

# Annual Report 2015



*“If in any kind of development efforts, one gender is left behind, then there cannot be real development, even for the dominant gender”*  
Sabra Bano, Director



Women and men waiting to vote during the 2015 general elections in Myanmar

## Vision and Mission

Gender Concerns International strongly believes that women collectively possess the power to improve their lives and advance their communities. As director of Gender Concerns International, Ms. Sabra Bano states: “there cannot be real development if one gender is left behind”. Investing in women’s leadership is crucial to making a difference now and in the future. Empowering women to believe in their abilities as catalysts for change will allow them to encourage others and strive for gender equality. Ms. Sabra Bano, has emphasized that the ‘three R’s’ are essential in achieving gender equality: **Recognition, Respect, and Resources.**

Gender Concerns International works towards building the capacity of women, women’s organisations, civil society organisations, and government officials to lobby and advocate for

a gender-inclusive society. In order to successfully achieve gender equality in every society, especially in fragile environments, women’s political participation, female leadership, and inclusive governance are necessary steps that must be taken. The importance of gender-sensitive **electoral reform** in national institutions and decision-making bodies should be acknowledged, in order to strengthen **inclusive democracy.**

## Countries in Focus

Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Sierra Leone, Myanmar

## Strategy

- To **build capacity** of targeted communities to achieve gender equality.
- To connect and **facilitate communication on gender equality** among individuals, organisations and governments.

## Areas of Expertise

- Gender Election Observation Missions (GEOM)
- Lobbying and advocacy
- Development and facilitation of training programmes
- Launching campaigns and organising conferences, seminars, workshops and forums
- Consultancy and advice on gender issues
- Project planning and management



Women and Women’s Organisations attend the launch of Gender Concerns’ GEOM report in Myanmar

## Looking Back: Activities in 2014

During 2014, Gender Concerns had the pleasure of working on important projects in Libya, Tunisia, and Afghanistan. In Libya, the Organisation cooperated with local partners and local women to establish a political cafe (**Marboua cafe**) – this cafe constitutes a safe meeting spot for women and women’s organisation, providing them with the means to effectively engage in political activities. Another project in Libya was the **Women’s Democratic Transformation Platform**. The aim of the campaign was to send out a call to support Libyan women’s participation in upcoming elections through trainings, observations of the constitutional drafting process from a gender-perspective and the installing of billboards promoting female inclusion. Moreover, the **Dastoor programme** started in Libya in 2014; this programme shall be discussed below. In Tunisia, Gender Concerns started its **GEOM**, which will be discussed below. In Afghanistan, Gender Concerns implemented its **Khaberi Khawen** project and its **Bayan I** project which was followed up with the Bayan II project in 2015, as will be discussed below.

*“2015 was a year filled with distinguished projects that fostered women’s rights in young democracies and conflict-torn countries in Africa and Asia”*



Sabra Bano,  
Director

2015  
Activities and  
Programmes

In 2015, Gender Concerns carried out new programmes and continued to carry out existing programmes in Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Myanmar and Afghanistan.

### Libya: Conclusion of the Dastoor programme

In May 2015, Gender Concerns concluded its two-year Dastoor programme in Libya on women’s inclusion in the constitutional drafting process.



Billboard in Libya promoting female political participation

After the Gender Election Monitoring Mission in Libya during the first elections in 2012, Gender Concerns started working with the Dastoor with the support of the EU. The programme included diverse support for women’s inclusion in the constitutional process through networking, capacity building, dialogue, lobby and advocacy.

Since the Dastoor programme’s initiation in 2013, its goal has been to strengthen the position of women in the drafting process of the new constitution. Women from member organisations of the Gender Concerns facilitated Women for Democratic Transformation (WDT) Platform, received training on women’s constitutional rights and constitutional drafting. Following this training, the **Gender-Sensitive Constitution was compiled**. It was the result of cooperation between women’s and civil society organisations, members of the Constituent Assembly, and the international community.



