



WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN MONASTIR AND SOUSSE

TUNISIA

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Although Tunisian women have actively participated in political life for a long time, they are generally absent from power and decision-making positions. This diagnosis describes the political commitment of Tunisian women, focusing on the governorates and municipalities of Monastir and Sousse during the period of democratic transition. It also addresses the realities of women involved in political parties and trade unions.



Women's Voice Association of Jemmel (Voix de la femme à Jemmel - VFJ) analyzed the perceptions of governmental and non-governmental actors on the representation of women in political parties and municipal and regional councils. ©IEMed



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Field diagnosis: Women's political participation in Monastir and Sousse

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Local clusters of gender equality actors[©] mobilized since 2016



- A** Region of Marrakech - Safi (Morocco) **D** South of Giza District (Egypt) **G** Mount Lebanon Governorate
B Wilaya of Oran (Algeria) **E** Southern part of the West Bank (Palestine) (Lebanon)
C Governorates of Monastir and Sousse (Tunisia) **F** Governorate of Irbid (Jordan)

The Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation sets up local clusters of gender equality actors coordinated by associations every year, in the following countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia (1 per country).

Each local cluster of gender equality actors[©] chooses a target territory that can be a region or a province or a metropolitan area of a large city. Subsequently, the local cluster's members define a topic of interest related to gender equality that they consider a priority in this target territory.

Each local cluster is made up of 5 actors working in favour of gender equality in the target territory: associations; research or education institutions; local or regional authorities or ministerial departments in charge of advocating for women's rights; media and enterprises and trade unions. Their mission is to mobilize the gender equality actors through data collection, consultations and exchange of experiences. Thus, they analyse the situation related to the target topic and they follow-up the effectiveness of public policies in this area with a collective and participatory approach.

This bottom-up approach leads to produce a diagnosis of the situation that highlights the main obstacles to achieve gender equality, and to design a collaborative and replicable field project to address those obstacles. A first call for proposals was launched and local clusters were set in Oran (Algeria), Giza (Egypt), Irbid (Jordan), Mount Lebanon (Lebanon), Marrakech - Safi (Morocco), West Bank (Palestine), Monastir and Sousse (Tunisia). These local clusters focus on two main issues: women's participation in political life and combating violence against women. This document presents the diagnosis with regard to Monastir and Sousse.

A. INTRODUCTION

Tunisia has ratified and acceded to several international instruments. Pursuant to Article 32 of the current Tunisian Constitution, duly ratified international instruments take precedence over domestic laws.¹ Tunisian laws, particularly those dealing with family issues of divorce and marriage, are considered more progressive than other countries in the region. However, Tunisian women continue to face difficulties and challenges in relation to their representation in the public sphere as well as in respect to gender-based violence practices. Illiteracy is a problem in Tunisia and recent trends show that it is becoming increasingly feminised. Regional and urban/rural disparities in illiteracy rates are large and growing. In 2008, the illiteracy rate in urban areas was 20.1% compared to 42.8% in rural areas and as high as 48.5% in some parts of the central west region.²

Women are poorly represented in the workforce and those who do work are concentrated in low-skilled jobs with low pay and poor working conditions, such as textiles and clothing.³ In 2008, an estimated 25.3% of the Tunisian workforce was women.⁴ In the medical field, however, women are well represented, constituting 60% of physicians and 72% of pharmacists.⁵ The pay gap between women and men remains significant although it has improved markedly over the years. Tunisian women currently earn approximately 78% of Tunisian men's earnings.⁶ The number of women in senior positions of responsibility and decision-making is also steadily rising. They currently account for 20% of diplomatic posts, 22.7% of parliamentary deputies, 25% of the Constitutional Council and 27% of municipal council members.⁷

Although Tunisian women have always been active in political life, their representation at the decision-making level and in leadership positions is yet to reflect such an active participation. Despite the fact that Article 46 of the Constitution established parity, women still encounter obstacles and difficulties that prevent them from holding decision-making positions in political parties, local and parliamentary councils, trade unions and in governmental and non-governmental organisations. However, there are questions that should be asked in relation to

1 UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE. "2010 Human Rights Report: Tunisia". Available at: www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154474.htm
2 COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN. "Consideration of reports submitted by State parties under Article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of States parties: Tunisia", *UN Doc. CEDAW/C/Tun/6*, 20 May 2009.

