



WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN MUNICIPAL COUNCILS IN LIWA AL KOURA, IRBID

JORDAN

A. Introduction	7
B. Diagnosis in Liwa Al-Koura	9
C. Findings of the diagnosis	11
D. Bibliography and references	25

This diagnosis examines Jordan women's participation in politics with a focus on municipal councils in Liwa Al Koura, within the Irbid Governorate. It presents the obstacles that women need to overcome to be involved in local, regional or national governments, and the challenges they face as members of municipal councils.



The involvement of women in political life must be supported by active public policies.

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- Advancing in the common fight for equal rights of women and men to participate in political, economic, civil and social life;
- Eradicating all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls;
- Encouraging a change in attitude and behaviour for gender equality.

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Field diagnosis: Women's Participation in Municipal Councils in Liwa Al Koura, Irbid (Jordan)

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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 (Lebanon)
B Wilaya of Oran (Algeria) **E** Southern part of the West Bank (Palestine)
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 Irbid.

A. INTRODUCTION

Jordan's Constitution stipulates in Article 6 that "Jordanians shall be equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination between them as regards to their rights and duties on grounds of race, language or religion." However, the Constitution does not mention explicitly the prohibition of gender-based discrimination and does not include any article in relation to gender equality. The neutral language of the Constitution does not pay special attention to women so as to enable them to compete and participate on the basis of equality with men in political, social and economic life as well as in public and private institutions. According to citizenship laws of Jordan, a woman married to a foreign national cannot grant citizenship to either her husband or her children.

Adult literacy in Jordan is one of the highest in the region at 92.2%. The illiteracy rate among girls decreased from 10.8% in 2009 to 10.1% in 2013 and for boys to 3.7%.¹ Access to basic services and education enrolment in primary education is 91% (49% of them are girls and 51% boys).² In higher education, the overall percentage is 31% with females constituting 51.9% and males 49.1%.³ In 2010, the female labour force participation rate in Jordan was approximately a quarter of male participation. Despite many efforts directed toward enhancing women's role in society and the economy, there has been little actual progress in women's economic participation. In 2011, women represented less than 20% of the total labour force in Jordan. The 2010 World Economic Forum Report on the Gender Gap ranks Jordan 120th among 134 countries in terms of women's economic opportunities, well below other middle-income countries.

Jordan's state policies towards gender equality have improved since the mid-1990s. Special attention was given to services and the registration of dozens of charitable women's organisations. The ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1992 and the establishment of the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) as a mechanism and monitoring body of the government's compliance with CEDAW in the same year have marked a new level of work on women's rights.⁴

The last two decades witnessed several changes to women's legal and civil rights. In 1999, the government responded to the demands of women's NGOs and amended the marriage age to

¹ DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS. *Women's Indicators according to Gender*. DOS, 2009.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ JABIRI, Afaf. *Gendered Politics and Law in Jordan: Guardianship over Women*. New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

18 for both males and females. Yet, judges were given the right to authorise marriages of girls under 18 if the marriage was seen to be in the best interest of the wider community.⁵

The country also witnessed several other developments that have had a positive effect on the status of women,⁶ including halving the illiteracy rate among them.⁷ According to the 2007 report of the Jordanian Statistics Department, the literacy rate of women has increased from 84.3% to 89.4%. Moreover, the improvement in the status of women's health complies with global indicators, and the number of women who have attained leadership positions in the government's institutions has also increased relatively.⁸

Nevertheless, women's political participation is still limited. Women occupy only 7% of the leadership positions in the public administration⁹ and 17% in middle management positions. According to the conclusions of the study undertaken by the Ministry of Public Sector Development in May 2015, women represent 45% of the total number of civil servants in the public sector. However, the percentage decreases to 24% if education and health care sectors are excluded, which means that women are concentrated more in educational and healthcare positions. The rate of women in middle senior management positions reached 29%. Therefore, women's low political participation in Jordan is still one of the main concerns for civil society organisations (CSOs). Whilst there has been some progress in relation to women's participation in elections generally and in active participation at the municipal level in particular, women's presence in the overall decision-making processes and in leadership positions is not yet adequate.

