The Personal Status Code underwent revisions in 1993, followed by a more comprehensive review in 2003 under the auspices of King Mohammed VI.

Reform attempts have continued by King Mohammed VI since 2004, as we read in the Family Code issued back then: "Our lord, the Commander of the Faithful, His Majesty King Mohammed VI, since he ascended the throne of his glorious ancestors, made the advancement of human rights at the heart of the modern democratic societal project, led by His Majesty, may God protect him, including justice for women, protection of children's rights, and preservation of men's dignity, in adherence to the tolerant purposes of Islam, in justice, equality, solidarity, diligence, and openness to the spirit of the age and the requirements of development and progress."⁷ It appears that progress in supporting women's rights is still important to the head of state, as in **October 2024** the King sent a letter to the Prime Minister in order to reform the family law.

Some studies on this approach have indicated that Moroccan women have increasingly engaged in political life, even on a symbolic level. This is evident through their representation as members of the government and their participation in rituals of allegiance to King Mohammed VI following his ascension to the throne. Furthermore, King Mohammed VI has

⁷ <https://justice.gov.ma/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/legislation-6294abb2180e1.pdf>

taken the initiative to appoint a woman to the position of his advisor, further demonstrating a commitment to gender inclusivity and empowerment.⁸

Despite the constitutionalizing of many women's rights in Morocco, "we find that the political rights that Moroccan women gained for nearly half a century were not actually achieved except through the rotational government that embodied the royal tendencies and implemented the government declaration that was read by Prime Minister Abdel Rahman Al-Youssef," who gave "special attention to women's issues, considering it one of the democratic challenges."⁹

In Jordan, some participants, such as Alaa Shamila and Dr. Heba Haddadin, also emphasized the legislative amendments that are taking place, which also reflects not only the will of women, but also the will of men who believe in the necessity of establishing equality. The constitutional amendments and the election and party laws that were approved in 2022 in accordance with the recommendations of the Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System may express a higher political will that constitutes a form of positive masculinity.

In Jordan, the King has also demonstrated his support for women and youth. During his speech at the celebration of Throne Day in 2023, he urged "all state institutions and leaders to support youth and women and to lend them a helping hand in strengthening their role on the political stage through action and words."¹⁰

It might appear exaggerated to discuss the positive masculinity of political actors, considering their efforts to portray a positive image of their policies, particularly concerning their international obligations. Nevertheless, the unanimous assertion of all interveners regarding the pivotal role of the law in propelling society towards equality and the significant strides made in this domain necessitates the acknowledgment of a fundamental role for political actors in this sphere.

The Canadian participants provided important and tangible examples of "equality champions" from Canadian politicians.

Perhaps the intervention of Mathieu Fleury, a former municipal representative in the city of Ottawa, best exemplifies this positive masculinity and the role of politicians in advancing gender equality and promoting the pioneering role of women. Mr. Fleury discussed his efforts to open up public spaces for women, particularly in relation to engaging in certain sports activities that were traditionally challenging for them to access. He emphasized the symbolic

⁸ See Rachid Ben Masoud, Positive Distinction between Legislation and Enforcement: The "Quota" Experience in Morocco, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Beirut 2017.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See the annual report of the Jordanian National Committee for Women's Affairs for the year 2023 <https://women.jo/sites/default/files/2024-04/JNCW%20Annual%20Report%202023%20%281%29.pdf>

significance of women's participation in sports, noting that it fosters confidence and leadership skills that transcend into other domains due to the competitive nature of sports.

Maxime Pedneaud-Jobin, the mayor of Gatineau, also shared his efforts in promoting women's leadership in the political arena, particularly by advocating for gender equality within political parties. He emphasized that equality should be a core component of the identity of political parties and stressed that it is not solely a concern for women but a fundamental issue for any democratic society. In his perspective, equality is fundamentally "a matter of justice and democracy." Therefore, he views the requirement of gender parity in electoral lists as an initial step towards women's inclusion. He also believes that politicians should empower women to occupy significant and progressive positions, rather than merely using them for portraying a good image.

It seems to us that Mr. Mathieu's speech summed up positive masculinity when he also considered that men must accept the idea that women do not practice politics in the same way that men do. He pointed out that women should only be held accountable for the political results and not for the approaches and mechanisms they adopt to reach the political goal.

This example, in our opinion, summarizes the essence of the dispute over the practice of women in leadership positions, as this practice is subject to standards set by men who believe that these practices are the most beneficial in the political field.