3 *Supra* note 2.

4 COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN. "Concluding Observations: Tunisia". *UN CEDAW, 47th Sess.*, no. 4-22, *UN Doc. CEDAW/C/Tun/CO/6*, 22 October 2010.

5 *Supra* note 4.

6 *Supra* note 5.

7 *Ibid.*

the revolution and the democratic transition as to whether the revolution produced rights for women, as full citizens, or rather women's rights and equality have been compromised, if not reversed.

B. DIAGNOSIS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN SOUSSE AND MONASTIR

The diagnosis was conducted by the Women's Voice Association of Jemmel in cooperation with the Center of Arab Women Training and Research (CAWTAR). The diagnosis acknowledges that the status of women in politics is very much linked to women's economic and social status. Generally speaking, traditional views of women and their roles as secondary subjects is one of the pertinent obstacles that hinders women's participation and mobility. In the 2010 revolution, women's presence in politics was noticeable from the outset of the demonstrations between 17 December 2010 and 14 January 2011; they were often at the forefront of all events and protests. Nonetheless, low representation of women in political processes was visible in the results of the 2011 and 2014 elections that took place during the democratic transition.

The results of the elections revealed that there are many obstacles that impede women's presence in the public sphere in general and political sphere in particular. To probe the ways in which women's interests and demands were included in the transitional period, this diagnosis will question the perceptions and policies of the state and non-state actors towards women's political participation. It will further look at the challenges and obstacles that obstruct women's abilities to engage fully in the political sphere.

Voice of Women Association in Jemmel/Voix de la Femme à Jemmel (VFJ)

VFJ is an association that was created in 2011 at Jemmel, in the centre-east of Tunisia, in the governorate of Monastir. The mission of the association is to defend the rights of women and help them to take their place in public life as well as to promote children's rights through civic education. In that respect, VFJ works on informing among women to register to vote as well as encouraging them to participate in Constituent Assembly elections and in the regional elections of Monastir. The association organizes arts and crafts exhibitions and fosters women's creativity in all fields to encourage them to develop their talent and therefore achieve economic empowerment. By giving them the opportunity to exhibit the results of their work, the association strengthens women's confidence in their skills.

1. Objectives of the Diagnosis

The diagnosis aims to answer the question about how far the Tunisian government strengthened women's political participation in the transitional period and in building democracy through access to decision-making positions. As a result, it will address the realities of women in the political decision-making processes, with emphasis on women's engagement and participation in the regional councils of Sousse and Monastir.

2. Methodological Framework of the Diagnosis

The methodology used is based on the following:

Literature review: this included a review of the main reports, publications, conferences and databases that provide local and national information on the participation of Tunisian women in politics generally and in the regions of Sousse and Monastir specifically.

Interviews and consultations: this stage included conducting various consultations and meetings with leading representatives to select a sample of women from the Monastir and Sousse Governorates who held political or parliamentary positions within political parties or municipal councils during the period of study. This was done in order to identify the reasons behind women's low participation in politics in Tunisia in general and in Sousse and Monastir specifically. Data collected from the meetings was analysed in relation to the following questions:

- Does this area present an exception to what has been able to observe in Tunisia in previous studies?
- Are there specific obstacles in the region in connection with the emergence of women in politics?

Generating priorities and recommendations: a summary report with suggestions and recommendations was published to boost the presence of women in politics and encourage them to reconcile their private and public lives and how to implement the principle of gender equality in the political sphere. This summary was discussed during a meeting held on 5 December 2015, which involved 70 representatives of local government bodies, governorates and municipalities, non-governmental organisations and the media, as well as women from political parties. Several recommendations were made to promote women's access to positions of responsibility at the community level and to ensure the involvement of all organisations in improving women's participation in future political life.

