

**Second progress report of the Women on the Frontline
programme
January – December 2014**



In memoriam Salwa Bugaighis



On June 25, 2014, Salwa Bugaighis was stabbed and shot in her home in Benghazi, just after casting her vote in the Libyan general elections. She had been receiving threats from Islamic extremists for some time already. Salwa was one of the founders of the Libyan Women's Peace Platform, a partner within Women on the Frontline.

Salwa played a very active role in the 2011 revolt against Colonel Qaddafi. Her hometown Benghazi was a stronghold of resistance against the dictator in the first half of that year. After the fall of Qaddafi, the struggle entered a new phase of striving for democracy, women's rights, freedom and security. Salwa, trained as a lawyer, displayed great perseverance and humanity as she searched relentlessly for opportunities for positive change. She was a member of the National Transitional Council and played a key part in the development of the new Libyan Constitution. Salwa can rightfully be called one of the driving forces in Libya's political transition. **For an impression of her impressive persona, please see [this short video](#).**

When she was invited to the Netherlands by Hivos at the beginning of 2012, we experienced her charisma first-hand during meetings with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Members of Parliament and journalists. She proved a brave leader and worthy advocate for a democratic Libya: quiet but determined, and with a sympathetic ear for her interlocutors.

When she was a member of the transitional government, more rights for women and disarmament were placed high on its agenda. However, after a few months she gave up her seat in protest at the lack of women in the new government.

People who knew and worked with her have described the day Salwa was murdered as the day when a part of Libya died a sad death - the part that has fought tooth and nail against lawlessness and lack of freedom. We support the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace in their continuous efforts for justice and full and equal participation for all Libyan women. Together with El-Karama they started a campaign called "[Justice for Salwa is Justice for All](#)", asking for Justice for Salwa and all other women in the region who fall victim to violence and abuse.

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1. Introduction

The year 2014 was yet again an eventful year for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with a number of dramatic developments that not even regional analysts expected to happen. During 2014, not much remained of the euphoria and excitement of 2011, when the expectations of a region-wide transition to a democratic and peaceful region were high. The developments of the past year, especially with the fast growth and expansion of areas controlled by groups like the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS), has left many commentators, analysts and politicians cynical towards the gains of the so-called Arab revolutions. Aside from Tunisia, where the transition to a more democratic and open political society is going relatively smoothly, a regional democratic transition in the near future is no longer a realistic scenario.

No matter how dramatic the developments are, at least one gain has been made during the past four years which cannot be turned back. The events of the Arab uprisings have forced academics, politicians and (international) civil society organisations to rethink the theme of citizenship in the region. For a long time, there was little attention for the role of citizenship as a rallying cry for social forces that want to redefine state society relations based on new social contracts. Given the current state of violence, instability and radicalism in the MENA region, the focus on these social forces might seem a utopian euphoria. Yet if we are willing to look beyond the headlines of beheadings, car bombs and counter-revolutions of autocrats and terrorists, it remains clear that something fundamental has changed. Beneath all these setbacks and negative developments, many citizens and activists continue to strive for dignity, fundamental freedoms and rights for all citizens - the issues that started the uprisings in the first place, and that brought many who had never claimed such a public and political role before to the streets. The major gain of the uprising is an opened lid that resilient men and women, despite terrorism and extremism, will strive to keep open forever.

The initial belief and rationale of the Women on the Frontline programme – that a real transition can never take place without the full and equal participation of women – remains as valid today as it was in early 2011. Especially now that extremist and fundamentalist groups gain influence, and political repression continues, the women in the region voicing an alternative sound and calling for full and equal participation need our continuous support. The focus of this participation has broadened or shifted in some of the WoF countries, from mere participation in national democratic transition processes to participation in local and more informal politics, or reconciliation and peace processes and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR). The implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security is potentially one of the most powerful instruments to make sure that women are not overlooked in both the analysis of the effects of the conflicts taking place, as well as in the solution to these conflicts. The UNSCR 1325 has been a focal area for many of our partners in 2014, and the issue of Women, Peace and Security is one of the main topics for the advocacy efforts within Women on the Frontline.

Continuously supporting these organisations has turned out to be a challenging, but rewarding task. We are fully convinced that the implementation of our programme is more needed than ever before, and this is reflected in the good relationships we have built on the ground and in the requests to intensify our support.

Lasting change requires substantial and long-term commitment towards these organisations, to allow the ‘flowers’ amongst them to blossom and to nurture the ones damaged by the ongoing conflict. Only in this way, we might be able to actively support the altering of power relations and the creation of transformative change from within.

We, Hivos, Oxfam¹ and PwC, look back on the past year with pride, and with determination and belief that our programme offers an important added value to the full and equal participation of women in the MENA region. The programme was designed on several pillars which, when combined, enable us to offer tailor-made trainings and strategic advice as well as activity support, next to possibilities for horizontal knowledge exchange and networking. As such, we strengthen our partners’ (organisational) capacities and their financial sustainability, and enable them to build informal alliances while we stimulate them to explore new paths and different ways of working. Combined with partnering in advocacy efforts, we provide an easier access to the international community and international media exposure, accelerating the effect of their work and their long-term impact.

One example of the added value of our all-round approach is our collaboration with the Iraqi Women Empowerment Organization (WEO), which has since 2012 taken the lead with other women’s rights groups and state actors from federal Iraq and KRG on the development of the Iraqi National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325, which was approved by the government in 2014. WEO was one of the two leading organisations of the INAP 1325 Initiative, a group of women’s rights organisations working on UNSCR 1325. With support from Women on the Frontline, they organised a series of meetings and trainings with the 1325 Network (another group of CSO’s, simultaneously working on UNSCR 1325). As a result of this, they managed to merge and form the UNSCR 1325 Alliance, which now consists of around 25 Iraqi and Kurdish CSOs.

In 2014, they started constructive discussions with the governments in both Erbil and Baghdad, to form cooperation structures for the actual implementation of the Iraqi National Action Plan. In addition, Hivos functioned as a broker, opening doors to various international stakeholders including the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose pressure is needed to realise true political commitment towards the 1325 Iraqi National Action Plan from the side of the Iraqi government. Through our strategic collaboration with the Ministry, we do not just implement our programme effectively, but we can also directly contribute to the implementation of the Netherlands’ policies in the MENA region, just as we did in the context of the Syrian peace negotiations and the political participation of women. We appreciate your acknowledgement of the importance of the Women on the Frontline programme in the “Artikel 100” letter about the Dutch participation in the international fight against ISIS, that was sent to the Lower House of Parliament on September 24, 2014.

In this report, an overview is given of the achievements, deliberations and challenges that we met in 2014. After an introductory overview of the developments of the programme in 2014, this report gives an overview of the Organisational Capacity Development and the Strategic and Content Related Capacity Development implemented in 2014. Next, the report covers the programme’s strategy and activities in the field of Linking and Learning, before moving to the work done concerning advocacy and media outreach.

¹ In line with Oxfam’s branding policy we will refer from now on to Oxfam instead of to “Oxfam Novib”.

Next, the report moves to an overview of the context and partner updates per country. Please note that we did not report in detail on each organisation's set-up and activities, but rather highlighted their areas of focus and main achievements. In the annexes you will find the financial report, a results scheme based on our annual plan for 2014, an update on Monitoring and Evaluation, the report of the first Linking and Learning Regional Meeting and the full WoF partner organisations overview.

2. The Women on the Frontline Programme in 2014

The year 2014 started with the continuation of the partner scouting process. In 2013, we selected five organisations, in 2014, this number was soon brought to a total of 28 organisations in seven countries. In Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Iraq, we selected five organisations per country and in Syria a total of four. One umbrella organisation was selected in Bahrain and three organisations were chosen in Libya. *(NB: A complete overview of all partner organisations can be found in annex 5).* Of these organisations, 21 take part in the Organisational and Strategic and Content Related Capacity Development. The remaining seven² receive activity support, are engaged in the Linking and Learning events, and – if desired – receive capacity support from Oxfam or Hivos staff, or can request to use part of the reserved funds for activity support for tailor-made trainers. In some cases they might be invited to attend trainings offered within the regular WoF programme. As some of these organisations were selected for their strategic value, we also partner with them in advocacy efforts when there is a clear added value.