The issue of women's participation in politics acquires great importance within the context of civil and political rights and the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women concerning their rights. However, all studies and projects focus mostly on the country's capital, the decision-making centre, and somehow neglect remote regions and villages. This presents one of the primary reasons for the diagnosis. The diagnosis focuses on the gaps in women's participation in municipal councils at Liwa Al-Koura within the Irbid Governorate, as well as the obstacles facing women in that region. Therefore, this diagnosis tries to shed

5 See more on the changes made to the marriage age in Jordan and other Arab countries in WELCHMAN, Lynn. *Women and Muslim Family Laws in Arab States: A Comparative Overview of Textual Development and Advocacy*. Amsterdam University Press, 2007.

6 THE JORDANIAN NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN (JNCW). *Jordan Official Report on the Implementation of Beijing Platform of Action, submitted to the Beijing + 15 Conference*, p. 2, 2009.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

8 *Ibid.*

9 ANNUAL REPORT OF CIVIL SERVICE BUREAU. *National Report*, 2010.

light on cases of women's participation in the decision-making process, identifies the challenges facing them and makes recommendations for the promotion of women's participation in decision-making at the level of local councils. In fact, women's participation in leadership positions is still far below expectations as it represents only 10%.

B. DIAGNOSIS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN LIWA AL-KOURA

Building Bridges Association chose to identify the factors and challenges affecting women's role and participation in municipal councils in order to improve their situation and allow them to play an effective role in society's development and growth.

Building Bridges Association (BBA)

BBA is a non-profit voluntary initiative headquartered in Amman. Its geographical scope of work extends all through the governorates of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. BBA's team contributed to the setting up of the Jordanian Network of the Anna Lindh Foundation in 2011. The association aims at building a society based on equality, social justice, freedom, and human dignity in order to improve the quality of life through development and progress.

BBA aims at making a positive change towards a better social, cultural, political, and economic reality, through implementing programs and projects designed for women and men. It aims at empowering and strengthening women's capacity to confront gender-based violence, as well as increasing the participation of women in decision-making positions.

BBA pursues the following goals:

- To spread, enhance, and defend human rights;
- To strengthen the community's awareness about the culture of knowledge of gender;
- To empower women legally and socially in order to highlight their role in society;
- To provide support – legal, social, psychological, and health services – to women and children victims of human rights violations;
- To organize studies and qualitative and quantitative researches in the field of development and women's and human rights;
- To contribute in developing the skills of women and youth in making researches and creating public policies in order to enable them to take an active role in decision-making positions.

1. Objectives of the Diagnosis:

The general objective of the diagnosis is to have an overview of women's participation in municipal councils in the region of Liwa Al Koura, Irbid.

- a) Identification of the level of women's awareness and information about their political and civil rights as well as national and international regulatory framework within the municipal councils of Liwa Al Koura, Irbid.
- b) Obstacles and challenges facing women in municipal councils.
- c) Trends and views among civil society and female local leaders in terms of women's participation in municipal councils.

In order to realise its goals, the study set forth the following questions to be examined:

- What is the level of women's awareness in terms of civil and political rights when they decide to participate in political life?
- What are the obstacles and challenges facing women on their way to municipal councils?
- What are the opinions and trends regarding women's political participation and specifically in municipal councils?



Building Bridges Association encourages women to overcome the cultural and social challenges that hinder their access to decision-making positions.

2. Methodological Framework of the Diagnosis

Literature review: reviewing the studies connected to women's political participation published in Arabic at the local level as well as other formal or informal publications including reports and documents from international institutions and organisations.

Focus groups: organisation of three discussion groups, which included representatives from NGOs, local leaders, women members of the municipal council (elected or appointed) and women who were candidates in municipal council elections. Additionally, brainstorming sessions with different sectors relating to women's political participation were organized. In total, 128 persons were involved in the focus groups and the brainstorming sessions.