C. FINDINGS OF THE DIAGNOSIS

1. Characteristics of the Regions of Sousse and Monastir

The area of diagnosis, which is part of the coastal area called “the Tunisian Sahel”, is characterised by its inhabitants, who are primarily peasants involved in agriculture. These villages and towns share many similarities with each other. However, they are different:⁸ for example, Ksar Helal, with its craft and industrial nature, is different from Moknine, which has a rather agricultural and peasant nature.

This region is characterised by conservative views concerning women but they somehow have a central and prominent place. For example, in many parts of this region, family surnames are related primarily to the mother, such as the Moknine region, where female surnames are common, such as Ben Zina, Ben Fattoum, Ben Fatma, Ben Cherifa and Ben Halima.

Furthermore, women have always played, and still play, a fundamental role in the domestic economy of the family, be it in agriculture, craft trades and more recently in the industrial sector and public service. After meeting the challenge of education for girls and access to paid work, which is socially valued and rewarding, women have been prepared to make progressive appearances in the public sphere. The purpose of this was first to defend the national cause and oppose the French occupation by a generation of pioneering women, such as Sheikh Salem Ben Hamida's daughters and the sisters Jalila and Hafsia Bouzgarrou.

The region of the study is also characterised by high population density. In the last census in 1994, there were 460 people per km², a situation that confirms the economic prosperity of the region and its ability to attract other inhabitants of the interior of the country, who come looking for work in the industrial and tourism sectors.⁹

The rate of urbanisation in Sousse rose in the 2000s, while Monastir is a 100% urbanised area, following an administrative policy decision on the part of former President Habib Bourguiba, who transformed all the regions of Monastir into municipalities. The urbanisation rate in these regions is higher than in the regions of the central east, compared to Mahdia, which is primarily rural and has an urbanisation rate of around 44.9%, and Sfax, which has an urbanisation rate of 63.7% (the urbanisation rate in the regions of the central east is 71.7% and throughout Tunisia, 64.9%).

⁸ DESPOIS, Jean, *The eastern Tunisia, Sahel and low steppes*. Paris: PUF, 1955.

⁹ LAMINE, Ridha. *Cities and urban central Sahel, Tunis*. Sousse Faculty of Arts and Humanities: L'or du temps, 2001.



Despite a high rate of unionized women in Tunisia, few are in positions of responsibility. © Alexandru Nika / Shutterstock.com

Young people aged 20-29 form the largest category, accounting for 20% of the inhabitants (20.2% for men and 20% for women). The specificities relative to education show that there is a big difference between girls and boys in terms of illiteracy. It is twice higher among girls than boys: 25.3% (girls) and 11.2% (boys) in Monastir and 21.6% (girls) and 9.5% (boys) in Sousse. However, for those who access higher education, the difference between boys and girls is small, only 8.9% in Sousse and 1.9% in Monastir, compared to 35.2% for secondary education.

In terms of higher education graduates, we note a difference of 2 percentage points between girls and boys with rates of 8.8% (girls) and 10.7% (boys) in Monastir and 9.9% (girls) and 10.7% (boys) in Sousse. This shows that the road is still long for women in terms of modernisation and economic independence, and hence their presence in the public and political spheres.

These differences between women and men are confirmed by economic indicators and figures on economic activity. Thus, the rate for women's participation in the labour force in Sousse is 29.8%; this figure increases in Monastir with women's presence in the industrial field and textiles with 36.2% while, for men, the economic activity rate is 50% (precisely 52.1% in Monastir and 49% in Sousse).

It should be noted that the region of study suffers from environmental problems and sea pollution, desertification, issues regarding the management of wastewater and rainwater flow as well as the

management of solid waste and drainage of groundwater.¹⁰ Added to the depletion of natural and human resources is aging and reduced olive groves and other new problems that emerged after the revolution, such as increased traffic, the black economy, terrorism and the danger of security threats. These factors had a serious impact on a vital economic sector for the region, including tourism, crafts and services, which employ a predominantly female workforce.