Second paragraph: Positive Masculinity of Civil Society Actors

Civil society plays a crucial role in advancing gender equality and promoting the pioneering role of women across various spheres, including the economic, social, cultural, and political domains.

At the heart of civil society are associations, which vary in specialization and areas of focus. Nonetheless, these associations collectively contribute to shaping public opinion in favor of the issues they champion.

Among these issues is the issue of equality between women and men, including women's leadership and their access to decision-making positions in the same circumstances as men.

The meeting between Canada, Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan demonstrated that many active men in civil society expressed their commitment to women's issues and rights. Through the various fields of intervention of the associations to which they belong.

The common element among the various interveners is that they all uphold a vision that supports women.

This vision has been translated into a field commitment, each according to the space in which he is active and his areas of interest.

In this context, we can mention the testimony of Quraish Jauhedou from Tunisia about the necessity of civil society's commitment towards women, through several elements, which are mainly related to denouncing discrimination and inequality, through the sensitizing mandate of civil society and through advocacy processes.

For instance, Mr. Jawehdo showcased the role he played in encouraging female citizens to engage in municipal projects. This highlights the role of women within the context of local democracy, particularly within the framework of decentralization. Tunisia made significant strides in this area before retracting the principle of parity in the current electoral law. Additionally, the discussion also touched upon the issue of women's participation at the local level in Jordan and Morocco, providing an insight into the realm of women's political responsibilities in these countries.

This aligns with what Mr. Jawehdo conveyed during our conversation when he emphasized that women's political participation is linked to the broader political landscape, including the presence or absence of political freedoms. Indeed, women's involvement and leadership across all spheres cannot be divorced from the state of rights and freedoms within each country. Women's rights are fundamentally human rights, enshrined in international instruments pertaining to human rights. Therefore, it becomes challenging to address women's rights and gender equality in non-democratic countries or those that do not uphold human rights in general, including the right to form political parties and associations, as well as freedom of expression, the press, and publishing.

The role of civil society has been noted in the countries covered by this study.

Civil society in Tunisia has played a decisive role in pushing towards equality in several periods, through several influential mechanisms, as men played an important role in the constitutional enshrinement of women's rights during the period ranging between 2011 and 2014, when equality between women and men was the subject of many social and political tensions.

It can be asserted that positive masculinity today encompasses the active engagement of many men in civil society who champion women's rights issues alongside other causes they advocate for. These men dedicate themselves to conducting extensive studies, comparisons, demonstrations, and commentaries on various texts prepared during this period.

In terms of supportive tools and mechanisms, Quraish Jawehdo from Tunisia introduced a set of indicators aimed at facilitating tangible efforts to achieve gender equality and foster women's leadership. These indicators, as presented by the speaker, encompass health as

the primary focus, followed by access to justice, financial independence, and political participation.

He considered that civil society can achieve the goals through the mechanisms we mentioned previously.

Indeed, civil society in Tunisia has proven the importance of advocacy, for example.

The advocacy process that accompanies many paths, including the founding paths, that is, the constitutional paths, and the legislative paths.

Positive masculinity is also the masculinity that expresses itself in times of major choices, such as constitutional choices.

At the constitutional level, for example, the role of civil society and the role of many men active in this civil society were noted during the preparation of the 2014 Constitution.¹¹

Civil society is made up of women and men, so advocacy processes are not limited to women or feminist movements.

Many associations headed by men have contributed significantly to changing the constitutional path towards constitutionalizing women's rights, such as equality in rights and duties, equal opportunities, political participation in general and parity in particular, but also in confronting societal violence directed at women in all fields.

Intervener Quraish Jawehdo from Tunisia underscored the significance of civil society's actions between 2012 and 2018, particularly in facilitating women's access to justice. He emphasized that women often hesitate to seek recourse to the judiciary to defend their rights, particularly those who are victims of violence.

It is worth mentioning that the constitutionalization of women's rights in Tunisia was made possible thanks to the efforts of Tunisian civil society, which includes feminist,¹² human rights, and academic associations¹³. These associations played a pivotal role not only in advocating for rights at the textual level but also in empowering women in the economic and

¹¹ The Constitution of January 27, 2014 is the second constitution of the Republic of Tunisia, which was ratified by a National Constituent Assembly.

¹² See Hamrouni (S.) "L'engagement des femmes tunisiennes dans le processus de transition démocratique", in *Penser l'engagement*, Dir. Ouelbeni (M.), édition Beit el Hekma, Carthage 2015.