Interviews: three interviews with polls and questionnaires, which included representatives from local authorities, local society, NGOs and CSOs.

In preparation for the diagnosis, BBA's team consulted with different active organisations and actors in Liwa Al Koura. These groups provided the team with the potential participants of the study, through which the team was able to select the diagnosis participants based on specific criteria.

C. FINDINGS OF THE DIAGNOSIS

1. Social and Cultural Challenges

The legislation stipulates compulsory representation of women in governments, such as the laws related to the parliament and the municipal councils, which use the quota system for women, the provisional law relating to the 2003 elections and the law related to the municipalities of 2007. Nevertheless, the popular trend did not follow the official one and women's representation is still low within various political institutions. Almost all the research studies and surveys that examined the issue of women's political participation raised the social, economic and political factors that hold back women from reaching decision-making positions as one of the main factors. Indeed, most of the surveys and research studies confirmed that the social challenge facing women when they decide to engage in politics, be it at the municipal council or parliament level, is their main obstacle. In fact, gender stereotypes still prevail with a traditional framework that assigns family issues as women's main responsibilities. These studies also relate to women's capacity to succeed in the elections, their financial situation and economic independence. Most of the conclusions in

the various studies highlighted the fact that without support from the family, women are far less successful than men.

Dr. Hassine Al Othmane dealt with the issue of women's political participation in his research study entitled "Obstacles to Jordanian Women's Participation in Politics from a Sociological Point of View". He concluded that women's absence from the political arena is not due to legal obstacles but rather to cultural and social obstacles that still segregate men and women in public life and this, according to him, is the reason for the weak presence of women in leadership roles. Hence, the number of women who reached decision-making positions through free competition remains low. This alone, according to him, explains that Jordan has a male-oriented culture that excludes women from the public sphere.

Dr. Hassine Al Othmane also stressed the traditional and conservative based system of values, habits and customs that portray a stereotyped image of women as a tool for social reproduction. Furthermore, the distribution of roles between men and women is based on cultural beliefs, which determines that the role of women should consist of looking after their husbands, children and families while men should take political and legislative positions and responsibilities.

A study published in 2011, which was conducted by JNCW under the title "Women's Participation in Municipal Councils in Jordan", concluded that the concerns of women as members of the municipal council are limited to dealing with social and environmental activities, as well as cleaning and general services. Therefore, even when women reach decision-making positions they are still performing a rather social and service oriented role.

Another study written by the Kods Center for Political Studies in July 2007 entitled "The Situation of Women in Political Parties in Jordan" considers that the social heritage represented in habits and traditions is an obstacle to women's participation in political life as it identified the role of women as mothers, sisters and/or wives.

Within the framework of this social heritage and with the influence of culture, women are dependent on men for decision-making. Furthermore, at the level of society, women are excluded because men are considered more competent in terms of political work. Hence, the social environment obstructs women from participating in political life because of the patriarchal system, which emphasises protecting women and keeping them away from public

life issues. The vast majority of people believe that men have the qualities and skills needed for political work such as communication, negotiation and persuasion. In addition, they consider that men are more able to make alliances than women. Therefore, they confirm that political work is not suited to the nature of women; even though this belief varies from one area to another, it hinders women's access to political decision-making centres (Mokdad, 2004).

2. Recent Developments in Women's Political Participation

On several occasions and in several studies, the JNCW highlighted the need to take into consideration appointing qualified and competent women in decision-making positions within municipal/local councils and regional councils as well as executive councils and administrations. It also recommended including the two laws related to municipalities and decentralisation in a single law, cancelling the system of one-person-one-vote and adopting instead the system of lists with the obligation of a fair representation of women on these lists. The JNCW also suggested increasing the seats reserved for women in the local councils so that they can reach 25% of the seats, similar to the municipal councils. The commission is also taking into consideration women's representativeness in the executive councils (in the governorates) by completing the text with a condition to reserve seats for no fewer than five women.