2. Elections in Tunisia

Decree 35 for the year 2011, which was used for the election of the Constituent Assembly, established the principle of parity and alternation between women and men in the lists. This decree, added to the general situation in the country, has encouraged more than 5,000 women to submit their nominations for election to the Constitutional Council. This impressive number can be explained by the persistent desire of women, and citizens in general, to participate in the public sphere in the post-revolution era.

However, the 2011 elections have demonstrated the limits of the vertical parity principle as it did not lead to a true parity within the Constituent Assembly although it has one of the highest rates of parliamentary women in the world (24%). However, this did not meet the aspirations of Tunisian women who went out on a national march on 29 January 2011 to denounce their marginalisation, claiming their right to full citizenship and requesting the establishment of the principle of full and effective equality in the Constitution.

Despite the enthusiasm of women and men during the Constitutional Council elections (2011), the administrative registration of citizens has not exceeded 47%. It should be noted that the actual number of registered women on the election lists for 2014 rose to 51% of the total number of registered voters, an increase of four points from 2011. The number of women who actually voted in the elections of the People's Representatives Council (2014) reached 50.5% on a national level.

The Independent High Authority for Elections noted in one of its press conferences that about 300,000 women in the interior regions of the country have no identity card and thus cannot practice their right as citizens to administrative registration and voting. The Authority has somewhat corrected this, and with the help of the Ministry of Women has helped 5,000 women to obtain their ID card, but the number of women not recognised by official institutions as citizens remains high.

10 KHOUAJA, Ahmed. "Experiencing compromise balance of expertise in the bay of Monastir". *Figures of Compromise in Islamic societies*. Paris: Institute of Islam and Societies of Muslim Worlds - Karthala, pp. 209-226, 2012.

During the 2014 elections, the number of women registered on the lists of voters exceeded 50% with a number of women candidates around 47%, among them 12 heads of lists and only one candidate among 26 presidential candidates.

During the Constituent Assembly elections (2011), the rate of women voters dropped compared to the national average in Sousse, where it has not exceeded 48.49%, and in Monastir, 48.25%; two points less than the national average of the country, which is 51%.

However, after the announcement of final election results by the Independent High Authority for Elections at its press conference on 20 November 2014, the overall participation rate has exceeded 67%; this rate was higher in Sousse and Monastir, with 70%. For the presidential elections, Monastir retained that same participation rate while the latter fell in the Sousse Governorate in the second round (between 62-65%). Although women have occupied eight positions of ministers and secretaries of state in the new government, this remains limited because they have not reached 25% of elected mandates.

3. Presence of Women in Legislative and Executive Authorities

Article 21 of the Declaration of Human Rights states that every citizen, men and women, has the right to participate in the government of his/her country, directly or through elected representatives he or she chooses. Although women generally represent half of the population in a given country, and despite the overall orientation towards the democratisation of political life and the massive presence and contribution of women on the ground to fight in civil society, especially after the revolution, women are still notably absent in decision-making positions (governors, leaders of political parties, etc.). Women's presence in the successive governments after the revolution is very low, as the table below shows:

Table (1) Women's Presence in the Successive Governments After the Revolution

Governments	Number of ministers	Men	Women
Mohamed GHANNOUCHI	37	35	2
Beji KAID ESSEBSI	30	28	2
Hammadi JEBALI	41	38	2
Ali ARAIDH	37	35	2
Mehdi JOMAA	29	26	3 and 1 secretary of state in charge of women's affairs
Habib ESSID	27	24	3 and 5 secretaries of state

4. Women's Presence in the Constituent Assembly

In the Constituent Assembly elections (2011), women accounted for approximately 26% of the seats; this rate increased to 30% with the appointment of some members to positions within the government. During these elections, the percentage of women as heads of lists in Sousse and Monastir was slightly higher than the national average. Eight women were heads of lists out of 60 candidates in Monastir (13,3%) while five women were heads of lists out of the 50 candidate lists (10%) in Sousse.

