

ANNUAL REPORT

2021



ARAB
WATCH
COALITION



CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Throughout 2021, the COVID-19 restrictions represented a major challenge that hindered our ability to engage with new partners and grassroots communities. It also impacted our ability to establish a good interpersonal relationship with senior officials at different IFIs, which is important to get inside information that is hard to get in online meetings. This challenge highlighted another layer of technological obstacles.

Many civil society actors in some areas in the region have limited or poor access to internet coverage.

Some also might lack the needed skills to use modern online communication programs. These technological difficulties required more technical support on our part and more creative ways to adapt to these situations.

On the positive side, virtual reality offset some other types of pre-Covid-19 obstacles. Virtual meetings meant opportunities for more people to participate without having to travel. This virtual reality allowed us to facilitate more engagement opportunities for our partners with different IFIs.



MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

- 1** Organized capacity-building events with member and partner organizations to increase awareness about IFIs and their policies.
- 2** Developed toolkits for activists and civil society groups to explain certain IFIs' policies.
- 3** Provided technical support to organization members in monitoring and reporting specific IFIs-funded projects.
- 4** Represented MENA region civil society and facilitated the engagement of its members in global campaigns around the review processes of some of IFIs policies
- 5** Launched the MENA regional campaign against austerity measures.
- 6** Facilitated meetings for our members and partners with the IFIs officials to discuss specific issues or projects.
- 7** Facilitated engagement for AWC's member and partner organizations with the accountability mechanisms of different IFIs active in the region.
- 8** Followed up on the investigations by the compliance mechanism of the IFC of the three complaints against Titan Cement Plant from Egypt.
- 9** Advocated for a more robust role for the IFIs against the closing civic space phenomenon.
- 10** Shared information on IFIs with over 400 partners.
- 11** Secured financial resources to member organizations



ACTIVITIES

1 Capacity-building events with member and partner organizations to increase awareness about IFIs and their policies

Although we could not travel and meet with our members and partners in person, we could organize many online events. Some of these events were in preparation for interaction with any of the IFIs (see details below), and others were to discuss specific issues or campaigns. Since we have staff based in Morocco, we could organize a few in-person events in this country in partnership with members and

partner organizations who have been working on monitoring specific IFIs-funded projects (see details below). As the restrictions were eased towards the end of 2021, we organized a workshop for our members and partners in Morocco where we introduced one of our toolkits (see details ago), and we also organized two workshops in Tunisia to introduce the policies of the IFIs that are active in that country and invited representatives from different IFIs to discuss their portfolios with the participants. We also believe that the best capacity-building activity is learning by doing. Thus we provided technical support to many of our members to work on specific IFIs-funded projects (see details below).



ACTIVITIES

2 Developed toolkits for activists and civil society groups to explain certain IFIs' policies

While working with our partners on monitoring some of the World Bank-funded projects in the region, it became clear to us that one of the funding instruments used by the Bank is widely used in the region, while the policies that govern it are not that clear to our partners. This instrument is called Program for Results, and it links the disbursements to the achievement of tangible agreed-upon results. To make it easier for our partners to understand this instrument and monitor the projects funded through

it, we developed a *toolkit* using the example of a project that one of our Moroccan members was working on.

As the closing of civic space became a global phenomenon, many of our partners questioned the role that different IFIs could play in dealing with it. AWC became involved in a global movement to pressure the IFIs to address this issue and developed a *toolkit* to explain the mandate of the IFIs and how activists can navigate the complicated power dynamics to pressure the IFIs to take a firm position against some cases, especially when these cases are related to activities funded by the IFIs.



ACTIVITIES

3 Provided technical support to organization members in monitoring and reporting specific IFIs-funded projects

Seven AWC members from 7 different countries analyzed seven Covid-19 response projects financed by the World Bank in their respective countries. The development of these analyses was an opportunity to work with these members to raise their capacity to look for and analyze World Bank's documents and understand its processes and policies. The final drafts of these studies were shared with the officials at the World Bank, and AWC facilitated the engagements of the seven members with the World Bank to discuss each of the seven projects.