In 2014, the circumstances of many of the countries we work in has become much more difficult than envisaged at the start of the programme. Logistical constraints – impossibilities to open an office or a bank account, the need to wait for governments' approval of funded activities – lead to frustration and delays. Due to the fluid political and social contexts, as well as the lack of sustainable funds, long-term planning is very difficult for many of the organisations. Some of them have shifted their priorities, and have included humanitarian support to the large refugee communities in their portfolios. We noticed that some form of core funding – to pay salaries, or the rent of an office – is crucial for these organisations to have a minimum level of financial sustainability, enabling them to invest time and energy for the development of their organization rather than their mere survival. Due to these complicated circumstances, we needed more time than estimated to discuss with partners, provide advice and adjust their work plans, often resulting in amended contracts. Furthermore, arranging the logistics of meetings and trainings, which more and more take place in third countries due to the impossibility of traveling to partners' locations, increased costs and resulted in substantially more work for all implementing partners³.

² As was approved by the Ministry, in 2013 we decided to expand the initial number of twenty organisations partaking in Women on the Frontline to a maximum of thirty. This means we can include organisations that are strong strategic partners for the overall programme and are inspirational for other partner organisations, whilst not being eligible for capacity building support. This is the case with organisations that are well-established or that receive such support already, or organisations that will only be involved in Women on the Frontline for a short term period.

³ In order for us to be able to carry out the project properly, we sent a request to the Ministry to employ extra staff for the period of one year. This request was approved by the Ministry in August 2014.

Green House model

The Women on the Frontline portfolio consists of a new generation of CSOs: mostly young, newly emerged women's organisations and movements, but also a number of older organisations, some of whom have more recently integrated the defense of women's rights in their work. The Women on the Frontline programme serves as a sort of 'Green House' to these organisations, offering extra support during their development and growth. In 2014, it became clear to us that some organisations need more support and attention than others, based on their skills, context and expected impact. Some of the organisations in the programme are considered to be more able to grow and blossom outside of this Green House than others, and therefore we have made a basic classification so that the different types of support within the programme are offered as efficiently and effectively as possible.

In this division, between so called "*sprouts and seeds*", *sprouts* are partner organisations that we consider capable of reaching a certain level of impact within their societies on the short term, when provided extensive training and individual mentoring. *Seeds* are organisations currently limited in their possible impact, due to internal or external reasons, but that still need support and training as they have potential for future influence. We believe that it is worth continuing our support to these *seeds*; sometimes they mostly need moral support to remain resilient and committed until they find space again for their interventions. However, if we conclude that the support for an organisation is no longer fruitful, or that our support no longer adds to their work, we can decide to end the partnership. On the long run, we want to improve the organisations' resilience to the extent that all of them can survive, grow and blossom on their own and be effective change makers in their societies. In the ideal Green House model, the ultimate flourishing is done via 'cross fertilisation' between the organisations in the MENA region and the WoF-implementers, as we see a clear added value in co-creation.

Sustainable activism

Despite the many challenges due to political unrest, economic uncertainty, continuous oppression by authorities and in some cases, violent conflict and war, the WoF partner organisations remain committed to their objectives and their organisation's internal growth and development. However, the often difficult and sometimes outright dramatic political and social developments leave no person untouched, however brave and committed they are.

In the past year we more and more encountered stress, sadness and exhaustion amongst our partners. The assassination of our Libyan partner, Ms. Salwa Bugaighis, board member of the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace, left her colleagues and other activists in the region not only heartbroken, but also fearful for their lives. The political developments in Bahrain and Egypt have put an extra strain on civil society, making their work with any foreign donor a reason for suspicion and possible prosecution. In Egypt, some of our partners have not been able to receive financial support from us for their activities, while one partner decided to temporarily halt their activities altogether. After the first regional meeting took place in Tunis, the Oxfam Tunis office was approached several times by the Bahraini Embassy, inquiring about the participating Bahraini organisation. Our Yemeni, Libyan, Syrian and Iraqi partners are constrained in their daily work and movement due to the ongoing violence and conflict in their countries. At the same time, international travel becomes more difficult for them, due to for example the closure of Embassies in Yemen and the stricter regulations concerning visa for Iraqis and Syrians. A growing number of Syrian activists are dealing with expiring passports or the lack of empty passport pages for new visas, with no possibility to apply for a new passport from the Syrian regime.

We, and the partners themselves, realise that the growing security risks and feelings of stress and frustration need to be dealt with if they want to be able to continue their work in the future. Therefore, we have chosen to focus part of our efforts on the topic of 'sustainable activism'. Amongst others within the Linking and Learning component, this topic will be covered more extensively in the year to come. But there is a dire need for extending this effort, to set up a scheme for serious, sustainable support ranging from digital security trainings to physical violence support, safe havens, retreats, etc.

Offering a safe haven

After the receipt of serious death threats, a prominent Libyan activist and LWPP member came to the Netherlands together with her husband for a period of six weeks in the summer of 2014, to find a refuge from the threats and take some time to catch their breath and explore solutions to their difficult position. Hivos facilitated their journey and their stay in the Netherlands, with great support from both the Netherlands Embassy in Tunis and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁴

3. Capacity Development

In 2014, both the Organisational Capacity Development component as implemented by PwC and the Strategic and Substance Capacity Development component fully started. For the implementation of the latter we held a tender procedure, leading to a constructive cooperation with the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR). IWPR was selected because of their excellent track record and presence on the ground, but also because we felt that the CSOs were best served with IWPR's hands-on, concrete trainings on issues such as lobby and advocacy and (social) media outreach. A more extensive description of both components follows in the next pages. In summary, the following results were achieved in 2014:

Organisational Capacity Development:

- At the end of 2014, all organisations received the Capacity Assessment Tool (CAT). At the end of 2014, PwC received and analysed nineteen fully filled out CATs, functioning as a baseline of the partners' capacities, while the remaining two organisations were working on them.
- Based on the assessments, ten organisations were selected for the Individual Capacity Development Programme. With eight of these selected organisations, PwC finished the in-depth capacity assessment, after which an individual work plan for each organisation was developed.
- Six organisations finished their first individual session (of a total of three sessions) in 2014.

⁴ Costs for this were covered by the activity support funds reserved for LWPP within WoF, as was explained and asked permission for in a letter to the Ministry dated September 18, 2014.

- Two group trainings were developed, one on Financial Management and one on Project and Programme Management. These trainings were developed in close cooperation with Hivos and Oxfam.
- Six organisations, represented by eight participants, took part in the first financial management training held in December 2014.

Strategic and Substance Capacity Development:

- Seventeen organisations, represented by 163 participants, took part in a strategic planning training for their organisation, in which they developed an understanding of the importance of strategic planning in organisational effectiveness; and made progress in developing individualized strategic plans and theories of change to guide their organisation's work;
- Organisational vision, mission statements and goals were discussed and drafts of each of these documents were developed by seventeen organisations;
- Strategic plans and theories of change were finalised for sixteen partner organisations;
- Better operational knowledge and structures were developed by seventeen partner organisations;
- Monitoring and Evaluation coaching sessions improved the M&E skills of the three Tunisian partners;
- Eleven CSO partners, represented by eleven participants, were trained in digital safety and security practices and protocols.

In addition to the Capacity Development trainings offered by PwC and IWPR to 21 organisations, Oxfam and Hivos will offer additional support sessions to all 28 partners when needed. For example, Oxfam offered basic financial management trainings to AFPF and Droit à la différence, and in early 2015, Hivos did the same with two Iraqi partners. In addition, any of these seven organisations can request part of the funds reserved for activity support for tailor-made trainings in themes or skills connected to the overall Women on the Frontline objectives.