The low rate of women as heads of lists is due to a lack of political will amongst the parties to allow women's access to decision-making positions. Women are often excluded from certain activities. Even when they participate, they become victims of stereotypes that imprison them in specific roles.

5. Presence of Women in Political Parties

Article 7 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) requires parties and states to take the necessary measures to eradicate discrimination against women in the political sphere, an issue that is addressed in the text of Article 46 of the 2014 Constitution.

In the central Sahel region, no special effort is being made by political parties for the advancement of women. On the other hand, Monastir ranks first according to an opinion poll conducted by the United Nations Development Program (December 2013), which places Monastir in first place in terms of encouraging women to participate in politics.

6. Presence of Women in Unions

In regards to the participation of women in trade unions, women occupy an important place in the active class with 70% in the textile sector, 60% in the education sector and 55% in the health sector. However, their presence in decision-making positions within trade unions does not reflect their numbers in these sectors, with 13 men on the executive boards and only 3 women in the Administrative Commission.

The National Commission of Women, established in 1984 within the General Union of Tunisian Workers, acquired its legal status in 1991 by incorporating Article 44 of the union's rules. In 2002, the constituent regulation was revised with the inclusion of Article 38, which ruled that the Commission of Women will be elected for a term of four years. It is chaired by

the Deputy General Secretary responsible for women, youth and associations and can attend meetings of the administrative commissions, as an observer.

On the current executive board in the Monastir Governorate, there is one woman out of nine and this is the first time a woman has been elected to the executive board of the union in Monastir. Among 13 local unions, there is only one woman in the local union of Ksar Helal. As for the sectors, there are two women in the textile sector, one in tourism and one in transport. There is a woman in the regional union of education, two women in the regional union of justice and another woman in the regional union for training and employment. However, women hold certain positions and are usually found in the textile sector as secretaries of the unions with a rate of 51%, a rate that also corresponds with their level of membership. The situation is no better in the regional union in the Sousse Governorate.

7. Presence of Women in Regional Councils

This study focused on four municipal councils in the Sousse and Monastir Governorates. The choice was guided by the demographic importance of these municipalities. In the Sousse Governorate, the study focused on the following four municipalities:

- City of Sousse: 239,411 inhabitants as the municipality includes delegations of Sousse Medina, Sousse Riadh, Sousse Sidi Abdelhamid and Sousse Jawhara;
- City of M'saken: 97,225 inhabitants;
- City of Kalaa Kebira: 59,132 inhabitants;
- City of Hammam Sousse: 42,694 inhabitants.

The Monastir Governorate includes 31 municipalities, the most important of which were the city of Monastir with 93,306 inhabitants, the city of Ksar Helal with 49,376 inhabitants; the town of Moknine with 89,277 inhabitants; and the city of Jemmel with 65,420 inhabitants.

a. The city of Sousse

The municipality was founded in 1884. Women did not accede until 1969, with two representatives. This number remained almost unchanged until the 1985–1990 term; at that time, the number of women councillors was 40, i.e. a representative rate of 12.5% for women. The number of councillors had been increasing, but irregularly until it reached a quarter of the board in the last two recommendations that preceded the establishment of the Special

Delegations.¹¹ The first Special Delegation was established in April 2011: the number of women was lower with four out of 24 and increased in the Special Delegation established in October 2012, reaching 6 out of 24, a level already achieved by women in the Sousse Board since the council elected in 2005.

b. M'saken

The municipality of M'saken was founded in 1921 but it was impossible to find data beyond the municipal council 1990-1995. The number of women on boards had risen steadily since 1995 and until the 2010-2015 term. With the creation of Special Delegations, the situation has changed and women have experienced the following progression: 1>4>5>7>11 women (last Special Delegation) out of 30. This corresponds to 33%, a rate higher than the quota rate advocated by Ben Ali in his campaign for the 2004-2009 presidential elections.