The comments we received from the WB were incorporated, when applicable, in the studies. This project was within a global project funded by Avina and included similar studies from different regions in the world. A [global summary](#) that synchronized all the studies' findings and recommendations, including those by AWC members, was [released](#) in January 2022 and discussed with the World Bank in a public event during the Spring Meetings in April 2022.

AWC also organized different events to present the [seven studies from the region](#). We also believe that the best capacity-building activity is learning by doing. Thus we provided technical support to many of our members to work on specific IFIs-funded projects (see details below).



AWC provided technical support to the Association Jeunes pour Jeunes (AJJ), a youth-led Moroccan organization, to conduct field research on the impact of the World Bank-funded [*“Supporting the Economic Inclusion of Youth”*](#). The [*report*](#) was posted in Arabic and English in June 2022.

After the Beirut Port explosion in 2020, the UN, the EU, and the World Bank launched an 18-month program in Lebanon titled [*“Recovery, Reform, and Reconstruction Framework \(3RF\)”*](#). The program is designed as a collaborative process that brings together the government, civil society, the private sector, and the development partners to plan a comprehensive development plan for the country and monitor its implementation. This business model is currently piloted by the World Bank in only two countries: Lebanon and Tanzania.

The Bank aims at drawing lessons from these two pilots before extending the model to other countries in the world. At the beginning of the program, the World Bank accepted applications from Lebanese civil society groups to be part of this platform. The Lebanese Union for People with Disabilities (LUPD), an AWC member organization, was selected and, as such became, participated in many meetings and could assess the effectiveness of the platform and its structure. To allow as many CSOs as possible to participate in the process, the World Bank follows a rotation structure where each CSO participates for a limited time. Another group replaces it from among the applicants who have applied at the beginning of the process.



However, this rotation system does not guarantee a sustained representation of people with disabilities on the platform. When LUPD served in the platform, they could identify other gaps in the process, especially with the communication structure between the different committees and workforces that constitute this platform. AWC organized several meetings for the Lebanese Union for People with Disabilities (LUPD) with senior officials at the World Bank's headquarters to discuss these concerns. The meetings were framed as helping the Bank assess the pilot model's effectiveness and structure and adjust it to address any shortcomings.

AWC worked closely with its member, Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM), in monitoring the implementation of the World Bank's funded "[Casablanca Municipal Support Program](#)". Throughout this work, AWC facilitated the engagement of ADFM with the World Bank office in Morocco and the municipality of Casablanca, which oversees this project. As a result of this work, ADFM and some other local civil society groups in Casablanca are regularly invited to the consultation meetings that accompany the implementation phase of this project.



ACTIVITIES

4 Represented MENA region civil society and facilitated the engagement of its members in global campaigns around the review processes of some of IFIs policies.

AWC participated in the global campaign around the review process of the IFC accountability system. A [report](#) commissioned by the Board of Directors of World Bank Group has identified several recommendations to strengthen the accountability system of the IFC (International Finance Corporation- the arm of the World Bank Group that invests in the private sector). The first step to act on these recommendations was the review of the policy and guidance notes of the CAO (the Compliance

Advisor and Ombudsman- the compliance mechanism that deals with complaints from the impacted communities). AWC was part of a small group of CSOs worldwide that provided inputs to the proposed policy. Throughout the review process, regional consultations were held for different regions globally, including in the [MENA region](#). AWC held a prep meeting for its members and provided them with an analysis of the proposed changes and talking points. The Board approved the newly revised policy in July 2021. The IFC is currently developing new policies for responsible exit and remedy, two recommended policies by a report analyzing the IFC's overall accountability system. AWC is engaging in the development process of these two new policies.

AWC facilitated the development of a working group that includes several international and African civil society organizations to work on the African Development (AfDB) as it reviews its Integrated Safeguards System (ISS- it includes the disclosure of information policy and different environmental and social safeguards policies). The group holds weekly meetings to coordinate their actions that include several submissions, meetings with senior officials at the AfDB and its Board's members, and meetings with different government officials who oversee the position of their representatives on the AfDB Board. Public consultations around the proposed policies are expected to begin in the coming few months. Final policies are expected to be presented to the Board for approval by 2022.