3.1 Organisational Capacity Development

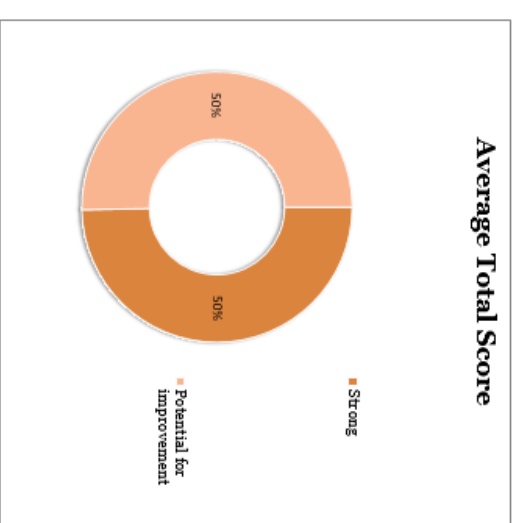
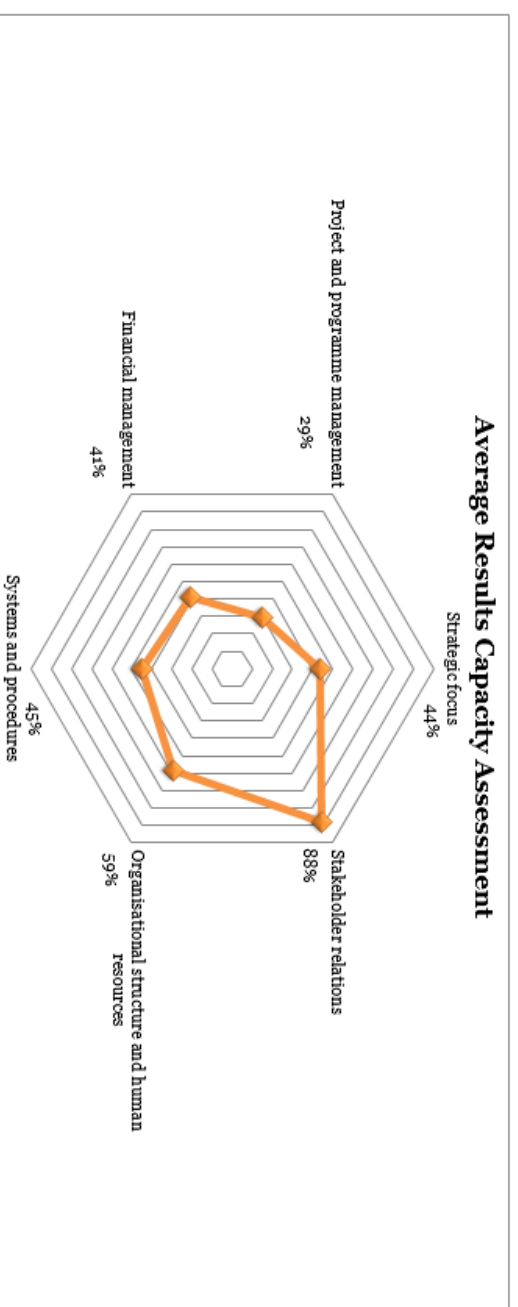
Capacity assessments

Based on well-known and often applied organisational assessment frameworks, such as 5C and 7S model, a Capacity Assessment Tool (CAT) was developed in 2013, which covers seven organisational elements of the organisation: strategic focus, stakeholder relations, organisational structure, human resources, systems and procedures, financial management and project and programme management.

The Capacity Assessment Tool was completed by nineteen organisations in total in 2014. The organisations were asked to conduct a self-assessment in the CAT in which they indicated on a scale from one to five whether improvement is or is not necessary, regarding each organisational element. Furthermore, the organisations answered a number of questions relating to each of the organisational elements, which was used to assess the actual organisational capacity. Information from the CAT was verified by additional documentation received by the organisation such as annual reports. Its results form a baseline of the organisational capacity of the organisations. In the figure on the next page, the scores of all nineteen organisations are displayed for each of the seven organisational elements.

The results of the Capacity Assessment Tool were used to identify the main topics of the group training sessions: Financial Management and Project and Programme Management. The topic of Systems and Procedures has been incorporated in each of the trainings. The Financial Management group sessions focus on budgeting, monitoring and reporting. This training addresses topics such as planning and budgeting, monitoring budgets, petty cash expenditures, budget adjustments, the role of the external auditor and financial procedures and processes. The Project and Programme Management sessions focus on project planning and tools, S.M.A.R.T. methodology, monitoring and evaluation, applying for funds, project and programme management, risk management, stakeholder management and Plan Do Check Act cycle. In addition, both group sessions address various soft skills, such as the importance of communication. Finally, the topics accountability, transparency and how to deal with corruption are emphasised within the context of the group sessions. In total, three two-day Financial Management trainings will be offered, and two three-day Project and Programme Management trainings. All organisations will take part in both trainings, with two participants per training. The organisations were clustered based on their maturity levels and experience, as captured in the results the Capacity Assessment.

Consolidated results									
	Strategic focus	Stakeholder relations	Organisational structure and human resources	Systems and procedures	Financial management	Project and programme management	Strong	Potential for improvement	
Aswat Nissa	10%	100%	80%	47%	73%	60%	59%	41%	
Imprint Movement	45%	73%	87%	47%	7%	15%	44%	56%	
Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria	45%	53%	33%	60%	53%	30%	45%	55%	
Syrian Women's Network	55%	100%	13%	27%	7%	0%	33%	67%	
Syrian Women's League	15%	100%	47%	7%	0%	5%	27%	73%	
HarassMap	100%	100%	53%	27%	33%	45%	61%	39%	
Yemen 21 Forum	45%	100%	100%	80%	73%	40%	70%	30%	
Union Generale Tunisienne du Tra veil	45%	100%	67%	100%	87%	65%	75%	25%	
EMMA Organization for Human Development	35%	73%	80%	7%	40%	50%	47%	53%	
Women for Peace	80%	100%	67%	87%	60%	10%	65%	35%	
Cairo Center for Development	10%	100%	13%	67%	87%	30%	48%	52%	
Warvin Foundation for Women's Issues	10%	100%	100%	7%	87%	40%	54%	46%	
Baader Development Foundation	10%	100%	67%	27%	13%	10%	35%	65%	
Alliance for Women's Rights	80%	100%	47%	20%	0%	15%	44%	56%	
Libyan Women's Platform for Peace	80%	100%	67%	20%	0%	10%	46%	54%	
Alwan	80%	100%	67%	87%	40%	55%	71%	29%	
Committee Supporting Women in Decision Making	10%	53%	33%	80%	40%	10%	35%	65%	
Mowatinet	45%	73%	67%	7%	0%	30%	37%	63%	
Libyan Women Forum	35%	53%	33%	47%	87%	40%	48%	52%	
Average results third group 19 organisations	44%	88%	59%	45%	41%	29%	50%	50%	



In December 2014, the first group session on Financial Management took place in Tunis. The session included a balanced amount of theory as well as practical cases, offering the organisations the possibility to apply the knowledge gained. In total eight people from six organisations participated in the financial management session, as well as a representative of the Oxfam Tunis office. The first group session was evaluated with an average of 8.9, indicating the participants were highly satisfied with few points identified for improvement. The participants indicated that they appreciated the topics tackled during the session: specifically the topics on the preparation of project budgets, monitoring of budgets and its impact on donors were appreciated highly. The knowledge level and training skills of the trainers were also highly appreciated, as was the certificate which was received at the end of the session.

Individual Level Capacity Development Programme

The Individual Level Capacity Development Programme (ICDP) builds upon the results of the Capacity Assessment Tool by subsequently performing an in-depth capacity assessment through desk research and interviews with the organisations. Based on the findings of the in-depth capacity assessment an action plan is set-up including the main development areas to focus on during the three capacity building sessions provided by the local offices of PwC. The results are evaluated after each session to make sure that the organisations reach their long-term objectives as set out at the start of the programme. From all the organisations that have filled out the Capacity Assessment Tool, ten were selected to participate in the ICDP: Syrian Women's Network, Centre for Civil Society and Democracy Syria, Aswat Nissa, Mouwatinet, Cairo Centre for Development, HarrasMap, Baader Foundation for Development, Warvin, Libyan Women's Forum and Imprint.

The first part of the ICDP for the selected organisations consists of an in-depth capacity assessment. This assessment is based on the results of the Capacity Assessment Tool, the internal supporting documents provided by the organisation and the interviews held with key persons of the organisation. The information is gathered in the in-depth capacity assessment form, developed specifically for this programme in 2013, focusing on the same seven organisational elements as the Capacity Assessment Tool.

The second part of the ICDP for the selected organisations consists of three capacity building sessions addressing the main areas for development of the organisational elements. During the first capacity building session the capacity assessment form and the documented findings are discussed in detail with the organisation. The main areas for development to address during the capacity building sessions are selected together with the organisation and filled-out in an action plan - an instrument that supports the organisation in achieving its goals by making them concrete through formulating the actions needed to achieve the main results that contribute to the organisation's long-term objectives. It includes both the topics which will be discussed during the capacity building sessions provided by PwC as well as the activities which should be implemented by the organisations themselves in between the sessions. In 2014 the first capacity building session was held for six of the selected organisations. The accomplishments are reviewed after each capacity building session. In this way the organisation learns how to work with a logical framework as well as monitoring the outputs and outcomes of the programme.