The Gender-Sensitive Constitution outlined the women's constitutional rights, which needed to be included in the new Libyan Constitution in order for it to be gender-sensitive. Members of the Women for Democratic Transformation Platform (WDT) presented the Gender-Sensitive Constitution to the Libyan Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) in December 2014. In 2015, Gender Concerns and WDT continuously lobbied and advocated for the recommendations in the Gender-sensitive constitution towards important stakeholders in both Libya and the International Community.



Members of Libyan Women's Organisations during the Dastoor programme

### Tunisia: Conclusion of GEOM 2014

In May 2015, Gender Concerns completed its 2014 GEOM in Tunisia. Gender Concerns observed both the Tunisian Parliamentary Elections on the 26th October 2014 as well as the Presidential Elections on 23rd November 2014 with support from the German Federal Foreign Office.

The mission comprised of 110 female observers, deployed across all 22 governorates. The Parliamentary Election was monitored from a unique gender perspective, with a focus on women's inclusive governance in Tunisia.

The GEOM reflected that Tunisian women play an increasing role in the public sphere. However, many steps remain in order to ensure full voter equality, such as improved

voter registration, electoral reform, voter education, and more.

In addition to **observing the elections**, the mission **built the capacity of local women's organisations** to observe elections through a gender perspective through the extensive collaboration with Gender Concerns.

On 29th and 30th October 2015 a MENA Conference was held in Tunis as part of Gender Concerns' Post-Election phase of its GEOM 2014. The MENA Conference represented the foundation of the creation of a joint regional strategy and action plan to address the gender gaps and disparities highlighted during the electoral processes in some of the MENA region countries after the so called Arab Spring revolutions. The conference was also a key moment for Civil Society Organisations to elaborate and present a wider regional action plan for lobbying to their respective Governments for greater Gender equality and participation in the democratic process. Representatives from across the MENA Region, including Morocco and Libya, were in attendance.



Woman in Tunisia voting at a polling station observed by Gender Concerns

The mission was undertaken jointly with local partner organisations: Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LTDH), Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD), Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development (AFTURD) and Gender

Concerns Tunisia. It was a continuation of the partnership that began with the joint GEOM in 2011. In addition, the Tunisian Independent High Authority for the Elections (ISIE) cooperated and assisted Gender Concerns in its mission.

**Morocco: Local Elections GEOM**

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 2015, the first nationwide regional and municipal council elections in Morocco took place, whilst on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September, these councils convened to select provincial councils. Gender Concerns International was invited to conduct a GEOM in Morocco on both dates.

As part of this Mission, Gender Concerns presented its GEOM Preliminary Statement for the municipal and regional elections on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September at a press conference in Rabat. A **successful democratic development in Morocco and more gender equality** during the elections was observed and concrete suggestions to further the democratic and electoral process were formulated according to aspects of gender equality.



**Moroccan women receive a training**

During this project, Gender Concerns cooperated with local organisations including Alliance of Youth for Reform, the Association of Women’s Creativity, and the Centre for the Rights of People (CDG). The National Council for Human Rights (CNDH), invited Gender Concerns to observe the elections, and

cooperated and assisted Gender Concerns throughout the mission.

**Myanmar: Pre-Election Needs Assessment Mission and GEOM 2015**

As a follow-up to an invitation from the Union Election Commission (UEC) of Myanmar, a delegation of Gender Concerns International experts conducted a Pre-Election Needs Assessment Mission (PNAM) from April to May 2015.

Assessed were the needs and opportunities for launching a Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) to work directly with local women’s organisations to promote inclusive governance and female leadership. Meetings were held with various stakeholders from the International diplomatic community, the UEC, and women’s and civil society organisations.



**Director Sabra Bano with members of the UEC**

The PNAM revealed a lack of a gender-specific democracy programmes, and identified a crucial need to support women’s electoral participation through a focused initiative such as the GEOM.