AWC was a member of a working group that included many organizations from around the world to be engaged in the review of the Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework (ESSF) of the European Investment Bank (EIB).

The working group conducted several meetings with different senior officials at the EIB, made several submissions, and participated in different public consultations. The new ESSF was adopted by the EIB's Board in February 2022.

AWC is on the steering committees of several global campaigns targeting the IMF and its post-covid economic recovery plan. The pandemic shed light on the inequality crisis around the world. As the IMF is preparing to play an even bigger role in the global post-covid-19 economic recovery plans, the issues of debts, sur-charge, austerity, and their impacts on the people's livelihoods have become critical. AWC is part of this dialogue and brings the voice of the experiences of the MENA region to this global dialogue.



ACTIVITIES

5 Launched the MENA regional campaign against austerity measures.

Besides being on the steering committee of the global campaign against austerity, AWC launched a regional campaign against austerity measures in MENA. AWC is currently working with its members and partners to develop strategies tailored to each country's specific context to fight austerity measures and provide alternatives to solve the budget deficit problems.



ACTIVITIES

6 Facilitated meetings for our members and partners with the IFIs officials to discuss specific issues or projects

Throughout our work with the organization members who are monitoring specific IFIs-funded projects, we facilitated meetings for them with the senior-level officials at the IFIs to discuss these projects. Throughout the year, we facilitated meetings for our members and partners with the IMF chief of missions/country representatives in Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco to discuss the economic problems in these countries, the Article IV consultations (the annual surveillance that the IMF provide for each of its member countries) and incoming IMF programs.

In December, we organized an in-person event in Tunisia for our members and partners to discuss the role of different IFIs in the country.

The event included sessions with the World Bank Country Manager, the IMF Country Representative, and a representative from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. This event was the beginning of an ongoing dialogue with the IFIs involved, especially with the IMF, preparing for a new program for Tunisia.

It became a tradition for us to facilitate meetings for our members and partners in the region with the head of the MENA department at the IMF and the Executive Directors who represent the region on the IMF's Board during each Annual and Spring meetings. We usually organize an online prep meeting before each of the IMF meetings. Covid-19 recovery, austerity, debts, surcharge, and Special Drawing Rights were the topics of all the meetings.



ACTIVITIES

7 Facilitated engagement for AWC's member and partner organizations with the accountability mechanisms of different IFIs active in the region

We organized several online events for the grievance mechanisms of different IFIs, including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Green Climate Fund, with our members and partners in the region. The events were opportunities for the participants to learn more about these institutions and their policies and how to find information on their websites. The participants also learned how to submit complaints to these mechanisms and what to expect as outcomes of these complaints. We are currently working with one of the Moroccan members to facilitate submitting a complaint to the IPAM (the Independent Project Accountability Mechanism of the EBRD).



ACTIVITIES

8 Followed up on the investigations by the compliance mechanism of the IFC of the three complaints against Titan Cement Plant from Egypt.

We continued to follow the development of the investigations in the three complaints submitted by communities in Egypt against Titan Cement Plant between 2015 and 2017. The CAO (the Compliance Advisor and Ombudsman of the IFC) concluded the investigations in the 3 cases more than two years ago. However, the IFC decided to divest from Titan in late 2019 before the investigation reports were finalized. The [investigation report](#) for the first of the three cases and the IFC

management response and action plan were finally submitted to the Board together in mid-2021.

However, since the IFC had divested and thus did not have leverage, the action plan was mainly about lessons learned for future IFC investments and promises to post some reports not made public in time. AWC used this case to highlight all [the gaps in the IFC accountability system](#) and the need to develop responsible exit and remedy policies. We are currently following closely with the development of the two remaining cases, and we expect the investigation report and the IFC response to be approved and posted in 2022.