3.2 Strategic and Substance Capacity Development

Given the many changes in the region, we decided at the end of 2013 that we needed an implementing organisation specifically for the Strategic and Substance Capacity Development (SSCD) component, and early 2014 we started a tender procedure. As a result of this tender, proposals were sent in by five interested parties. Based on our selection criteria, we found the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR: <https://iwpr.net>) the most suitable organisation to cooperate with in order to implement this component. IWPR has extensive experience in supporting small civil society organisations, as well as working in conflict areas. Also, IWPR has an official presence in several of the WoF target countries and a large number of local employees and trainers, making them both a reliable and a context specific knowledgeable partner to facilitate this process.

IWPR works together with Oxfam and Hivos closely in the set-up, preparation and evaluation of the trainings offered to the individual organisations. In addition, regular coordination with PwC is carried out in order to make sure that the Organisational Capacity Development component as implemented by PwC and the SSCD as implemented by IWPR are complementary, only overlap when deemed useful, and are in line with each other concerning training levels.

The main objectives of the SSCD are:

- To further develop and refine the objectives and strategies of activity programmes being conducted or planned by the 21 partner organisations, hence facilitating the process of strategy development and concrete action planning, including programme formulation and selection of activities, managing risks and changes in circumstances, and partnerships with other actors.
- To support the development of the skills and knowledge needed for the actual implementation of activities or programmes of partner organisations, e.g. advocacy and lobbying, media and outreach skills, political activism skills and tools, gender knowledge and skills, etc.

Strategic Planning Sessions

Strategic planning – encompassing the development of a shared and acknowledged theory of change, organisational vision, a mission statement, a long-term organisational development plan and a shorter-term work plan that relates to specific organisational objectives – is the essential underpinning required by organisations that are sustainable and effective over time. Before these training sessions took place, few of the WoF partners had any experience in thoughtful planning that includes the input of all major constituencies of the organization; none of them had written plans against which new projects or initiatives were considered that were used to inform the organisation's evaluation of its effectiveness. In fact, prior to the strategic planning sessions, only one of the seventeen organisations had previously held planning discussions, and none conducted their activities based on an organized and agreed to strategy; rather, they are used to work on a day-to-day and project-by-project basis. We started a process teaching and engaging the partner organisations to think more strategically, keeping in mind their goals and how to reach those, despite the daily challenges they face.



Harassmap - Strategic planning lead by facilitator Doaa Abdelaal, Cairo, November 2014

IWPR's organisational development specialists and WoF's management worked closely with partner organisations to design and conduct strategic planning sessions. The planning and initiation stage was challenging, with deteriorating security and political conditions in most of the target countries. Despite the challenges, the program team was successful in holding seventeen out of 21 strategic planning sessions in 2014, and one session was planned for February 2015. Three sessions were postponed until 2015 either at the request of the partner organization (Libyan Women's Platform for Peace and the Committee in Support of Women's Decision Making) or as a result of the partner organisation's inability to hold such a session for internal reasons (Syrian Women's Network).

The sessions included a number of elements, the development of a clear and concrete strategic plan, a clear vision and mission statement, and structures that enable organisational sustainability and define the clarity of long-term objectives. Further, they were designed to cater to the unique and specific needs of each participating organization, resulting in the development of a needs assessment and strategic development plan for each organization. Based on the strategic sessions and their outcomes per organisation, IWPR in coordination with PwC, Oxfam and Hivos developed an individual "wish list" of needed trainings, knowledge improvement and skills enhancement for each organisation, which will be further developed and implemented in 2015.

Example of a strategic planning session: Awan (Diwaniyya, Iraq)

Awan's strategic planning session was held in Baghdad in October 2014, which required members of the organization to travel from south-central Iraq - where Awan is based - under risky travel conditions. At that time, ISIS was surrounding Baghdad from three sides. IWPR conducted a careful security assessment in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior to evaluate the risks associated with the trip and concluded that making the trip was possible with a certain element of risk, which the members of Awan were comfortable with taking.

Awan's focus was on the general programmatic orientation of the organization and on the question whether the undertaken projects were in line with the organisational vision, mission statement, and objectives. The participants concluded that less than ten percent of their previous projects were related to the declared objectives. As result, they agreed a review of the organisational strategy, and careful consideration of projects in line with the new strategy was essential for the organization. They also engaged in a discussion about the roles and responsibilities and decision-making processes within the organization, calling on the organization's leadership to delegate more and allow greater engagement from staff and volunteers, via creating clear job descriptions for staff and having a clear organisational structure with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and a consultation mechanism within the organization. During the session the participants also developed a) a new organisational strategy, b) an organisational theory of change, and c) an organisational development plan for the next two years.

[For a video report of Awan's strategic training, please click here \(05:05 min.\)](#)



Awan's strategic session with facilitator Dr. Ghaith Hamid, Baghdad, October 2014

Digital Safety and Security training (October 2014, Tunis)

Organisations operating in unstable or transitional political environments, particularly those espousing causes that are unpopular with large or powerful elements of society (such as women's rights and responsibilities), are at considerable risk of persecution, harassment, and other negative actions from those who would like to see them silenced. One of their greatest vulnerabilities is in the use of electronic communication and in the storage of sensitive files and records on digital devices. Many of them recognize this vulnerability but lack the up-to-date knowledge needed to protect them, their colleagues, their constituents, and their data, and have little if any idea of where to obtain the skills they need to better secure their safety.

In October, IWPR held a digital safety and security training in Tunis. The session was designed to enhance the attending organisations' ability to communicate internally, with other groups, and with constituencies in repressive and sometimes dangerous environments and while under the scrutiny of restrictive governments. Eleven participants representing ten organisations from six countries and one representative from Hivos attended the training. All participants fully acknowledged their lack of knowledge in this field, and appreciated the training as they did realize the risks they took by using the internet for all their internal and external communications. The post-tests showed that the participants increased their knowledge of digital security on average by 65% as compared to the pre-test.

However, the level of computer skills of many trainees turned out to be rather low, which prevented the training from fully achieving its objectives. Also, due to the fact that the participants were from different organisations, there was not enough space to explore the specific individual risks of each organisation. Despite both IWPR's and Hivos' track record of providing group sessions on this topic, this training experience taught us that given the level of trainees and the current security environment, intensive in-house trainings with all staff members of a CSO is probably more effective than a general group training.

4. Linking and Learning

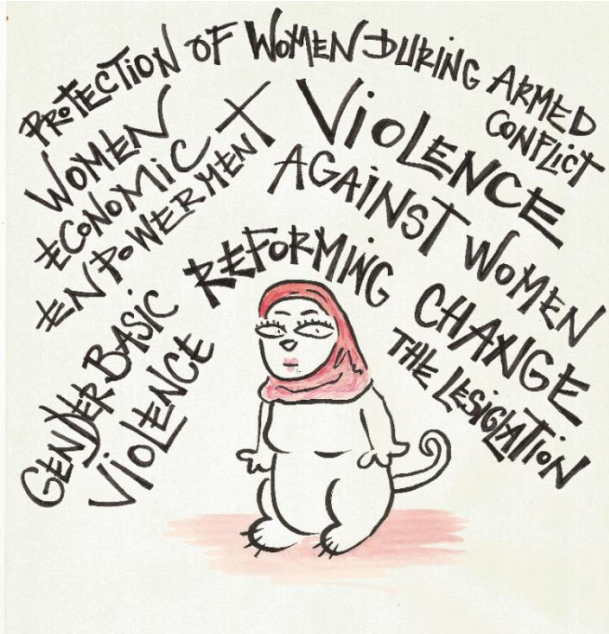
In 2014, the plan for the Linking and Learning component of the programme was further developed. This component tries to find answers to questions about political spaces in the MENA- region: Political spaces in the recent period have altered completely, social and cultural spaces are constantly challenged. Some spaces in society have tremendously opened in the last years and have been claimed by the people, whereas other spaces shrunk and are still shrinking in contexts of extremely high political volatility. The notion of these "shifting spaces" is the core of the L&L programme and runs through it like a thread. Next, partnering organisations have also expressed their interest to share experiences and to have space to identify topics they want to address in the next regional gathering. In addition, the Linking and Learning component will give ample attention to "sustainable activism", as was explained in the report's introduction.