Afterwards, M'saken experienced two Special Delegations in which the number of women dropped to two, barely a 10% rate. Note that the elected city council between 2005 and 2010 and the Special Delegation introduced in 2013 allowed women to assume responsibilities in the electoral districts or commissions.

c. Kalaa Kebira

The municipality of Kalaa Kebira was founded on 29 February 1921. The first woman acceded to the Kalaa Kebira municipal council during the 1980-1985 term. During this period, there were two women. The number increased to three, then four during the 2000–2005 term. In the two councils that preceded January 2011, the number of women was 6 out of 22 seats; it is a figure close to the quota recommended by the party in power in those days. Women have kept the same rate with the Special Delegation, with 5 out of 16 seats. Local businesses in the municipality of Kalaa Kebira are administered in the presence of the City Delegate and the Assistant of the Management Commission, comprising nine members, including two women, since 13 July 2015.

d. Hammam Sousse

The municipality of Hammam Sousse was founded thanks to the decree issued on 1 September 1957; thereby, and unlike other municipalities created before 1957, all its councils were elected. The first woman came to the council during the 1969–1972 term. It was the only woman among

¹¹ In 2011, the municipal councils that emerged from the 2010 municipal elections were gradually dissolved on the decision of the head of government. They were replaced by special delegations, similar to interim municipal councils. It is worth noting that these delegations are appointed by the government (after adoption of the Constitution on 27 January 2014).

10 members. During the next term, 1975-1980, the Board, with 16 members, did not include any women. The ratio of women initially increased with 1 out of 16, and then the number of women increased further to 2 out of 16 for three successive terms. This number rises to four for two terms, then 6 out of 22, giving a turnout of 30% in Hammam Sousse. During the two terms 1985-1990 and 1995-2000, the Social Affairs Committee was chaired by a woman councillor.

Another councillor was in charge of a district in the 1990-1995 and 1995-2000 terms; another adviser chaired the Economic Committee in 2000-2005, during the same period, the first assistant to the Chairman of the Board (equal to the mayor) and the Chairman of the Committee on Social Affairs were women. Another woman among the members was the Head of the Commission of Tender during the 2005-2010 term.

e. Monastir

The municipality of Monastir was founded on 24 January 1887. The first time a woman became a member of the council was during the 1969–1972 term. Women were absent during the following mandates. During the 1982–1985 term, the number of women was 5 out of 20, a rate of 25%. During the 1990–1995 term, the number of women dropped from 6 out of 22 to 4 out of 22. In the city council just before January 2011, the number of women was 9 out of 30, a rate of 30%; it decreased with the Special Delegation to 3 out of 24, 12.5%.

Women councillors had the responsibility to preside over a district in 1990-1995, 2005-2010 and 2010-2015, and the latter term was interrupted by the introduction of the Special Delegation.

Often, women have chaired various committees: the Women's Commission (1985-1990 and 2005-2010), the Committee on Social Affairs (1985-1990 and 2005-2010), the Committee on Health and Protection of the Environment (2000-2005), the Committee on Youth and Sport (2000-2005 and 2010-2015), the Protection Committee of the Third Age (2015-2015), and the Economic Committee within the Special Delegation. The women councillors also chaired other committees such as the volunteer labour board, municipal information, trustees of buildings and supervision of the Municipal Council for Children. All these committees disappeared under the Special Delegation.

f. Moknine

The municipality was created following a decree issued on 30 November 1934 and, like all other municipalities, the first elected council served in 1957 but remained reserved for men until 1969, when the first woman joined the board members, 1 out of 10. During the following term, a woman

was elected, 1 out of 12, and she was the assistant of the Chairman of the Board. The number of women varied from none to one during successive terms until the May 2005 elections, with the election of 6 out of 22 women, a 30% rate. This is the desired national rate. Today, the municipality is governed by a Steering Committee composed of heads of administrations (men and women) in the delegation; the Committee meets in the presence of the delegate of the city. However, no women take part in the Committee's meeting because they do not occupy leadership positions in their administrations.