The JNCW further suggested reserving 10% of the seats for women within regional councils. In addition to that, it recommended that, during the preparation of strategic plans and the development of budgets, the regional council should consider the needs of women and men. They should be considered in a way that guarantees equal opportunities and women's participation in all the commissions and that ensures that the votes of women, especially illiterate, handicapped and elderly women, are not manipulated.

To respond to the demands of the JNCW and NGOs, the Prime Ministry has created a women's ministerial commission that aims to empower women. This commission aims to address women's priorities and rights, and ensure their participation in all programmes and projects. The commission includes the Minister of Social Development (a woman) as well as Ministers from the Interior Ministry; Planning and International Cooperation; Municipal Affairs; Culture; Transport; Industry and Commerce; and Communication and Information Technologies. The commission is in charge of reviewing all measures, regulations and initiatives related to women's empowerment and highlighting the main obstacles facing women by reviewing all the international and local obstacles in order to make recommendations to the Council of Ministers for approval. Furthermore, the JNCW submitted

a series of remarks and recommendations relating to various laws, such as the laws on municipalities and decentralisation in order to harmonise them with Jordanian women's rights and demands.

3. Political Parties' Lack of Support for Women

In her research study for the Association for Women's Promotion and Development entitled "Women's Political Participation in the Arab World", the researcher Imene Bibers was acquainted with the experiences of a number of women who were candidates for municipal and parliamentary elections in several Arab countries, including Jordan, Yemen, Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine. The study dealt with the scope of women's political participation in the Arab world. The researcher found that there are many factors hindering Arab women from political participation. Among these obstacles, she mentions that the election climate is dominated by violence, corruption and political money. In addition to this, there is lack of support to women from political parties in all Arab countries where the role of women within political parties is still insignificant. However, despite the existence of quotas in some Arab countries like Sudan, Morocco and Jordan, there are some laws that allow discrimination against women in all Arab countries.

For this reason, because of the male culture prevailing in society as well as the political conditions of the country before the political awakening, the political parties, at their creation in the beginning of the sixties, were also dominated by a male culture. Furthermore, the prevailing political culture which is cautious and negative about political parties' activities, discouraged people, particularly women, from joining political parties.

Finally, a document from United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in 2004 states that women's resentment to participate in political parties is due in part to the issue of non-attractiveness of the political parties themselves and their incapacity to recruit citizens in general in addition to their neglect of women's rights. This is highlighted by the figures and statistics of the General Statistics Centre, which indicate that the rate of women's participation in political parties in the middle of the last decade did not exceed 6.8% for 2005 and 7.5% for 2007, but it increased remarkably in 2009 to reach 29.1%. As for women's work within municipal councils, the rate reached 25% in 2007.

4. Legislation and Laws

As mentioned earlier, Article 6 of the Jordanian Constitution stipulated that "Jordanian people are equal before the Law." The Constitution stated in Article 22/1 that "every Jordanian person

has the right to take public positions according to the conditions specified in the regulations and systems.” The progress of Jordanian laws in recent history shows that the municipal law, which was issued in 1925, replaced by law no. 29 of 1995 and modified by law no. 21 of 2003, made several changes to the Municipalities Law in 2007. Article 9, paragraphs A and B, states the following:

“The municipality may be divided into electoral districts; the limits of the district and the number of elected members in each district are decided by means of a ministerial decree published in the Official Journal. A rate of 20% minimum of the number of members is reserved for women candidates. If the results of the elections do not allow for 20% women, then the women corresponding to this rate are appointed by a decision from the Council of Ministers. This text is applied in the Amman Governorate, relating to the members elected.”

Furthermore, it is important to discuss the new law for the municipality AB 2015 and the Decentralisation Law of the same year. While the Municipal Election Law has been modified many times, in 2007, the law was modified to provide 20% of the total number of seats in the municipal councils for women. This is in addition to women’s right to be candidates under free competition. This encouraged 355 women to engage in the election experience; among them, 226 succeeded, 23 of them through free competition, not through quota system. Furthermore, six women were candidates to the position of council president and one of them was successful. Therefore, the rate of women’s participation increased remarkably (UNIFEM, 2007). However, in terms of competition related to municipal council presidency, a decrease with regard to the previous election is noted in the rate of women candidates (six women candidates among a total number of 739 candidates, less than 1%).