The Linking & Learning programme consists of three elements:

1. Knowledge development and integration
2. Organisations share experience and knowledge, exchange good practices and ideas, and build strategic alliances
3. Joint advocacy and generating visibility

In total three regional meetings and one final conference will offer all WoF organisations opportunities to exchange with researchers, experts, activists and observers about how current trends impact their work. While taking some distance from the day-to-day work, organisations are enabled to better understand their contexts and the trends influencing social movements, and how those trends impact their programmes. Solutions and approaches to address these challenges will be introduced and discussed.

First regional meeting – Tunis, October 2014



Scenes from the regional meeting were drawn by the Tunisian cartoonist ‘Willis from Tunis’, who became world famous during the uprisings in Tunisia in 2011 with her depiction of “revolutionary cats”.

The first Women on the Frontline Regional Meeting took place in October 2014, gathering 22 members of WoF organisations for a three-day meeting in Tunis. During these three days, they reflected on the status of women’s rights in the region, the complicated social and political context they operate in, and explored alternative approaches towards the full and equal participation of women in politics and society. The meeting was a great success in several ways; not only did it show the commitment and conviction of the diverse WoF partner organisations, it also confirmed the added value of the Women on the Frontline programme. While the discussions were lively, open and led to new insights, the participants also particularly valued the possibility to network, reflect and meet with other women’s rights organisations and movements. Especially for some of the “younger” groups, this is not something they have many opportunities for. The diversity of the organisations within Women on the Frontline proved to be a strength during this meeting; there was real interaction and exchange between the more established ‘older sister’ groups and the more recently founded, younger ones, and the learning process in this interaction worked both ways. The meeting led to the set-up of a Facebook group and a WhatsApp group on which activities and ideas are shared, and the bases for several informal alliances were built. *For an extensive description of this event, please see the first Regional Meeting Report, annex no. 4.*

5. Advocacy & Media

Besides the dire need for more structural, yet flexible, financial support, it is also clear that moral support and advocacy are key to maintaining and bolstering both the efforts and spirits of women's rights activists in the MENA region. In 2014, we and our partners undertook several advocacy and media initiatives, based on our common analysis of the most urgent issues at stake. The organisations we work with have expressed their appreciation of the benefits of a true co-partnering relation in which we support them in media and advocacy efforts to amplify their demands in various arenas. Many organisations are faced with the fact that the safest and most effective way to operate is advocating for change through lobby and advocacy, (social) media outreach and campaigns. Hivos and Oxfam realize that co-creation in the field of advocacy advances the output and effectiveness of the advocacy activities. Therefore, we advocate for the international community to closely engage with these peaceful activists, to better understand and meet the needs of their daily work, while together we search for solutions to the root causes of their challenges. The WoF partner organisations are trained in advocacy, and we engage in co-partnership to open regional and international doors, increase political pressure and liaise with relevant international stakeholders.

In 2014, the WoF team attended several regional and international conferences and meetings on women's participation in the MENA region, to network, vocalize the demands of partner organisations and to coordinate and discuss with other actors working in this field. Constant consultations with partner organisations, aimed to give input to Dutch and European political forums, take place with partners from all WoF-target countries.

Some examples:

- The WoF programme manager attended several meetings on Syria, amongst others the strategy meeting of the Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy in Amman, hosted by UN Women and funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to support the effectiveness of this platform that was founded with the support of Hivos. The important role of CSOs, especially the need to advance women participating in building (local) peace, was highlighted and advocated in various ways.

- A consultation meeting was held with all our Iraqi partners in October, aimed to discuss the situation in Iraq and the priorities for advocacy. Their input was used to inform and advocate for the advancement of women's rights both in the Dutch as European political arena, which resulted in MPs putting the issues of women's political participation on the political agenda. The Iraqi CSOs recommended to focus on the implementation of the Iraqi National Action Plan (INAP) for 1325, which led to our active commitment in this field, aimed to be further consolidated now the Dutch MFA is also providing political support on the matter. In December, Ms Aref visited the Netherlands and met amongst others with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and several Members of Parliament to discuss this issue further.

- The input of our Yemeni partners was discussed with Dutch Parliamentarians In preparation for a 'special session' on the Yemeni transition that took place in November in the Parliament, resulting in their issues being addressed by MPs.

- Several WoF partners attended the 2014 United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York, advocating for a Women, Peace and Security agenda to be carried out in the MENA region. Among others, the Egyptian Feminist Union and the Libyan Women's Network for Peace were present.
- Ikram Ben Saïd, the director of the Tunisian organisation Aswat Nissa, was invited to attend a meeting hosted by the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon in Tunis, during which she addressed the women's perspective of the current Tunisian transition.
- In December, the CEO of the Libyan Women's Peace Platform was invited as the only female civil society representative to participate in the UN-led peace negotiations in Libya with both governments (the GNC in Tripoli and the House of Representatives in Tobruk).
- The Yemeni activist and journalist Nadia Al-Sakkaf, head of Yemen 21Forum, participated actively in several Friends of Yemen meetings as a civil society representative to urge for international action regarding the economic and humanitarian situation in Yemen. In January, she visited the Netherlands to discuss the position of women in Yemen in a lecture organised by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs: **click [here](#) for video**. In November 2014, Nadia Al-Sakkaf was appointed as Minister of Information in the new Yemeni government.
- The Egyptian organisations Nazra, Imprint and Harassmap have joined several advocacy efforts to address issues that jeopardize women's participation. Together with other rights groups, they developed a joint statement on sexual assaults and gang rapes in Tahrir Square during the celebrations of the inauguration of the President Al-Sisi. Imprint and Harassmap were mentioned in Opzij magazine in August, in an article on how young women in Egypt defend their rights and positions.
- The WoF Programme Manager was interviewed by Pass Blue on the peace conference in Geneva and the developments and women's priorities in Iraq: **click [here](#) and [here](#) for the interviews**.
- In January, Rajaa Al-Talli of the Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria (CCSDS) was depicted in a report about the Geneva peace conference in the Dutch TV programme 'Altijd Wat' (**click [here](#) for video**). In June, three members of CCSDS visited the Netherlands, during which they met with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and civil society organisations in to highlight that solutions for the Syrian crisis should come from within, and that more support for peaceful civil voices is needed.
- Six stories depicting the work and vision of individual Women on the Frontline were produced during the regional meeting in Tunis, and **[published on the Hivos website](#)** in the context of the 'Sixteen Days of Action Campaign' against Gender Based Violence. More information and news about the general Women on the Frontline programme on the Hivos website can also be found **[here](#)**.

Bilkis Abu Osba: combatting corruption in Yemen



Bilkis Abu Osba from Yemen is passionate about politics. Smiling, she recalls with pride the legacy of her grandfather Mutee' Dammaj, who was one of the first people to start the 26th of September revolution. Bilkis was the first woman of her generation and her family to follow his footsteps; her father and her uncle strongly encouraged her to do so. Among all these men, she also had a female role model: Amat al Alim Alsoswa, the first woman political commentator and journalist on Yemeni TV. Her bold career left an imprint on Bilkis, and when she decided to enter politics, Amat became a friend.

Bilkis' first commitment as a civil society activist was in a college union in the 1990s. At this stage, Yemeni citizens experienced a window of opportunity after unification and the adoption of the new constitution. Equal rights for all citizens were enshrined in the new text, and this continued to inspire Bilkis who voted for the first time in 2006 after the country adopted a multi-party system.

Her passion for politics was also reflected in her Ph.D. dissertation on political parties and democratic change that led to an academic career. Her current position as Professor of Political Science at Sanaa University runs parallel with her activism.

Since 2006, she has focused on gender-related issues: early marriage, women's political participation and combatting corruption. She was selected as the first ever vice-chairwoman of the Supreme National Authority for Combating Corruption (SNACC).

With her fellow women's rights advocates, she succeeded in pushing through a quota of 30 percent for women on political party lists. However, Yemeni salafists opposed this decision and threatened the activists. Women were called *kaferat* (heretics), and the salafists issued death threats against them.

Despite the security hazard in Yemen, Bilkis remains calm and enthusiastic about her country's future. And while the Houthis from the northern part of the country are threatening the government, forcing it to lower the price of oil, she goes on with her political activism by teaching her students the true meaning of a state and the political mechanisms needed to build it.