g. Jemmel

The municipality of Jemmel was founded in 1920. According to the information collected starting at the beginning of the 1972–1975 term, women had been absent from the council until 1985. Then, the board included 2 out of 22 women. This number increased and reached 7 out of 22, a rate of 30%. Women have had the following responsibilities within the council during these successive terms:

- Mandate 1990-1995 - Commission of the Family and the Protection of Women.
- Mandate 1995-2000 - A councillor was assistant to the Chairman of the Board, another was President of the Commission of the Family and the Protection of Women.
- Mandate 2000-2005 - One of the councillors was assistant to the chairman and presided over the Committee on Social Affairs at the same time.
- Mandate 2005-2010 - An adviser chaired the Committee on Youth, Sports and Culture, a second councillor chaired the Coordination Commission with neighbourhood committees and national organisations.
- During the current mandate, a councillor is head of the Committee on Social Affairs and Family.

h. Ksar Helal

The municipality of Ksar Helal was founded on 23 September 1948 and remained reserved for men until May 1995, at which time women were able to participate with 4 out of 22 seats, a rate of more than 15%. This number grew to 7 out of 22 in the last elected council, a rate of 30%. This rate decreased with the introduction of the Special Delegation on 28 October 2011, with 4/16, a rate of 25%.

The presence of women in municipal councils indicates that there is a policy promoting women in their accession to the councils. The participation of women was limited and grew irregularly with the guidelines of the policy, particularly the quota established by the ruling party. It is well known that it is the ruling party that decides the composition of the board. One significant issue



The many responsibilities that women assume on a daily basis, mobility constraints and sexist attitudes reduce the chances of women to pursue a political career. ©Vfj

to note is the low number of women in the Special Delegations compared with the elected councils in May 2010.

8. Women's Perceptions and Their Challenges

a. *Women's multifaceted burden*

In interviewing women, it was obvious that a woman holding several responsibilities at the same time is one of the main barriers to their full engagement with politics; besides being politicians, they are wives, mothers and workers. One interviewee said, "Women's exclusion from decision-making positions within the party is due in the first place (80%) to the obstacles of the family."

From women's accounts, there are women who demanded full responsibility from men over household responsibilities as partners rather than as helpers. As one woman said, "As long as men do not fulfil their responsibilities, women cannot reconcile family and the public sphere." She rejected the perception that men should just help, but held the belief that housework and childcare should be an integral part of men's responsibilities towards the family: "We do not need men who just help in domestic work."

However, this was not the case for all women, as some have to compromise their political engagement in favour of family duties: "After my marriage and with the arrival of my children I

went through a long period of inactivity in politics." Another woman stated that "I became a mother in 1997 and, despite the beauty of motherhood, I found myself unable to continue my activities in the public sphere... I was inactive for a long time so I could take care of my children... I tried to convince my husband, who was unable to overcome the mentality of the eastern man."

In cases where the husband accepted his wife's participation in politics, women have first to fulfil their family duties in order to maintain an engagement with politics. "My husband has accepted my decision to get involved in political activity and, in return, I tried to be the best woman, and so I usually leave home only once all my responsibilities at home are accomplished: meals and children."

Nevertheless, the husband is not the only person women have to reconcile with. Fathers, brothers and mothers usually intervene in women's choices, and a woman involved in politics has to answer the question "what will happen to your children if you win the elections?" or otherwise they will be accused of being selfish mothers. One woman said, "My mother even accuses me of neglecting my husband and my children." Such comments and stances regarding women's political participation have demotivated women to continue their political activities.

Whilst family members were an obstacle for some women activists, for others family was the main support for their activities. Some women stated that without the support they get from their families they would never have been able to continue.

Other women have been able to keep their engagement with politics without any adequate support. However, that did not mean neglecting their children but rather trying to balance between their children's needs and their political responsibilities. "I used to take my son with me when I moved into the neighbourhoods where we worked...; but if my son was ill, I preferred to stay at home."

b. Women political activists are targets of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and sexual harassment

Most women interviewed agreed that GBV, and sexual violence in particular, is one reason why women do not engage in politics. This violence, as some women stated, starts at an early age, which pushes women away from politics. For example, one woman said that "when girls reach a certain age, they stop joining the scouts' activities because of several social problems. I kind of understand because sexual harassment exists among the scouts and in many other places."