¹³ As an illustration of this, we highlight the role of the Women's Coalition, Harir Tunisia, which serves as an umbrella organization for numerous women's associations. Additionally, we acknowledge the efforts of the Tunisian Association for Constitutional Law, which has presented constitutional analyses and proposals advocating for human rights in general and women's rights in particular.

industrial sectors. They targeted numerous initiatives aimed at rural women, thus enhancing their capabilities and opportunities for advancement.

This was pointed out by the intervener when he presented the role of legal clinics that provide free services to women, especially in the countryside, in addition to many other mechanisms, including digital mechanisms that enable women to present their sales or productions to consumers in a simple way that does not force them to move and with minimal expenses.

The same opinion was expressed by the intervener Raji from Morocco who spoke about the development of the Moroccan legal system, but despite this, society remained backward compared to the law. Therefore, the intervener expressed the importance of the role of civil society, especially youth associations that worked on the women's position within the municipalities in particular.

Mr. Al-Raji also highlighted the crucial role of civil society in implementing various legal texts that secured certain rights for women. One notable example is the law on the marriage of minors, which, despite being subject to certain exceptions, almost became the norm.¹⁴

The element of men's intervention to defend women's rights was the subject of an intervention from Jordan, where the defense of women's rights and their leadership is seen as a purely feminist issue, and in fact it is an issue of concern to all of society.

There was not much focus on this element, but the discussion about the possibility of a man being an advocate for women's issues was raised by many feminist associations. The debate centered on whether or not it is necessary to include men in the process of defending women's rights and addressing gender equality.

Perhaps this element is one of the factors that led to a division within feminist movements. Some believe that women should be the sole advocates for their issues, while others argue that excluding men positions them, in absolute terms, as adversaries rather than partners.

¹⁴ Moroccan family law prohibits the marriage of minors. However, Article 20 of the law allows the family judge in charge of marriage to authorize the marriage of a boy or girl under the specified legal age, and that is by a decision explaining the interest and reasons justifying that, after listening to the minor's parents, or his legal representative, and seeking the assistance of a doctor who confirms the ability to marry or conducting social research. But that did not prevent the courts from granting 13,000 permissions to marry minors in the year 2020, out of 20,000 requests which prompted human rights organizations in Morocco to take action and demand revision of the law.

See: <https://www.hespress.com/%D8%AA%D8%B2%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B5-1205055.html>

It seems to us that the concept of positive masculinity today can reduce the severity of this absolute vision, which believes that women inevitably defend women's rights, and that men do not inevitably defend women's rights.

Perhaps the presence of many men committed to the issues of equality and freedom at this meeting, as well as their practical involvement in the field, demonstrates that defending women's rights becomes possible when the idea is accepted, when individuals believe in equality in rights and duties, and when this belief is translated into their actions, both in the public and private spheres.

Third Paragraph Positive Masculinity in Private Relations

Most of the participants in the forum highlighted the gap between the relative advancement of laws and the persistence of societal attitudes that view women as inferior.

Indeed, patriarchal societies are characterized by male dominance and an inferior view of women, deeming them unworthy of certain positions and responsibilities, and limiting their roles within the family and household. Moreover, many of these countries have decided to limit women's roles to the family and children's care, reflecting an inability to envision women's roles outside the confines defined by patriarchal norms. In Tunisia, for instance, there is the Ministry of Family, Women, Children, and the Elderly. Similarly, in Morocco, there was the Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family, and Social Development, which later became the Ministry of Solidarity, Social Inclusion, and Family. Despite the name change, the ministry's tasks continued to encompass women's issues, as it is "entrusted with the task of preparing and implementing government policy in the areas of solidarity, women, family, and social development." ¹⁵

In the National Committee for Women's Affairs, we find a huge number of members who are male ministers.

In addition to the commitment of men in civil society and political society, as influential actors and as parties that encourage more rights for women and work to develop them. The most important question remains how these men deal with women within the family and in the private space.

Indeed, it seems that some individuals publicly advocate for women's rights while neglecting these principles in their private lives, sometimes even engaging in practices that violate women's rights and resorting to violence against them. Consequently, many participants emphasized the importance of respecting women's rights from early childhood, within relationships with mothers and wives, and in raising children, ensuring equal education for

¹⁵ Decree No. 2.13.22 issued on 18 Jumada al-Akhirah 1434 (April 29, 2013) relating to defining the competencies and organization of the Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development (C.R. No. 6148 dated 21 Jumada al-Akhirah 1434 corresponding to May 2) 2013.

both males and females. This was highlighted by intervener Nour El-Din Al-Raji, who explained that equality between men and women should not merely be a slogan, but a conviction applied in private life. Mr. Raji practices this belief through the partnership relation he has with his wife, sharing financial and household responsibilities and caring for their children together.