*This story is part of a series depicting the work and vision of six of the Women on the Frontline partners. **You will find the other five stories [here](#).***

6. Context and partner update per country

Since Women on the Frontline started, 22 of the 28 Women on the Frontline organisations have signed one or more contracts for WoF-funded activities. In these activities, the three core areas of the Women on the Frontline Programme are central:

- 1) Gender sensitive constitutional, legal and policy reform,
- 2) Full and equal participation of women in political and civic processes, and
- 3) Civic education and awareness raising initiatives to promote gender equality, within the overall objective of the full and equal participation of women in the MENA region.

Advocacy campaigns for legal reform, recommendations for Constitutional articles, a leadership network of women and the involvement of men in fighting public sexual harassment are a few of the examples of the broad range of projects carried out.

Total number of organisations that have started activities funded by WoF	
Tunisia (five organisations in total)	All organisations started activities
Yemen (five organisations in total)	All organisations started activities (four after approval by the Yemeni government in early 2015)
Egypt (five organisations in total)	Two organisations started activities
Libya (three organisations in total)	Two organisations started activities
Iraq (five organisations in total)	Four organisations started activities
Syria (four organisations in total)	All organisations started activities
Bahrain (one organisation in total)	Activity support is currently negotiated

6.1 Egypt

In May 2014, former army commander in chief and deputy PM of the interim government, Mr. Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, was elected as the new President of Egypt. The power of the new regime was consolidated through the introduction of restrictive laws and measures, curbing room for maneuver of both his main political opponent, the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as of civil society organisations. The latter (NGOs, movements, not for profit companies) were to (re)register as NGOs, plus stricter regulations were announced with regard to receiving foreign funding.

Women on the Frontline in Egypt

This development has had major implications for in particular critical human rights organisations, but also international donors - many of which closed their doors. Of the five partners that were identified under the WoF program in the first half of 2014 ([The Egyptian Feminist Union](#), [Harassmap](#), [Imprint](#), the [Cairo Centre for Development](#) and [NAZRA](#)), two partners felt the brunt of these developments in particular, and one decided to postpone its activities from November 2014 onward.

Oxfam's request for registration in Egypt has been pending since 2007, and in light of the new regulations, a renewed effort was made to get clarity on its status. The signing of some of the contracts with and transfers to WoF partners was temporarily postponed because of the sensitivities surrounding receipt of foreign funds, although fortunately not all WoF related activities were halted. Also, participation in regional activities continued as planned, and all partners were represented at the regional WoF meeting in October in Tunis.

The WoF portfolio in Egypt consists of young and emerging NGOs as well as more established organisations. In total three organisations will be trained by PwC and IWPR, while the Egyptian Feminist Union and NAZRA have made a reservation in their budget for tailor-made assistance by Oxfam or consultants. In September 2014, Harassmap participated in the first Individual Capacity Development session by PwC, and as a result bylaws are now being used by the organization, and guidelines on human resource management are being put into practice.

In September 2014, the Cairo Centre for Development (CCD) discussed the outcomes of a study on the representation of women in Parliament and lobbied for the establishment of a women's quota. Also, the CCD organized 10 seminars to increase awareness on the importance of women's political participation, titled '*Towards Strengthening the Political Participation of Women*'. These were attended by lawyers, human rights activists and also by representatives of political parties. [For the press release of these seminars and more background information, please click here.](#)



CCD's seventh seminar on enhancing political participation of women, Alexandria, September 2014

Three of the Egyptian partners work to contribute to full and equal participation in political and civil processes, albeit from differing perspectives. Harassmap and Imprint focus on the fight against sexual violence and harassment on the streets, as this affects women's mobility and thus their full and equal participation in public life in general and democratization in particular. All five Egyptian NGOs in one way or another engage in civic education. An inspiring example is NAZRA's comic book 'Alshakmagia' ('The Jewelry Box') which addresses women's issues and gender equality.



Male bodyguards protecting women against street harassment during Eid on Talaat Harb square, Cairo: organized by Imprint

6.2 Iraq

In 2014, the security situation in Iraq deteriorated dramatically. The ongoing unrest and the oppression by the government of demonstrations in the north-western part of Iraq came to a breaking point when the central government lost control in large parts of Anbar province to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in early 2014. In the summer, when ISIS increased its territory of control to the North, including the city of Mosul and areas towards Baghdad, the Iraqi army proved incapable of resisting the armed group. Many militias, often founded on a sectarian base, joined the fight against ISIS, with a powerful coordinating role for Iran – as well as a powerful role for the Kurdish army in the defence of the border between federal Iraq and the Independent Kurdish Region. A new government under the lead of prime minister Abadi – formed under international pressure – has so far not been able to counter the sectarian divisions running through the segments of society. The siege of Sinjar, during which thousands of members of the Iraqi Yazidi minority were killed or abducted and which led to an exodus of the Yazidi population towards Iraqi Kurdistan, was the final straw that led to a US-led international military intervention against ISIS, starting in August.

While the security situation of Iraq deteriorated badly, so did the situation of Iraqi girls and women. As in all wartime situations, women became victims of extreme violence and abuse, in some cases they were used as ‘weapons of war’. The abduction of an estimated 3000 Yazidi women and girls, some of whom were sold to and abused by ISIS fighters in both Iraq and Syria, is the most graphic example of this development. Women living within ISIS controlled territories are subjected to strict Islamic interpretations – preventing women from participating in a large part of public life. At the same time, human rights organisations reported the systematic abuse of women by pro-government militias and the Iraqi army. Impunity in relation to gender based violence remained a big obstacle for women’s rights in Iraq, and the ongoing sectarian and religious discourse in government discussions leaves women vulnerable to religiously inspired legislation contradicting women’s rights.

Women on the Frontline in Iraq

In 2014, five organisations in Iraq were selected for participation in Women on the Frontline. Two of these are based in federal Iraq: [Women for Peace](#) from Baghdad and [Awan](#) from Diwaniyya, in southern Iraq. The other three are based in Iraqi Kurdistan: [Warvin](#), Emma Organisation for Human Development, and the [Women Empowerment Organisation](#). The first four organisations take part in the Capacity Development components offered by PwC and IWPR.

Within Women on the Frontline, both Awan and Women for Peace started advocacy campaigns in 2014, involving local and national decision-makers. Awan started a campaign to amend the Political Parties Law, aiming to include articles forcing political parties to stimulate women’s participation in high party ranks and to nominate female candidates for Ministerial positions. Women for Peace organised a series of events – both public events and round tables with politicians and Members of Parliament – aimed against the Jaafari Law that is still waiting for a Parliamentary vote. This law would replace the Unified Personal Status Law of Iraq and make Shia women subject to sectarian legislation that would lead to a deterioration in women’s rights, as this law for example would lower the legal minimal age for girls to marry to nine years old, limit possibilities for divorce and allow space for sexual violence within marriage.



Besides advocacy efforts with politicians to discuss the negative effects of the Jaafari Law, Women for Peace also organised public awareness events, including street theatre performances about the dangers of child marriage. Baghdad, December 2014.

Emma Organisation for Human Development is a small women's organisation in Erbil. Besides lobby work for women's rights and offering psycho-social support to victims of gender based violence, Emma functions as the coordinator of the Women Peace Group, an ad-hoc cooperation between around 20 women of different political parties and the High Women Council in Iraqi Kurdistan, functioning as a women's caucus. This group was founded in 2011, when the tensions between political parties were high, and the women saw a need to unify parties to bring the peace process forward. The main goal of the group is to lobby for women's participation in politics and peace processes, and to gender-sensitise Kurdish political institutions, parties and processes. As Women on the Frontline cannot work with such a political group directly, but we do see potential in this interesting set-up, we have chosen to support them through Emma; while Emma receives the Capacity Development support from IWPR and PwC, through them we offer financial and advocacy support to the Women Peace Group. As one of the aims of Women on the Frontline is to search for alternative approaches that might be more effective than 'old' ways of working, this initiative is very promising. It enables our partners to work from inside the Parliament and political parties, which is a very useful mechanism in a political context without a transparent agenda of Parliamentary debates.

The Women Empowerment Organisation, based in Erbil, has since 2012 taken the lead with other women's rights groups and state actors from federal Iraq and KRG on the development of the Iraqi National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325, culminating in its approval by both the Kurdish and federal Iraqi government in 2014. With guidance and support of Hivos, WEO managed to form the UNSCR 1325 Alliance, which now consists of around 25 Iraqi and Kurdish CSOs working on the topic of Women, Peace and Security. In 2014, they started constructive discussions with the governments in both Erbil and Baghdad, to form cooperation structures for the actual implementation of the Iraqi National Action Plan. Hivos functioned as a broker, opening doors to various international stakeholders such as the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This is a concrete example of the added value of a joint lobby strategy.