ACTIVITIES

9 Advocated for a more robust role for the IFIs against the closing civic space phenomenon.

The closing of civic space was a problem before the pandemic hit the world. This phenomenon became more obvious with the pandemic. AWC had mobilized a group of international human rights organizations to pressure the IFIs to address this issue. We started our work focusing on the doctors and journalists detained in Egypt because they had criticized the government's response strategy to Covid-19. The detained doctors and journalists were released in early 2021. Although there was no public statement from the World Bank to confirm, many indicators made us believe that the Bank played a positive role behind the scenes

With the same group of international organizations, we used the opportunity of the EBRD to develop a new country strategy for Egypt to pressure the EBRD to take a position regarding the closing civic space. The EBRD is the only IFI that has a political mandate. As per the first article of its founding charter, the EBRD must do a political assessment before developing a strategy for each of its countries of operations to ensure the country is on the right track and achieving progress towards a functional democracy. Based on this assessment, the EBRD designs its strategy and decides if it would provide financial support to the government or direct its support more to the private sector. This assessment usually puts pressure on the governments to take some measures to satisfy the criteria of the political assessment.



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We organized a series of confidential meetings with selected EBRD Board members and the EBRD President to update them on the situation in Egypt. Since the EBRD had to consult with Egyptian civil society around the new assessment and strategy, we explained that many of the right-based groups would not be able to participate in

any official consultations held in Cairo for their safety. As a result, the EBRD agreed to hold two consultation sessions. One is the official one organized by its Cairo office in July. The other one will be only with selected rights-based Egyptian CSOs with the EBRD civil society team and without the participation of the Cairo office. The new strategy for Egypt was approved in February 2022 and included civil society's views about the country's human rights situation.

We also realize that addressing the closing civic space in the region would benefit from addressing it worldwide. With the same international organizations, we have been pushing the IFIs to adopt robust policies against retaliation and include the civic space in their countries' assessments. We are currently working with other international organizations to monitor the development of a World Bank's anti-retaliation policy. The draft policy is expected to be out by mid-2022 and, as promised by the Bank's officials, would be open for consultation.



ACTIVITIES

10 Shared information on IFIs with over 400 partners

Recognizing the importance of a well-organized and user-friendly [website](#) in communicating with partners, we revamped our website in English and Arabic. We also kept our [Facebook page](#) and [Twitter](#) account active with new updates and live events.

Throughout the period covered by this report, we issued two [newsletters](#) well received by more than 400 partners around the world.



ACTIVITIES

11 Secured financial resources to member organizations

We continued to help our member organizations access the needed financial resources to work on IFIs in their countries. During the period covered by this report, we contracted Association Jeunes pour Jeunes in Morocco to work on the World Bank-funded “Support the Economic Inclusion of Youth.”

AWC facilitated access to five-member organizations to small grants from the Global Greengrants Funds. The small grants (on the average of US\$5K each) should enable the organizations to continue their efforts in advocating for environmental justice in their countries.

We also facilitated access to another sub-grant for an organization member from the Bank Information Center to monitor and report on the “Morocco COVID-19 Social Protection Emergency Response Project” AWC will continue providing technical support to this organization throughout its development of their monitoring report. We also facilitated a grant for another member organization from the African Coal Network to develop a think tank advocating for renewable energy in Morocco.



CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

AWC was established in 2018. In less than three years, we became “The Go-To” organization for issues related to IFIs in the region. Not only do international organizations working on IFIs approach us for any work in the region, but also IFIs consider us the entry point to engage with civil society groups in the region. Most importantly, groups in the regions started to see the value of working on and monitoring IFIs activities in their countries and approached us to seek support doing this important work. Our members increased to 30 organizations from 7 Arab countries, up from 18 founding members from 6 countries when we launched the Coalition in 2018.


We continue to receive membership applications, but the board decided to put new membership on hold until a full-fledged strategy for outreach and membership is developed to ensure that the new member shares the same interests and is committed to being active members of the coalition. A new strategy should be adopted and effective in the second half of 2023.




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