Among the champions of equality in Morocco, we also recognize the intervention of Hicham Ouzid. He expressed his gratitude to his mother, who instilled in him a respect for equality, enabling him to develop socially.

Mr. Bedno Joban from Canada also shared his personal experience, describing how he and his wife share all household tasks and childcare responsibilities, despite her working far from his workplace. He explained the positive impact this had on their children, who were able to overcome traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

In Tunisia, Ahmed, a student passionate about gender equality, discussed the pivotal role of education in fostering a democratic environment that cultivates men free from toxic masculinity and in harmony with themselves. He highlighted the influence of reading in shaping his convictions on the principle of equality, citing books that advocate for equality and human rights. For instance, he credited Dr. Nawal El Saadawi's works with helping him challenge conservative societal stereotypes and become an advocate for equality.

We observed a similar trend with Quraish Jawehdo, who elaborated on the importance of familial openness in shaping individuals' personalities and fostering a belief in equality. He emphasized the role of families that value science and knowledge, which serve as tools enabling women to enter the public sphere after pursuing education.

But despite these examples, the practice remains in our Arab countries in particular, and even in some of the developed societies, an expression of the penetration of discrimination and its internalization in society, through what Alaa Al-Shamayleh from Jordan described as red lines usually linked to the cultural and religious heritage that affects behaviors and sometimes determines them.

Indeed, to this day, many studies bear the title of "equality between women and men" while simultaneously justifying social or religious division of roles. This perpetuates the notion that women's lives should not extend beyond the roles of mother, wife, daughter, or sister, and do not attain the status of full citizenship.¹⁶

¹⁶ For example, Sanaa Abu Daqqa and others in a study entitled "Towards Equality between Women and Men and its Formation Factors among Graduate Students in Colleges of Education in Palestinian universities," states that: "Although Islam equates men and women with respect to the origin of humanity, religious obligations, afterlife reward, and financial disposal of property, it differentiates between men and women in the functions related to the nature of each of them, and to his mental, emotional, and physical formation."

Second Section: Areas of Expression of Positive Masculinity

First paragraph: The role of positive masculinity in promoting women's leadership.

Leadership can be defined as "the art of understanding and harnessing human nature, or the art of influencing human behavior to guide a collective towards a predetermined objective, fostering obedience, trust, respect, and cooperation."¹⁷ It encapsulates the skill of guiding individuals, exerting influence upon them, and serving as exemplars to inspire them.

The quality of leadership has long been associated with men and the qualities of physical strength, courage, initiative, and speed and power of decision-making.

Sociological and feminist studies have increasingly turned their focus to this matter, highlighting the disparity in women's representation in leadership roles despite their evident competence. Some studies have articulated that: "The discourse surrounding leadership and gender remained largely unexplored due to the perception of power as an inherently masculine trait. Traditional literature has frequently overlooked women in its examinations, concentrating predominantly on leadership enacted by men. In some cases, researchers have even questioned the suitability of women for leadership roles, thus perpetuating the underlying assumption that men are inherently predisposed to leadership, while traits associated with femininity are deemed unsuitable for such positions."¹⁸

In the meeting that brought together "Equality Champions" from Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan and Canada, the issue of women's leadership in several fields, including development, economics and political participation, was raised.

In this context, Mr. Alaa Al-Shamayleh from Jordan emphasized that while legislative measures have significantly mitigated discrimination against women and facilitated their ascent to decision-making positions, entrenched cultural norms continue to impede progress. These societal norms perpetuate the division of gender roles, constraining women primarily to domestic and familial responsibilities. Moreover, women often struggle with psychological pressures that make them question their self-assurance. In addressing these challenges, Mr. Al-Shamayleh advocates for proactive intervention, stating, "I recognize the

See:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341052555_Attitude_towards_Equality_between_Men_and_Women_and_its_Source_of_Formation_among_Palestinian_Post-Graduate_Education_Students/fulltext/5eab07a2a6fdcc70509dd023/Attitude-towards-Equality-between-Men-and-Women-and-its-Source-of-Formation-among-Palestinian-Post-Graduate-Education-Students.pdf

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¹⁸ EL HOUDZI, Abdelkoudous; BENAJIBA, Khalid. Le leadership féminin : L'impact de la perception du rôle social de genre. **Revue des Études Multidisciplinaires en Sciences Économiques et Sociale**, [S.l.], v. 3, n. 3, apr. 2019. ISSN 2489-2068. C'est nous qui traduisons.

immense capabilities of women, and I endeavor to assist them in overcoming these psychological barriers, starting from their formative years within the family."