6.3 Yemen

Yemen started 2014 with relatively positive developments, including the endorsement of a Statement of Action from the Global Summit to end sexual violence in conflict, an agreement between the Yemeni government and the UN to end and prevent the recruitment of children by the Yemeni Armed Forces, and the finalization of the National Dialogue Conference that included many recommendations to improve the position and political participation of women in the national Constitution. However, in the course of 2014, the humanitarian, economic and political situation in Yemen became very dire. In early September the Yemeni government was dissolved, and the outgoing president Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi reversed some of the measures to reduce subsidies on fuel prices as they were causing civil unrest and demonstrations, which were fed by the Houthis' demands and threats. It was hoped that appointing a new government would bring an end to the demonstrations. However, the Houthis continued to advance, and strengthened their position across different areas of Yemen, extending the territory under their control in a number of provinces in the north and west of the country. Following weeks of political paralysis and a UN-brokered peace agreement on 21 September, in November a new National Unity Government was sworn in. Problems however remained as the new government did not agree on a programme to steer the country, and the Houthis only increased their military presence and influence in national and local governments.

Women on the Frontline in Yemen

The under-representation of women - less than 10% - in the new cabinet illustrates women's continued marginalized position. The 2014 Global Gender Gap Report indicates that Yemen ranks 142 out of 142 (and 138 out of 142 when it comes to political empowerment)⁵. As may be recalled, in 2013 a very swift start was made with the identification of WoF partners. Of the five partners that were selected in early 2014 ([Yemen 21 Forum](#), [Baader](#), [Alliance Volunteers for Women Rights](#), [Activists for Development and Human Rights](#) and [Support Yemen](#)), only one - Yemen 21 Forum - was able to start implementing project activities while the other NGOs were awaiting the approval of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) in 2014. On a positive note, all Yemeni organisations were able to engage in preparatory Capacity Building work, and the MOPIC approvals for contracts with all four remaining organisations were granted in early 2015.

The WoF portfolio in Yemen is quite diverse, and includes more mature as well as newly emerging NGOs. Yemen 21 Forum, Baader and Alliance Volunteers for Women Rights take part in the Organisational Capacity Development and the SSCD. Support Yemen and Activists for Development and Human Rights have reserved a budget that allows them to seek tailor-made capacity building assistance.

Yemen 21 Forum started up its leadership trainings for Yemeni women. Its director, Ms Nadia Al-Sakkaf, is well known internationally and was invited abroad several times in 2014 to give presentations on the situation of women in Yemen. She was invited amongst others by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in January 22, 2014 for its Middle East department's "Henriëtte van Lynden"

⁵ 2014 World Economic Forum "The Global Gender Gap Report"

lecture series during an evening titled aptly “No Women No Spring”.⁶ Click [here](#) for the video report of this interesting lecture.

After Yemen 21 Forum finalized a pilot phase, it established a women’s mentorship network that aims to support 70 Yemeni women from different areas of the country in becoming public leaders. The first 42 women have been trained, and many of them put their newly acquired skills into practice, among other things by giving interviews on radio Sana’a. Serving as an outstanding example of a public leader herself, in November 2014, Nadia Al-Sakkaf was appointed as Minister of Information in the new Yemeni government.



One of Yemen 21 Forum’s trainings on Political Participation, Sana’a, December 2014

Support Yemen is involved in international projects to change the way the international media portrays Yemen and (female) Yemenis - e.g. showing the Yemeni people as diverse, committed and capable agents, instead of as disempowered victims only. Their international project encourages Yemeni citizens’ active agency: [click here](#) and [here](#) to see more.

⁶ The event ‘No women, no spring: Arab Women, Gender Equality and Political Participation’ took place on January 22, 2014, organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The focus was on gender equality in the Middle East, particularly zooming in on political participation of Arab women. Egyptian human rights lawyer and women’s rights activist Ragia Omran, Yemeni journalist and activist Nadia Al-Sakkaf, and Dutch-Moroccan journalist, writer and tv-producer Hassnae Bouazza gave their visions on the developments in Egyptian, Yemeni, as well as the European context.

6.4 Syria

The situation in Syria, which seemed so grim and complicated already in 2013, became even more desperate in 2014. As the civil war raged on, last year the death toll reached 200.000, almost half of the Syrian population had left their homes, and over three million of these people are outside of the country as refugees. The quickly increased power of ISIS within a growing territory of Syria, and its shockingly cruel treatment of opponents and prisoners, has distracted the international community's attention from the ongoing shelling of oppositional areas by the regime forces. Whereas the 'moderate' opposition has never been very strong in this geo-political conflict, in 2014 it almost completely lost its legitimacy and sphere of influence inside Syria.

In the current context, a political solution seems further than it has ever been before. The much anticipated peace conference that took place in 2014 in Geneva, did not lead to concrete solutions or improvements. However, the belief amongst civil society organisations in the need for political solutions remains strong, especially now that almost everyone, including activists and politicians, is coming to a point of complete exhaustion. The appointment of Mr Staffan de Mistura as the new UN Special Envoy to Syria has led to modest expectations, as for example his "freeze" initiatives for a cease-fire in and around Aleppo might move negotiations slightly forward.

Women on the Frontline in Syria

In 2013, three organisations were already selected for Women on the Frontline, being the [Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria \(CCSDS\)](#), the [Syrian Women's Network](#) and the Syrian Women's League. In 2014, one more organisation was added to this portfolio: [Saiedet Sourya](#). All four organisations take part in the Capacity Development component of the Women on the Frontline programme.

As was mentioned in the WoF Annual Report 2013 as well, CCSDS, the Syrian Women's League and the Syrian Women's Network all actively participated in the preparations for the Geneva II negotiations that took place in January-February 2014, and representatives of all three organisations were present in Geneva themselves. They are all active within the Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy, whose coordinator is the chair of the Syrian Women's League. Through support of Women on the Frontline, CCSDS published a [policy paper with recommendations](#) from civil society's perspective for the negotiations in January 2014. These were used by many diplomats as a point of reference and resulted in the director of CCSDS being invited for many high-level bilateral talks. During the negotiations in Geneva, the Syrian Women's Network organised a demonstration outside the meeting hall, in order to gain international attention for their public awareness campaign concerning the topic of (female) political prisoners, attended by at least 600 people. These organisations remained active in international meetings and forums, through the Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy as well as individually, in order to voice the Syrian women's perspective of the crisis and to demand women's participation in all negotiations concerning Syria's future.

However, as a formal political solution became less and less probable in 2014, and as Syria became even more divided logistically, many civil society organisations shifted their focus to efforts of peace and reconciliation on a smaller scale, reaching out to grass roots groups and communities inside Syria for discussions and efforts of local reconciliation.

This is also the case for our partner organisations: CCSDS for example successfully started its “Women Peace Circles” programme in 2013, with support from the Institute for Inclusive Security. In this programme, they bring together local groups of women in order to find solutions for local socio-political issues, while simultaneously overcoming internal divisions within the community through this common goal. In 2014, CCSDS and Hivos started discussing possibilities for financial support for the follow-up of this project in 2015 and others ways to enhance CCSDS’ advocacy work.

This is also the approach of Saiedet Sourya, the fourth WoF partner in Syria. This small, newly established organisation amongst others publishes a magazine written by and for Syrian women living mainly inside Syria, aimed at a group of women who are very isolated and subject to propaganda from either the government’s or the fundamentalists’ side. They have a head office in Gaziantep, Turkey, and five local offices in different cities in Syria, from where they print and distribute the magazine. From these offices, they invite local women to contribute stories. They build trust within these communities through the magazine, enabling them to start discussions amongst women about their daily lives, their ideas about Syria’s future, and how they can play a role towards these goals in their own communities. Hivos supports Saiedet Sourya by offering core support for these activities.



Editions no. 7 and 9 of Saiedet Sourya’s monthly magazine, distributed on paper inside Syria and in Turkey, and published online at www.saiedetsouria.com.

6.5 Tunisia

Tunisia's "spring" has been taken further forward in 2014, with the adoption of a Constitution in January and Parliamentary and Presidential elections in respectively October and December - leading to a significant change in the political landscape. Nidaa Tounes, a party basing its discourse on a security approach, now holds 86 out of 217 seats in Parliament while its founder Béji Caïd Essebsi has been elected as the new President of Tunisia. Ennahda, the Islamist party and former strongest political party, ranked second in the general elections with 69 seats. The two other main political parties, CPR and Ettakattol, both secular and centre-left, which together with Ennahda used to form the Troika and held over 40 seats, now only have four seats.