After these remarks a question emerges: is the quota system working? Since women gained the right to vote in the mid-1970s, they were unable to be represented and enjoy their constitutional rights as candidates and parliamentary representatives until 1989. During this period, their voice was used in the elections for the benefit of men. However, with the return of parliamentary life in Jordan in 1989, which is a milestone in the history of Jordanian women’s participation, they were granted the right to vote and the right to be candidates. In 1993, three women were candidates but only one of them succeeded with a representative seat. In 1997, 17 women were candidates in the elections but none succeeded in attaining a seat. In 2003, the Elections Law was amended to include six seats reserved for women in the parliament

(women's quota), as a kind of positive discrimination to promote women's participation. This also enabled to change the social culture which used to encourage people to give their vote to men rather than to women, regardless of the level of competence and competitiveness of the latter. The quota for women ensured the promotion of a culture of women's participation in parliamentary life.

The quota presents one of the successful ways in which women have access to seats in the parliament and in municipal councils, in spite of criticism until today. Accordingly, the increase in the number of women candidates to the presidency or as members of the municipal councils is a positive indicator that proves women's courage and boldness to start the election battle, which is no longer reserved for men. This was a great positive stride towards progress and participation in all areas of political life, even though women's chances of success through competition are negligible. However, the quota system could be considered as a transitional period preparing women for progress with more self-confidence and wider experience.

In the focus groups conducted by BBA, the quota system for women raised a lot of criticism and controversy. Indeed, the first group considered this as a transitional period to train women on how to engage in the experience of decision-making positions in the legislative or executive councils. This system is considered as a kind of positive segregation in order to achieve equality and alleviate the levels of segregation and marginalisation of women in society. It is based on the CEDAW Convention, which states in Article 4:

“Adoption by States Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved.”

As to the second group, those opposed to the quota system believed this contradicts an important article of the Constitution, which is equality, in addition to the fact that they consider women who succeed by means of the quota would think that they succeeded thanks to the quota and not to their personal or professional skills. Therefore, this category of women may be unqualified to work within municipal councils.

Finally, the progress made in relation to women's lives in Arab countries makes the quota system a necessary step towards women's empowerment in participating in the political sphere and



The Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation is fostering multi-stakeholder consultations on priority issues for women.

enabling them to reach economic and political decision-making positions. This system allows them to participate in the preparation of laws aiming at developing society as they represent half of it.

In conclusion, we can wonder if the quota system has been effective in realising its target. The objective of establishing the quota system in 2003 in the election law was not meant to deal with women's representation as a minority group, like the other quotas in Jordanian society. Women represent half of Jordanian society. They also represent 50.2% of the total number of people registered on the lists of voters according to the declarations of the Statistics Centre from 2008. The purpose of women's quotas was for women to participate in bringing about a social transformation in terms of changing the stereotyped social gender roles and women's roles in public life. The quota system was considered positive discriminatory legislation to reinforce women's participation in parliament in compliance with the political will and women's aspirations. This is also to comply with the international conventions signed by the Hashemite Kingdom in order to achieve human rights and bringing about justice and equality between all the members of society.

5. Other Detrimental Factors to Women's Political Participation

a. Lack of interest in politics among women and the general public

A study by Dr. Hassine Al Othmane from Moata University concluded with the identification of

a number of obstacles that hinder women from effective political participation, including a lack of regularity and readiness for political participation in Jordanian society in general and specifically a lack of experience among women in terms of political work. In addition, there is little political awareness within society in general, particularly amongst women, about the importance of their political participation.

b. The inter-linkage between family, tribe and economic dependency of women

Some ethnic, clan and family systems represent an obstacle to women's political participation as an individual may represent a clan or a family. This is in addition to the economic obstacles that make women financially dependent on their husbands and make it difficult to escape their domination. Cultural and social obstacles, which confine women within the private sphere and their role of mother and wife, become the priority and exclude women from the public sphere. Finally, there is a lack of awareness among women themselves relating to the importance of supporting other women candidates and about the importance of their participation in political decision-making.

