

# INVESTING IN WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

“The Global Fund for Women closes the knowledge gap on the long history of MENA women's rights activism and ensures MENA women can influence key decisions that affect them.”

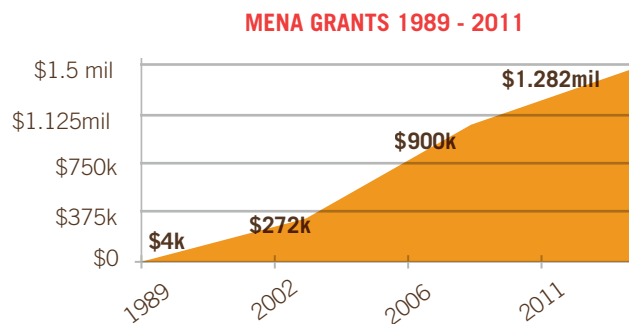
—GLOBAL FUND BOARD CHAIR LEILA HESSINI

Since 1989 the Global Fund for Women has provided nearly \$10 million in vital core support to 384 women-led groups in 14 countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Individually and collectively, these groups are working to achieve gender equity, genuine human security and greater opportunities for girls and women. By cultivating women's leadership and building a formidable movement, they are changing the region.

## BIRTH OF THE MENA INITIATIVE

In 2003, just months after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the Global Fund for Women Board made a bold decision to launch the **Initiative for the Middle East and North Africa**. Anticipating the additional hardship facing women under war, we decided to direct systematic support to women's groups dealing with increased destabilization. Despite their best efforts to rebuild their communities, women's groups had little to no financial support. The vast majority of funds for “reconstruction” in war-torn countries like Iraq or Palestine went either to governments or large, bureaucratic NGOs; rarely reaching smaller, local organizations capable of responding to immediate community needs. Inspired by this vision, a handful of donors launched the MENA Field of Interest Fund and raised \$460,000 to support women's rights organizations in the region.

In just seven years of our initiative, our grantmaking to the MENA region grew by 400%, accounting for 80% of the Global Fund's total giving to the region historically. We also significantly