In Tunisia, Dr. Lotfi Suleiman has demonstrated that societal advancement is achievable through collective effort. This has been evidenced in Tunisia, where certain professions, once perceived as exclusive domains for men, such as engineering, have witnessed a notable shift. Presently, women are penetrating all sectors, even emerging as the predominant force in some. They have successfully shattered the glass ceiling, marking a significant milestone in the country's social progress.

In Jordan, Minister Musa Al-Maaytah, a former minister and Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of the Independent Electoral Commission, underscored the pivotal role of women's representation in political spheres and their active participation in the political sphere. He emphasized the commitment of his leftist political party to fostering opportunities for women to ascend to political leadership positions. Minister Al-Maaytah recounted his leadership of a ministerial committee dedicated to women's empowerment, initially established as a temporary initiative before transitioning into a permanent structure. Collaborating closely with the National Committee for Women's Affairs, the committee embarked on various initiatives, notably addressing legal and constitutional reforms to promote women's political engagement.

In a significant legislative stride, Jordanian electoral laws were amended to enhance women's representation, elevating the quota for female parliamentarians to 18 seats. Moreover, regulations stipulated that women must occupy prominent positions within electoral lists, both in the first three and the subsequent three slots. Additionally, the legislation pertaining to political parties mandated a minimum of 20% female representation among party founders. These legislative reforms have yielded tangible outcomes, evidenced by the remarkable presence of over 40% women within political party structures, marking a substantial stride toward gender parity in political participation¹⁹.

In its report on the political participation of women in Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, the Forum of Federations stated that women's leadership and their access to the decision-making position still requires major legislative efforts that go beyond electoral laws.²⁰

Women's leadership extends beyond the realm of politics and should permeate all sectors, encompassing areas not exclusively tied to women's rights. In fields such as environmental conservation, where issues transcend boundaries of race and nationality, the role of women can be pivotal. In Jordan, a study examining the impact of Jordanian women leaders in advancing sustainable environmental development underscored a significant advancement in women's empowerment across various domains. Women are recognized

¹⁹ See: <https://royanews.tv/news/309029>

²⁰ See Salwa Al-Hamrouni For A Meaningful and Effective Political Participation of Women in Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, F, 2022, previously mentioned.

as instrumental in realizing significant environmental objectives and aspirations, promoting progress through their leadership and resilience in addressing climate challenges.²¹

Second paragraph: The role of positive masculinity in ensuring women's economic and social rights.

It is imperative to address women's rights and their parity with men not only through a lens of civil liberties but also by considering economic and social rights, which are fundamental human rights enshrined in numerous national constitutions and international conventions. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights mandates that "States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights by both genders as stipulated in the Covenant."

Furthermore, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women reaffirms women's entitlement to various fundamental rights, including the right to employment, access to healthcare, social security provisions, equitable remuneration, and quality education.

In other areas, the Convention stipulates that "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

- (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies.
- (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government.
- (c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

These texts are directed to the state parties, but the latter deviate from their international obligations in several countries, and they either violate the convention or misapply it.

Therefore, as we have already seen, civil society mobilizes in most cases to defend these rights.

²¹ Ibrahim Al-Ali and Dr. Tahani. The role of Jordanian women leaders in achieving sustainable environmental development in this era of climate changes. Journal of the Higher Institute for Qualitative Studies, 2023, vol. 3, no. 14, p. 4345-4374

Although some acceptance appears to be related to some economic rights, other rights find very few defenders, and this is why we call them champions of equality.

In Morocco, Nour al-Din al-Raji highlighted the importance of raising awareness and giving attention to women's reproductive health. He also presented the project he is working on, which is empowering women, with many of the relevant structures. He highlighted the need to go beyond the privileges enjoyed by men and integrate women into many fields, such as industrial innovation, sports, or theatrical experiences, which constitute best practices that contribute to the accumulation of assistance for women.

Hayat Nadeshi highlighted her association's efforts in engaging men to combat discrimination across various domains. She posed critical questions regarding men's stance on several rights, including inheritance, wage equality, and equitable division of wealth between spouses.

Similarly, Hisham Ouzid underscored the significance of equality clubs and their role in raising awareness about women's empowerment. He emphasized the necessity of addressing the needs of rural women, as he believes that the culture of discrimination is prevalent in desert regions. Furthermore, he introduced the Inclusive Institution project, emphasizing its significance in advancing women's empowerment.