After a **successful pre-election assessment**, Gender Concerns International conducted a **GEOM mission** during the November elections. In November, Myanmar had its first democratic general elections. Although Myanmar made some progress in 2008, when the SPDC announced that a referendum for the new Constitution would be held and that there would be elections by 2010, Myanmar still was not fully democratic. Gender Concerns became active in the country and helped build the capacity of women’s

organisations to improve electoral and political participation of women. The GEOM and activities implemented by Gender Concerns encouraged and supported existing networks with the Organisation's experience with monitoring elections and strengthening women, so that local organisations could learn how to influence and change policy.

This GEOM Myanmar 2015 was composed of 24 observers: 4 international expert observers and 20 domestic observers that were selected in support and collaboration with women's and civil society organisations in Myanmar. This mission conducted a gender-focused observation on the Election Day in urban and rural areas of four regions in Myanmar including Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon, Bago and Mandalay. The experience of observing in different regions has given a broader insight into female voter participation and polling station administration to help ensure inclusive democratic elections.

During this project, Gender Concerns cooperated with the Union Election Commission (UEC) and partnered with the Myanmar Youth Capacity Building Network (MYCBN) and Charity Oriented Myanmar (COM).



Ms Bano during the 2015 GEOM in Myanmar

*“A future with increased numbers of women as political party leaders,*

*heads of polling stations, candidate representatives and electoral staff can benefit all citizens in an equal development process.”*

**Sabra Bano, Director**

#### **Afghanistan: Continuation of the Bayan programme**

In 2014, Gender Concerns International, together with Oxfam Novib and Cordaid, seven Afghan women organisations (WO), and numerous Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), followed up on the earlier Bayan pilot.

The Bayan II programme runs from December 2014 to December 2016. It was launched to foster national influencing on women's right with a boarder audience to **increase public support for inclusive security, inclusive peace building and political participation**. The programme consists of capacity building sessions for the partners to targets participants to promote women's rights and various high-level meetings and events to bring political attention to the existing situation and proposals to implement them.

Target groups in this programme include official bodies at the central level in Kabul, social and governmental institutions across all levels of Afghan society, various Civil Society Organisations. On the international level, the advocacy activities are aimed towards bodies in The Hague, Brussels, and the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women in New York. The programme also includes capacity building interventions with local partners and aims to engage participants in the call to promote women's rights in accordance with the Dutch National Action



Plan and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

The Bayan II Initiative **has implemented various activities** strengthening WOs and CSOs in the region on the topics of security, peace and political participation. Among these activities are a series of radio broadcasts highlighting the importance of gender equality; a Leadership Training Programme, focused on bettering the qualifications of female politicians, has been created to maximize the effective participation of women as more qualified political nominees. The Programme will continue to train more women in order to contribute to more effective gender policies, foster a more inclusive atmosphere for women to join the political sphere, and demonstrate that women can, will, and are already making an impact on the political sphere; additionally, esteemed guests from partner organisations in Afghanistan were invited to The Hague and Brussels to share their own individual messages about how to best affect gender-related change and promote inclusion in Afghanistan. They presented their messages to the Dutch government, the European Parliament (EP), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

This project was conducted in a consortium with Cordaid and Oxfam Novib. Partners during this project include the Development and Support of Afghan Women and Children Organisation (DSAWCO), the Afghan Women's Network (AWN) and Women Human Rights and Media Organisation (WHMO).



Women during the Bayan II programme

## Publications and Gender Concerns in the News

In 2015, Gender Concerns made multiple publications relating to its programmes and activities. All publications can be found on the website.

The **GEOM report** on the election observation in Tunisia in 2014 was published by Gender Concerns in 2015. It is a comprehensive document on the findings of the election observations. In discussing the findings, the report makes comparisons to observation made by the Organisation during a previous GEOM in Tunisia in 2011. Moreover, the report contains background information on the Tunisian political and women's rights environment and makes important recommendations to various stakeholders.

Moreover, Gender Concerns published a **summary on the MENA Conference** it conducted on 23 October 2015 in Tunisia. The Conference strengthened the network of local women's organisations with a view of increasing their influence on the national and regional policy-drafting processes.