In referring to recent sexual harassment during the revolution, a woman stated that sexual violence against women was to punish unionists through women's bodies: "I am sad to remember these days of massive activity, when I found myself in the corridors of a hotel, a victim of sexual harassment by a trade unionist."

Although women have to face different types of violence as unionists, in an attempt to stop them from taking part in the demonstrations, their political parties and unions did not support them but somehow blamed them for these acts and made women feel as if they were a burden on the union or the political parties. As one woman stated, "The violence we endured and the perceptions of our male colleagues were a daily reminder that as women we should not have been participating in the demonstrations."

c. Sexist mentality and gender-biased policies of unionists and politicians

One of the main barriers for women politicians and activists is the mentality of political parties and unions, which have yet to recognise women's roles and support their presence. This was manifested in how male politicians perceived women's needs and interests. As one activist stated, "Our presence, as activists, trade unionists, is not desired. Other activists addressed the issue of how male unionists try to control decision-making within the union, because they (union members and activists in general) in the end all agreed to preserve the male way of thinking. Moreover, they know that when women engage in the public sphere, they can be very active, generally more active than men can, so they cannot let them guide and overshadow men."

In deciding on the time and place for activities, some women felt that they were excluded already as it is difficult for a woman to attend meetings in remote areas or that take place during night time. "All the conferences or the electoral roll are prepared outside the premises of the party and at times when it is impossible for women to be present." By not taking into consideration that women do not have the same opportunities and freedom of movement as men, due to social constraints and family responsibilities, unions and political parties were excluding women and reducing their chances of fully participating in the elections. "During the preparation of elections, we notice that most discussions take place outside the reserved official frameworks and outside schools. They take place in cafes and places that women cannot access, giving rise to every account of the absence of women, and pulling the rug from under their feet; they even quit when they feel that all plans have been made behind their backs."

These discriminatory practices are closely linked to the male mentality of political parties and unions; as one woman put it, "Discrimination against women was the reason to exclude me and prevent me from attending the national conference."

d. Women's lack of self-confidence

Often for women to engage in politics it requires great efforts to overcome the barriers as well as gain the respect of her community as a politician. "I overcame a great pressure that tried to weaken me and push me to give up being head of the list. I haven't abandoned it, but this required a great effort." This is because women are generally raised in a way that makes them feel less appreciated than men; they receive inadequate education, learn their duties as mothers at an early age, and are not encouraged to engage in politics. This usually results in women having less experience and qualifications required to pursue roles in the political sphere. Such a situation also leads to women perceiving themselves as less qualified and they thus have a lack of confidence in their views and capabilities. "Women reduce their capacities and behave like an inferior, just good enough for a rank of second degree as a result of the education they received and internalised."

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مؤسسة نساء الأورو-متوسط

Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation

Fondation des Femmes de l'Euro-Méditerranée

Dans le cadre de sa mission, la **Fondation des Femmes de l'Euro-Méditerranée (FFEM)** analyse au niveau local les réalités des femmes et les politiques publiques les concernant à l'aide de consultations et de dialogues de proximité. Pour ce faire, la Fondation met en place annuellement des **pôles locaux d'acteurs de l'égalité femmes-hommes**® dans les pays suivants : Algérie, Égypte, Jordanie, Liban, Maroc, Palestine et Tunisie (1 par pays).

Chaque pôle local d'acteur de l'égalité femmes-hommes® est coordonné par une association, la Fondation considérant que la société civile est le principal moteur du changement et de l'amélioration de la condition féminine dans nos sociétés.

L'approche des pôles locaux est une démarche innovante et participative qui encourage le réseautage et le partage de pratiques réussies en faveur de l'égalité femmes-hommes à un niveau décentralisé et qui promeut l'émergence de projets ancrés dans le territoire.

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