As for the Jordanian point of view, Bakr Al-Raghad highlighted the importance of financial capabilities for women since ancient times and highlighted that historical studies have proven the existence of contracts concluded by women, even in the field of loans granted to women, noting that this economic role was expressed in the currency in which we find a female side and a male side.

Dr. Ali Khawaldeh summarized the topic by talking about the empowerment of women as a condition for equality and presented the role of education in raising awareness of the necessity of equality despite social differences. He also presented the role of technology today in raising awareness of the issue of equality.

Minister Musa Maaytah elaborated on the journey of the Women's Empowerment Committee, highlighting its evolution from a temporary initiative to a permanent and integral institution. He emphasized the committee's commitment to mainstreaming women's empowerment across all sectors, ensuring their inclusion and advancement in various domains.

Dr. Boujdaria from Tunisia discussed the concept of citizenship, emphasizing its connection to the right to education. He highlighted the significant issue of many girls being forced to leave school, which is closely tied to societal perceptions of gender roles. Dr. Boujdaria argued that there is an ongoing struggle to overcome the rooted notion of male superiority and the accompanying cultural biases. He cited the Tunisian General Labor Union as an

example, noting the disproportionately small number of women represented in its leadership structures.

For his part, Quraish Jawehdo spoke about social integration centers and their role in supporting women. Noting that those centers are a form of protecting women and reducing their fragility.

Therefore, economic and social rights enable the economic empowerment of women.

Economic empowerment means empowering women with financial independence that frees them from a position of dependency on men, whether the father, brother, husband or son.

In 2017, the Middle East and North Africa region ranked last in terms of the gap in the global gender gap index.

In this context, UN Women stated that "women's economic empowerment—their ability to succeed and advance economically and their ability to make economic decisions and take action on them—is a basic human right." Despite all countries in the region having ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), seven countries have registered reservations to Article 15 (which relates to the equality of women's rights to conclude contracts and manage property), and eleven countries have reservations to Article 16 (which pertains to the right of married women to own, manage, and dispose of property on an equal basis with men). UN Women emphasized that these reservations negatively impact the economic empowerment of women in the region, as they hinder women's equal access to resources.²²

On another level, in March 2024, the World Bank Group released a report titled “Women, Business, and the Law,” which presented a comprehensive overview of the barriers women face in joining the global workforce and contributing to greater prosperity for themselves, their families, and their local communities. The report highlighted that “two indicators can significantly impact women's choices: safety from violence and access to childcare services.”²³

It seems that the Arab countries have become aware of these forms, as on April 21, the Arab statement was adopted after the Arab regional preparatory meeting for the 68th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women on “Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls through combating poverty and strengthening institutions and financing from a perspective that considers women's needs. He considered economic empowerment a priority for these countries to continue

²² <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/ar/what-we-do/economic-empowerment>

²³ https://www.albankaldawli.org/ar/news/press-release/2024/03/04/new-data-show-massive-wider-than-expected-global-gender-gap?fbclid=IwAR1s0BXkVxFBmTBFcCnTg1gE0DBVj-04MHUQsOqx_gPK9a5LASfEQEG6DPE

supporting the economic, social and political empowerment of Arab women, especially “through continuing to develop legislation and laws, developing national strategies for financial inclusion and taking the necessary measures to support women’s participation in the labor market and their equal access to economic opportunities, especially in the fields of science, technology, innovation, digitization, green and blue economy, as well as enhancing women’s access to decision-making positions.”²⁴

The phenomenon of the feminization of poverty is considered one of the most important expressions of discrimination against women. Poverty can be considered one of the basic determinants not only of a country's economy, but also of the safety of social relations and the achievement of civil peace in various societies.

The United Nations has defined poverty broadly as “more than just the lack of income, resources, or ensuring a sustainable source of livelihood, as its manifestations include hunger, malnutrition, limited access to education and basic services, in addition to social discrimination, exclusion from society, and lack of opportunities to participate in decision-making.”

Here the role of equality champions appears through their commitment to helping women achieve economic empowerment through several mechanisms.

During the regional meeting, the focus of this paper, numerous barriers hindering women's economic empowerment were discussed, with particular attention to the challenges women face in acquiring ownership. Dr. Sahar Al-Mishri from Tunisia highlighted the specific difficulties women encounter, particularly in owning agricultural land. It is notable that the agricultural labor force in Tunisia is predominantly female, as women tend to accept lower wages than men and work under conditions lacking basic rights. However, when it comes to land ownership, women face significant pressure from family members, banking institutions, and other stakeholders, making it difficult for them to secure property.