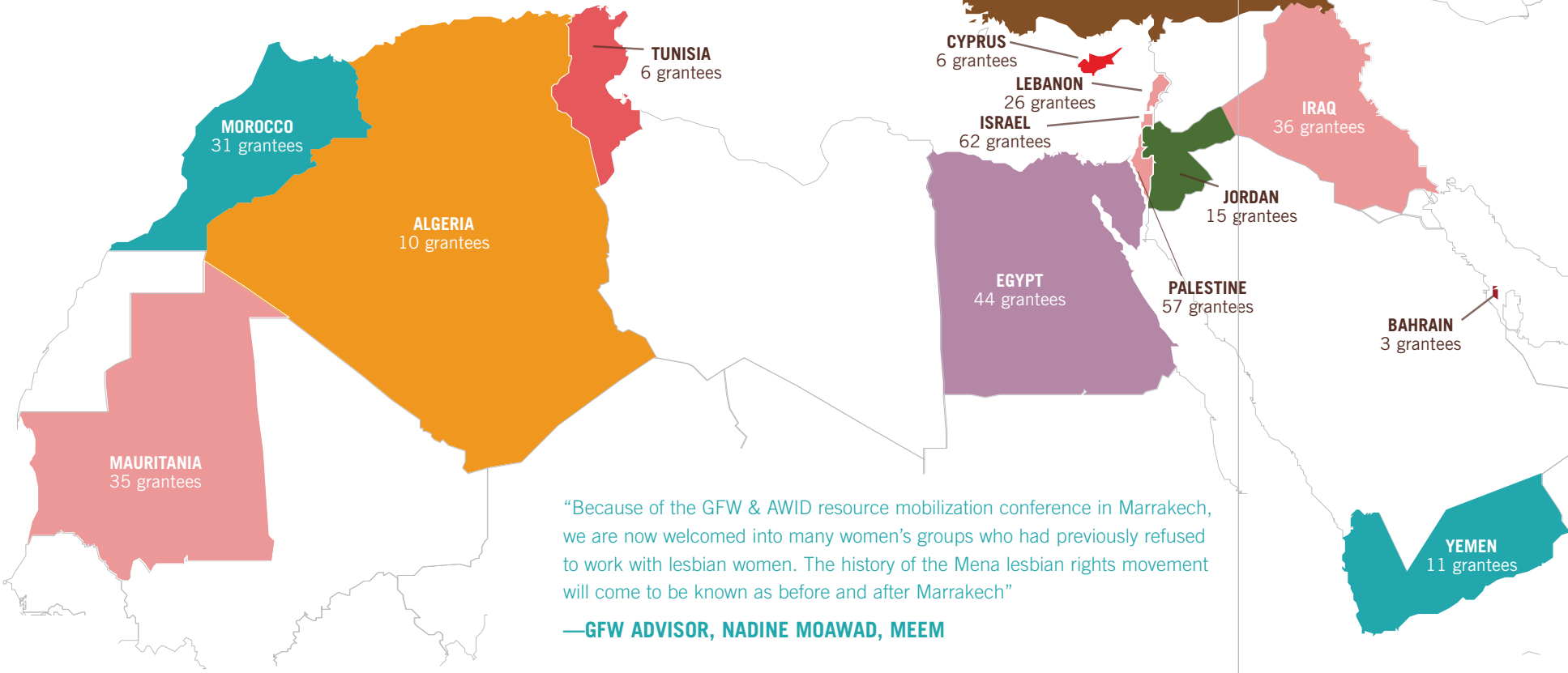


expanded our network by adding 12 new regional advisors and diversified our grantees to include groups from rural areas, marginalized communities, and to countries and regions with nascent women's rights organizing.

Global Fund grants provide direct, core support to grassroots organizations and national and regional networks. This flexible support helps women's groups meet immediate needs and respond quickly to changing environments, such as mobilizing for democratic reforms recently witnessed throughout the Arab world. Our strategic support has brought leading feminists together and helped to open spaces for dialogue in a region that has been historically closed to taboo or sensitive issues, such as sexuality rights.

# SNAPSHOT OF OUR GRANTMAKING

In total, the Global Fund has awarded **\$9.7 Million through 762 grants to 384 women-led organizations** working to advance women's rights and well-being in 14 countries in the MENA region. We also leveraged an additional \$412,679 in fiscal sponsorship support to longtime grantee partners.



“Because of the GFW & AWID resource mobilization conference in Marrakech, we are now welcomed into many women’s groups who had previously refused to work with lesbian women. The history of the Mena lesbian rights movement will come to be known as before and after Marrakech”

—GFW ADVISOR, NADINE MOAWAD, MEEM

- 2003** MENA Initiative launched
- 2004** 1st MENA regional director hired
- 2005**
  - 1st Board outreach trip to 7 MENA countries & meeting in Egypt
  - GFW prioritizes “Women Living Under Occupation, Conflict, & War”
- 2007** GFW Board votes to extend Initiative
- 2008**
  - GFW & AWID workshop in Morocco on mobilizing resources for MENA women
  - 1st ever GFW trip to Mauritania
- 2009**
  - GFW Board votes to create MENA regional program
  - 1st MENA directory of women’s rights organizations produced
- 2010** 1st MENA Advisory Council strategy convening in Amman, Jordan
- 2011** 1st MENA book, “Telling Our Stories” by Advisors, Staff and Board

# SUCCESS STORIES

## 1. “SPRING OF EQUALITY”, MOROCCO

On March 8th 2000, some 200 women’s groups led the “Spring of Equality,” a mass campaign where hundreds of thousands of women marched on Rabat, Morocco’s capital. They demanded reform of the Family Code, the *Moudawana*, which made women subjects of their fathers or husbands and denied them equal inheritance rights. It also sanctioned polygamy and granted divorce only to men. King Mohammed VI ultimately yielded to the feminists’ demands. By 2003, several Global Fund grantees participated in the Royal Advisory Board to transform the *Moudawana* into legislation guaranteeing women equality. Today, women have 40 seats in Morocco’s Parliament and 16 Family Court judgeships.