Women now hold almost one third of all parliamentary seats. The lobby and advocacy efforts of women's organisations started to pay off when on April 28, Tunisia officially lifted all reservations on the articles of the CEDAW, excluding those in the general declaration. However, there is more work to do as the remaining reservations with regard to the general declaration limit the application of the Convention.

Women on the Frontline in Tunisia

In April 2014, an intensive selection procedure was finalized with the selection of five partners: [Aswat Nissa](#); the Women's Commission of [UGTT](#) (the Tunisian General Labour Union); [Droit à la Différence](#) and a consortium from the city of Sfax, consisting of [Mouwatinet](#) and the [Women's Association for Family Protection](#). This portfolio combines national and local organisations, emerging and well established ones, and includes youth as well as mature leaders. Moreover, these organisations tackle the lack of women's political participation from various angles and approaches (through women at community level, through alternative powers such as trade unions or through political leaders) which will enrich linking and learning possibilities between the different organisations.



*Azzah Ben Mosbah, President of Droit à la Différence
at the first WoF regional meeting in Tunis, October 2014*

Three Tunisian organisations (Mouwatinet, UGTT and Aswat Nissa) receive WoF Capacity Development through PwC and IWPR, while two (AFPF and Droit à la Différence) have reserved

separate funds in their budgets for tailor made capacity building assistance, and also took part in a basic financial management training provided by Oxfam. In May 2014, UGTT and Aswat Nissa also attended an advocacy training provided by Oxfam, which was conducted within the framework of the 'Civil Society Capacity Building on Advocacy and Communication' project, supported by the Netherlands Embassy in Tunis.

Aswat Nissa's project includes an intensive training workshop, which focuses on enhancing the skills and capacities of 25 female politicians to run for municipal elections and to put women's rights and priorities higher on the political agenda of their respective parties. In 2014, five workshops were organised and the candidates started up so-called 'territorial diagnoses' by distributing and collecting 1,250 questionnaires that record regional demands and grievances with regard to women's issues in five regions in Tunisia.



*Launching event of the Political Academy of Women by Aswat Nisaa
(Tunis, June 2014, @ Haithem Chebbi)*

Through the Eastern Tunisian consortium of Mouwatinet and AFPF, almost 700 women have been informed about the possibility to become directly engaged in formal election processes. In total 97 women decided to apply for election observer status, while 157 women put in their candidacies to become a member at polling stations (of which 64 were recruited): **please click [here](#) for photos.**

All Tunisian partners' activities include civic education and awareness raising activities - sometimes these focus on raising awareness within one's own (male dominated) ranks. The Women's Commission of UGTT works towards full representation of women and women's needs and interests in the Union. Advocacy meetings have been conducted with different (sector and geographic) departments of the UGTT, in order to share the project's logic and objectives, and to advocate in favour of the women's quota amendment that would increase women's representation at the decision making level of the Trade Union. This allowed the Women's Commission to reduce the reluctance around this project, as well as to increase the project's ownership at the local level.

6.6 Libya

The situation in Libya continued to deteriorate in 2014, and as the central government lost control, the country became even more deeply divided. In June, elections were held for the House of Representatives, in order for this House to replace the interim General National Congress (GNC). Twelve out of the 200 seats remained empty after the elections due to boycotts. Soon after the elections, the majority of the House of Representatives moved to the eastern city of Tobruk for security reasons, governing from there. However, after the Constitutional Court declared the elections unlawful, the former GNC reconvened in Tripoli, leaving Libya to have two Parliaments and two governments: one in Tobruk and one in Tripoli. The Constitutional Committee, that was elected in February 2014, is still working on a draft version of the new Constitution.

Scores of armed groups, a number of them linked to and paid by either of the 'governments', continuously fought over the strategic areas of Libya, in particular petroleum facilities. The fighting caused many casualties amongst fighters and civilians, and a large part of the population fled their homes. Most Embassies closed their doors during the summer, when attacks on international representatives increased. As fundamentalist groups took over parts of the country, women were forced to live under their rules, often limiting their public participation and forcing Islamic dress upon them. Oppositional voices, both from politicians, journalists and activists were silenced through violence. In June 2014, Salwa Bugaighis, the founder of the Libyan Women Peace Platform, was brutally killed in her own house by unknown assailants. No real investigations into the case have been started. Many tens of other politicians, activists and journalists were confronted with a similar fate.

Women on the Frontline in Libya

After a scouting mission by a consultant took place in Libya in spring 2014, three Libyan organisations were selected for participation in Women on the Frontline: [The Libyan Women's Platform for Peace](#), the [Libyan Women's Forum](#) and the Committee in Support of Women's Decision Making in Benghazi. Due to the urgent situation in Libya, both the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace and the Libyan Women's Forum have had to close their headquarters and move to Cairo. Both organisations operate from Cairo and sometimes from Tunis, organising events outside of Libya only, as it is currently too dangerous to do this in their own country. The Committee in Support of Women's Decision Making in Benghazi is still based in Libya, but currently not able to undertake any activities.

The Libyan Women's Platform for Peace (LWPP) started in 2014 with a series of roundtable events with Libyan experts, in order to discuss the inclusion of women's rights in the constitution. During these meetings, activists, legal experts, judges, scholars, religious leaders and members of the Constitutional Committee looked at this topic from both the viewpoint of Islamic Law and international laws and conventions, searching for ways to reconcile these two important references, and leading to a Charter for Libyan Women's Constitutional Rights. **For the full document, please click [here](#). For a short video about this process and the Charter, please click [here](#).**

6.7 Bahrain

As in 2013, political space in Bahrain remained very limited in 2014, and human rights abuses were widespread. In November, the country held elections, but these can hardly be considered legitimate seen the fact that a large part of the opposition boycotted them out of protest against the unfair electoral system in the country. Oppression of activists continued and even intensified in the context of the regional 'war on terror', which makes the authorities brand many of their opponents and critics as terrorists. Criticism of the authorities led to numerous arrests and convictions in 2014. Maryam Al-Khawaja, one of Bahrain's most prominent activists and the daughter of a famous human rights defender currently serving a life sentence in prison, was arrested in August on arrival at the Manama Airport, for offending a police officer. She was released on bail in September.

Women on the Frontline in Bahrain

Defending women's rights in Bahrain remains crucial, but several activists expressed to the WoF team that the intense oppression of all sorts of activism currently stifles the fight for women's rights. Due to the difficulties of working in Bahrain, as well as the challenges for us to visit the country, we have decided to work with only one partner in the country: the [Bahrain Women's Union](#). This Union, that encompasses thirteen women's organisations in Bahrain, has been active in pushing for the reform of several laws in Bahrain, including the Nationality Law (giving Bahraini women the right to pass on their nationality to their children) and the Personal Status Law, as well as the laws and regulations concerning the labour and living conditions of foreign domestic workers.

Because the Union works merely on the topic of women's rights, which the government does not consider too big a threat, it can still operate freely to a certain extent. Because of the difficulties for the WoF team to travel to Bahrain, and because the Union felt more comfortable meeting outside for a training within WoF, ten members of the Union came to Istanbul in November for their strategic planning session with IWPR. This session was also attended by Hivos, and gave an opportunity to speak privately and comfortably with the members. It was concerning to note that even during this session, there was no complete trust amongst the group, as suspicions run high and civil society has few possibilities to work completely out of the government's control. Also, in light of the strict rules governing Bahraini civil society, BWU is not allowed to receive funds from any foreign donor. However, the BWU has now founded a consultancy company in order to be able to sign a contract. As we do believe that through the Union the Bahraini women can influence both the government and the public debate on the position and rights of women, we want to continue our support, albeit in a way that does not bring unnecessary risks to the Union members. In 2014, Hivos and BWU started to plan an activity in which the Union trains youth groups and welfare organisations in order to gender sensitize their work. Although these trainings may seem to stand far from WoF's objective towards more political participation, this is the best and most promising way for the Union to continue their work and build a strong alliance of likeminded people in the current repressive context. Their long-term goal is to build a broader network of Bahraini civil society groups willing and able to push for equality and rights for women in due time. Despite various delays, we now expect to sign a contract soon.