In Morocco, Mr. Hisham Ouzid spoke about the experience of the thirty clubs made up of men and women at a district level, which helped in the economic empowerment of women through training in several fields, including education, institution management, and others. He also pointed out the need to generalize this type of experience that helps women achieve economic empowerment, which is the key to equality.

For his part, Mr. Nour El-Din Al-Raji stressed the role played by some rural radio stations in encouraging industrial innovation for women, and it seems that Tunisia has witnessed the same experience. Mr. Jawehdo explained the importance of helping rural women, especially to market their products directly through e-applications. This marketing mechanism will

²⁴ <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/ar/stories/byan-shfy/2024/04/albyan-alrby-alsadr-n-alajtma-althdyry-alaqlymy-alrby-lldwrt-68-lljnt-wd-almrat-balamm-almthdt-hwl-tsry-thqyq-almsawat-byn-aljnsyn-wtmkyn-jmy-alnsa-walfatyat-mn-khlal-mkafht-alfqr-wtzyz-almwssat-waltnmwyl-mn-mnzwr-yray-ahtyajat>

make women avoid, for example, marketing through intermediaries, which enables women to make more profits and encourages them to develop their production.

On the other hand, he highlighted the importance of integrating women into development projects and investment projects, which is what some municipal experiences in Tunisia have emphasized, in addition to the necessity of thinking about a gender-sensitive budget. Regarding his experience as a supporter of this trend, Quraish Jawehdo stated that women's participation in determining the annual investment plan developed from 2 percent in 2016 to 42 percent in 2018.

According to the various participants in the discussion, the mechanisms for economic empowerment vary, including legislative ones, which is what the participants from Canada, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia agreed upon.

But regardless of what countries do in this field, positive masculinity can play an important role in confronting women's poverty, through men's commitment not only to defending equality and equal opportunities, but also through their attitudes towards reforms and public policies, and through their personal positions.

Although not all participants addressed the issue, Dr. Boujdaria from Tunisia discussed the reform efforts in Tunisia aimed at achieving inheritance equality, a matter that directly impacts women's financial status. Quraysh Jawehdo also spoke on this topic, acknowledging that despite legislative discrimination, his family practiced equal inheritance distribution between women and men. He highlighted this as an example of positive masculinity in action.

It can be said, then, that economic and social rights for women remain an ongoing demand in most countries. This urgency was echoed by Betty Trombeck, lead author of the World Bank Group report mentioned earlier: "It has become more urgent than ever to accelerate efforts to reform laws and develop public policies that enable women to work, establish business activities, and grow them. Today, only half of women participate in the global workforce, compared to about 3 out of every 4 men, and this goes beyond justice to wasting the value of women. Increasing women's economic participation is the key to increasing their ability to express themselves, make their voices heard, and influence decisions that directly affect them. Simply put, countries cannot afford to bear the consequences of marginalizing the role of women, who represent half of society."²⁵

²⁵ https://www.albankaldawli.org/ar/news/press-release/2024/03/04/new-data-show-massive-wider-than-expected-global-gender-gap?fbclid=IwAR1s0BXkVxFBmTBFcCnTg1gE0DBVj-04MHUQsOqx_gPK9a5LASfEQEG6DPE

Third Paragraph: Expressing Positive Masculinity in Times of Crisis

Women are often considered the most vulnerable during crises, as many societies still regard women's human rights and equality as a luxury that can be neglected in difficult times. Despite the interconnectedness of human rights, states are obligated to prioritize women's rights during crises, a point emphasized by both male and female participants during the Forum of Federations' meeting.

The discussions focused on two key issues:

1. How do men view the situation of women during and after the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How do men perceive the situation of women who are victims of wars, specifically the current situation of Palestinian women?

Regarding the issue of Covid, Ms. Hayat Lahbaili raised this issue to the attendees, asking about the role of Covid and its impact on women, especially since the pandemic forced women and men to share the same space for a long time.

Before delving into the reactions of those present, we note that the consequences of the pandemic have been catastrophic for women, who in many countries endure toxic masculinity, whether from their husbands or other members of their families.

In his answer to the question, Mathieu Fleury spoke about the Canadian experience in specific and the North America in general, where many modifications were made to the way work is organized and its mechanisms. He also reiterated that the pandemic led to greater interest in the green economy.

In Tunisia, Dr. Boujdaria testified that nearly 80% of health workers were women who bravely faced the pandemic despite the difficult working conditions. He also tackled the consequences of the pandemic on women, including an increase in the birth rate, and at the same time an increase in the divorce rate, an increase in GBV rate, and further impoverishment for women.