The Organisation published a **preliminary statement** on the parameters and preliminary observations of the Morocco GEOM. As soon as the programme will be completed in 2016,

the Organisation will publish a comprehensive final report.

Gender Concerns published its **“Afghanistan 2016 and Beyond” Report** on two activities on 15-16<sup>th</sup> December 2015. The report discusses the topics of the three panel discussions and the press conference that took place during these two days. An important component of the event was to discuss the way forward for women and WOs in Afghanistan.

Gender Concerns was also mentioned in the news. The *Myanmar Times* reported on 10 June about Gender Concerns’s establishment of relations with the Union Election Commission (UEC) for the aim of conducting a Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) in Myanmar for the upcoming national elections.

*“Our 2015 activities brought us closer to our vision of a gender-balanced society”*  
*Sabra Bano, Director*

## 2015 Achievements and Results

- Gender Concerns collected important gender-specific data on female electoral participation in Tunisia, Morocco and Myanmar in 2015 alone
- Gender Concerns maintained good relations with the governments of all countries it operated in, allowing for sustainability of its projects and the implementation of the recommendations given by the Organisation
- Gender Concerns was one of the only international bodies observing the 2015 landmark elections in Myanmar
- Gender Concerns continued to build partnerships with local organisations and

governments, paving the way for future cooperation

- Libya drafted a new constitution in 2016 that includes some advances for women: they are granted formal equality and the right to vote and hold office. It also guarantees them 25% of seats in elected councils. However, the equality provision is very broad and many other rights contained in the constitution act discriminately against women. The 2016 constitutional draft thus is a step in the right direction, but does not provide for full gender-equality.

## The Way Forward: upcoming activities in 2016

Gender Concerns has many exciting and meaningful activities ahead for 2016. The following provides an overview of what 2016 will bring for the Organisation.

Gender Concerns will host a **Roundtable Discussion** at the Training Centre of the National Human Rights Council (SNDH) in Rabat, Morocco, on 29<sup>th</sup> February 2016. Key women and civil society organisations will participate and show their concern regarding the lack of progress on women’s political participation in Morocco. A set of recommendations and an action plan will be drafted to influence women’s political and economic empowerment through inclusive political participation.

On 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016, the new **Dutch National Action Plan** (NAP) under UN Security Council Resolution 1325 will be launched in The Hague. Gender Concerns will be present as a third-time signatory at this launch to highlight its current and future programmes in Afghanistan and Libya within the framework of the Dutch NAP. Gender Concerns is a signatory to the previous Dutch NAPs of 2008 and 2011.



As part of Gender Concerns' commitment to the Dutch NAP under Resolution 1325, the Organisation will present **two short documentary films** at the launch event on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016. The first film "Bayan: Women at a Flash Point, Challenges and Opportunities Beyond 2016" depicts the challenges posed to Afghan women amidst a deteriorating security situation, and highlights Afghan women's sustained and ever-growing resilience to change these challenges into catalysed opportunities. The second film "Our Revolution, Our Constitution" is a film to voice the voice of women in Libya in the context of the Libyan revolution, to reiterate the vital role of women in democratic processes and constitutional inclusion.

In March 2016 Gender Concerns International will host both a Side Event (22nd March), in partnership with the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations, and a Parallel Event (19th March) at the **Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)** in New York. Both events will highlight the importance of sustainable support to women's political participation and female leadership in Afghanistan.

Moreover, Gender Concerns will of course continue to carry out on-going programmes. Among these are the **GEOM in Morocco**, the **GEOM in Myanmar**, and the **Bayan II programme in Afghanistan**. During 2016, as part of the GEOM Morocco, Gender Concerns will carry out training programmes for local female councillors. For the Myanmar GEOM in 2016, the Organisation will conduct training programmes for female Parliamentarians. For both the Morocco and the Myanmar GEOMs, Gender Concerns will compile final and comprehensive reports on the missions. Part of the Bayan II programme's agenda for 2016 is the participation in the CSW in March.

## Donors in 2015



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