## 2. “ARAB REVOLUTIONS”

In early 2011, grantee partners in Tunisia and Egypt were at the forefront of democratic uprisings in their countries. After the ouster of President Ben Ali, Tunisian women’s groups secured women’s equality in the new Tunis Declaration and legal reforms to prohibit gender discrimination. In Egypt, after millions occupied Tahrir Square and other public sites to overthrow President Mubarak, women’s groups traveled the country to gather input from women to ensure that the new constitution enshrines gender equality. The impossible was made possible by years of organizing and trust building across civil society by our grantee partners like Nadim Center, Center for Egyptian Women’s Legal Assistance, New Woman Foundation, and Nazra for Feminist Studies, among others.

## 3. WOMEN WIN NATIONALITY LAWS

In 2010 and 2011, after a decade of research advocacy, media reform and protests, women’s rights groups secured the passage of gender-conscious nationality laws in Libya, Palestine, Tunisia, Yemen, Algeria, and Egypt. These laws mean women can now pass their citizenship on to their children. Legal guarantees are essential for women and children to access education, health care and employment. These victories were the outcome of the “Arab Women’s Right to Nationality” regional campaign led by Global Fund grantee partners with regional coordination by the Collective for Research and Training on Development in Action (CRTD-A) in Lebanon.

# HOW WE'RE BUILDING A MOVEMENT

A hallmark of our grantmaking is to chart new territory and fund where others fear to tread. We're able to do this because of our impressive network of MENA advisors who help us assess trends and give on-the-ground analysis. We have prioritized grants to LGBTQI women, women with disabilities, girls and adolescents, rural women and others who are too often left out of mainstream funding channels. Over 90% of Global Fund grants have supported initiatives that specifically include marginalized populations.



## RURAL WOMEN

In 2008, the Global Fund convened two meetings in Mauritania for existing and prospective grantees, which were instrumental in seeding small women's groups in rural areas. In addition to bridging rural/urban divides, these meetings brought together women from the four major ethnic/linguistic groups. We awarded more grants to Mauritania between 2008-2011 than the prior 14 years combined. This helped grantees secure critical victories, including changes to the Mauritanian personal status code. Although over 63% of adult women are illiterate and nearly half of the country lives in poverty, women's groups have launched small rural cooperative businesses, increased women's voting by 30%, and addressed controversial human rights issues, including slavery, sexual violence and discrimination against widows.

## BUILDING MOVEMENTS ACROSS BOUNDARIES

The Global Fund is building stronger movements by creating connections between diverse networks and supporting feminist research and analysis. At the 2008 Resource Mobilization Conference in Morocco and the 2009 Arab Feminisms Conference in Lebanon, the Global Fund intentionally supported the participation of women's groups facing multiple forms of oppression; this created a safe networking space to help shatter old stereotypes.

As a regional priority, the Global Fund strengthens ties between LGBTQI and women's rights movements. For example, in 1995 in Turkey, we awarded the first grant to a lesbian group; by



2011, we funded the first ever conference for sex worker and trans-peoples' rights organized by **Pembe Hayat** (Pink Life). Sex workers received safety training and sexual health information and networked with human rights defenders.

Supporting young feminist leadership is also another major focus of our grantmaking. In May 2010, we gave a seed grant to the **Young Arab Feminist Network** in Cairo, Egypt to support feminist youth building alliances and breaking the isolation often felt by young people concerned about the political future of their countries.

## DURING OCCUPATION AND WAR

In areas facing violent conflict or military occupation, the Global Fund supports refugee women's groups and community-led programs that save lives and meet the urgent needs arising from war. These women endure incredibly difficult circumstances, including death or disability in the family, increased domestic violence, and trafficking resulting from deepening poverty. Global Fund grantee **Zakher** runs a cooperative commercial kitchen in Gaza where over 25 women heads of households come together to prepare and sell foods locally, earning income to sustain their families. In Israel, **New Profile** works to challenge Israel's occupation of Palestine and the militarization of their society, especially the militaristic socialization and education of their children. The **Baghdad Women's Association** operates a "listening center" to provide trauma counseling to women and families and programs to prevent, monitor and report incidences of gender-based violence.