Indeed, Covid has deepened the vulnerability of women on the economic and social levels and contributed to strengthening the violent tendency of many men, including those who depend on women to provide for the family's domestic needs.

Quraysh Jawehdo confirmed this conclusion, recalling the significant increase in women's poverty and even the phenomenon of killing women.

All of these observations can be confirmed by the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations that was issued in December 2020 on the impact of the Corona pandemic on women, as it was stated in these two reports: "This pandemic has devastating social and

economic consequences on women and girls, as “nearly” 60% of women around the world work in the informal economy, earn less income, save less, and are more at risk of falling into poverty. With the collapse of markets and the closure of companies, millions of women’s jobs have disappeared. Hence, the report recommended that governments shall “center Women and girls at the heart of their efforts to recover from Covid-19, which begins with placing women in decision-making positions and giving them an equal role in decision-making authority.”

The Secretary-General called for concrete steps to be taken to ensure equal treatment on many fronts:

"Women should target measures to protect and stimulate the economy, from cash transfers to credits and loans. Social safety nets must be expanded. Unpaid care work must be recognized and valued as a vital contribution to the economy. We must acknowledge the expression of positive masculinity in this report, given that it includes recommendations supporting women during their ordeal. While the plight of COVID-19 is the result of a health pandemic, the plight of women during international conflicts is often the result of human actions."

At the meeting, some champions of equality expressed their concern about the targeting of women during international conflicts. Specifically, the discussion focused on the suffering of Palestinian women and their targeting, not only since October 7, but since the beginning of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.

In this context, Minister Musa Al-Maaytah talked about targeting the most basic rights of Palestinian women, which is the right to live. He also noted that women were targeted through some international measures that punished Palestinian women, such as suspending aid in refugees’ centers.

In general, it can be said that international actors can deny the principles of equality and human self-dignity, but also even the rules of international humanitarian law, which consider the protection of civilians at its core, and this is what we have seen in most of the wars that target women to impose collective punishment on the weakest party to the conflict.

These observations were recorded, but the Security Council tried to limit these practices through its Resolution 1325 dated October 31, 2000, which aimed to combat sexual violence during armed conflict, and increase women’s participation in peace processes and political institutions.

Conclusion

At the end of the meeting, Mr. Hatem Lamleki undertook the task of rephrasing and restructuring the interventions representing the four concerned countries—Canada, Tunisia,

Morocco, and Jordan. This effort effectively highlighted the significance of positive masculinity in promoting and fighting for gender equality in these countries.

He noted that the discussions centered on elements typically emphasized by traditional gender analysis, including norms and values, family roles, control of wealth, access to public space, and participation in political life.

Indeed, the champions of gender equality shared their personal and professional experiences, particularly regarding the economic empowerment of women and gender equality within political parties, civil society organizations, and public administrations. These experiences showcased the progress achieved in various countries from one side and underscored the importance of positive masculinity from the other side.

The various interventions also demonstrated that gender equality is intrinsically linked to the struggle for rights, freedoms, democracy, and transparent, accountable, and participatory governance.

Following are some of the recommendations:

- Make the greatest efforts to achieve actual equality between the sexes in all fields, including social, economic, legal, institutional, and cultural fields, with special attention to periods of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war on Gaza, which have shown that women are more vulnerable and more exposed to risks and attacks.
- Emphasize the importance of education as a lever for fostering positive masculinity and encouraging men's commitment to gender equality.
- Raise community awareness to promote gender equality.
- Promote innovation and the use of ICT and social networks to enhance men's participation in advancing gender equality.
- Adopt a comprehensive approach to gender equality that enables women to attain decision-making positions and assume leadership roles.
- Transition from the concept of positive masculinity to actively involving men in the struggle for gender equality, thereby giving real meaning to the idea that "gender equality is also a man's issue."

At the conclusion of this tour across the four countries, alongside the champions of equality, to explore "Men's Perceptions of Gender Equality," this report underscores the crucial role of positive masculinity in the journey toward gender equality. It showcases numerous examples of men advocating for women's rights, sharing domestic responsibilities, and challenging traditional gender norms. Furthermore, the report emphasizes the transformative potential of men in advancing equality by fostering a culture of respect, advocacy, and equal opportunities for all. Thus, it is hoped that this report will inspire other men to emulate these champions of equality, as it paves the way towards a fair society grounded in the equal rights and dignity of all individuals.