c. Administrative obstacles

There are also administrative obstacles, which refer to prior preparation and organisation, such as preparing election banners and women's lack of communication skills with electors; this affects the results of the elections. Finally, the psychological obstacles refer to the lack of confidence of women in women candidates, believing that politics is a man's business and men are more capable of leading and making decisions.

d. Women's knowledge of rights and responsibilities

-Inadequate knowledge in relation to the roles and responsibilities within municipal councils and a lack of awareness about the law that governs these roles

All participants in the study confirmed that being a candidate in the election is the right of women and men. They insisted on the fact that this is stated in the Jordanian Constitution as a source of civil and political rights which, according to them, argues that all citizens are equal before the law. Some of the women participants said that the concept of political rights refers to the right to vote, to be a candidate and to be involved in political parties; they did not mention any other activities that could be included within this concept.

-Controversial views on CEDAW

There were extensive debates in respect to the municipal law and to the decentralisation law's projects between the focus groups' participants. The focus groups were organised to discuss

the two law-based projects, giving their views and opinions about candidature conditions, the preparation of quotas and nominations in general. Many women criticised the law-based project related to decentralisation, arguing that the executive council (in the governorates) will endorse the important decisions and deprive municipal councils of their prerogatives. Some participants made a few remarks relating to the election districts divisions and quota calculations. However, they briefly raised the international conventions related to women's political rights, but they have superficial knowledge about these conventions limited to a few articles, commonly used when talking about women's participation or discrimination against them. The CEDAW is the most debated matter by women and men, because of the problems it raises and the fact that it is rejected by most Arab countries.

-Lack of efforts to empower rural women and women outside Amman in engaging in politics

Women participants complained about the lack of concern on the part of official and unofficial parties relating to candidature to the municipal council elections, most particularly in rural areas. Indeed, many participants together with civil society representatives highlighted the fact that most training sessions take place in the capital Amman, which represents a challenge to women living in remote areas and deprives them of the opportunity of involvement in political life.

6.Challenges

a. Women's dependent status on male family members

There are some factors that are interiorised by women, including the superiority of the male sex. This is how one of the women participants expressed the socio-cultural heritage of Jordan, which frames women's roles. According to most women participants, the socio-cultural heritage is one of the factors hindering their participation in political life. One of the women said that "Women cannot make decisions because society decided that they cannot make them." In fact, women live in a ready-made frame: "The idea about women is pre-determined by the family and husband"

b. Lack of empowerment, support and capacity-building programmes for women

For this reason, there is still a long way to go to women's participation in the political sphere and they need many training programmes and a lot of capacity-building. Almost all the participants agreed that women have a great fear of accessing the political and public spheres and most particularly decision-making positions. They may be afraid of failure in this experience and therefore lose the confidence of their families and society. Women's capacity-building is the responsibility of CSOs in order to prepare them for the elections. However, most participants

agreed that the law forbids CSOs from supporting the election programmes at the level of the parliament. Many women insisted on the fact that “We lack support from our environment” so that they could be effective participants. If women want to participate in public life, they need to have capacities that allow them to balance home and work responsibilities.

c. Lack of financial means to support women's candidates and achieve their independence

Most of the participants agreed that the main obstacle is the economic situation of women and their financial dependence in addition to strength and authority, which are characteristic of men in this society. This makes women seek support from the family or the husband. Hence, they need support from society in the first place, which provides the proper environment for women to be able to achieve independent financial support; otherwise, their decisions remain dependent on someone else.

d. Lack of confidence in, and appreciation of, women's role in the councils

“The council members would laugh at our proposals and views and refuse them,” say many women who sit on the bench in municipal councils. A total of 85% of the women participants agreed with this idea, adding that women's suggestions are not accepted like the suggestions made by male colleagues. Some of the women even said that the president and the male members of the council hid some information and documents from them so that they could not be informed and are ultimately unable to participate in the discussions. Therefore, they cannot be fully informed or effective when it comes to what goes on around them, especially in relation to important issues with financial consequences like bids and purchases.

e. Perceptions of women as lacking the capabilities and right qualifications for leadership positions

Most of the participants confirmed that there is a lack of women's involvement and participation in political activities despite their participation as voters and as candidates in the municipality and parliament councils. However, their rate of participation remains below their expectations. For the participants in the discussion groups, this explains women's low presence in decision-making positions, especially in the government teams. This proves, according to women participants, that Jordanian society has negative perceptions about women's capacities to work in politics and reach leadership positions in municipal councils or in parliament.

f. Lack of women's support for female candidates

Many participants raised the issue of the relation to women's support for each other, which, according to them, presents a complex relation tinted with hesitation and a lack of confidence. This

has a negative effect on support of women by women as well as mutual help to achieve success. It prevents them from giving a new, unusual image of women being supportive of their female colleagues.

g. Women's perception of their role is service-oriented

Most participants in the discussion groups said that the main reason that motivates women to engage in the municipal council experience is to serve society, referring to women's sense of responsibility towards local population issues. They also have communication capacities with people in order to present programmes and services to them. Other women participating in the discussion groups said they wanted to improve themselves and the image of women working, as well as their role in society. They also said that women are able to work successfully both inside and outside the home.

7. Summary of the Results:

- Women's awareness about their civil and political rights is based on the understanding of social and cultural issues rather than referring to national systems and legislations or international conventions;
- There is a lack of awareness and training programmes for women relating to international conventions and treaties signed by Jordan, regarding civil and political rights;
- Women's capacity to express their wish to be candidates for decision-making positions is still dependent on the social and family situation and is not the practice of a right guaranteed by the Constitution or the international conventions and treaties;
- Lack of financial means for women and economic dependence oblige women to rely on the family and the group relating to their decision to be candidates or to mobilise society support;
- The negative view from society towards the role of women confines them in their traditional stereotyped role within the family;
- The role of women in the municipal councils is reduced to the field of services. A development's perspective and the implementation of sustainable development objectives are not considered;
- Women's presence within municipal councils in the form of a services role is but a continuation of their role inside the home providing services to the family.

8. Recommendations

a. At the official level:

- Focus on awareness programmes in terms of rights, related to social and cultural matters, which

aims to increase awareness and change trends related to attitudes towards the roles and tasks of women and men;

- Capacity-building for activist women relating to public work in terms of the ability to mobilise, support and organise election campaigns and improve self-empowerment and self-confidence;
- Development and approval of specific equivalent regulations of the social gender, including articles related to women's temporary and strategic needs;
- Use the JNCW as an umbrella for women's work. This would aim to unite efforts among potential partners of civil society and the parties and provide service programmes related to women's issues. It would help to make boosting women to reach decision-making positions and alleviating obstacles in their way national priorities;
- Change the stereotyped view about women's role, starting with the education methods through revising the contents of these tools in terms of traditional and stereotyped image of the role of women in society;
- Reorganise the role of the media, newspapers, radio and television in order to transform them into awareness and education platforms, which play an important role in changing society trends and ensuring that images are free of stereotypes and segregation against women. This is important in order to gain a supportive media that promotes women's role in public work and reinforces opportunities for them to reach decision-making positions.

b. At the level of CSOs and NGOs:

- Create a network of alliances with civil society, which would be in charge of capacity-building programmes for women and improve knowledge among men and women in order to train women executives who are able to engage in the municipal council and parliamentary elections;
- Assign roles to local women leaders and reinforce their role in managing local populations through development and productive programmes aimed at improving their experience and expertise;
- Organise awareness-raising programmes aimed at activists among men and women in addition to religious men as well as opinion leaders in order to effectively change trends and opinions that hinder women's participation and prevent them from reaching decision-making positions;
- Create a common social public opinion with a culture of equality and justice and willing to achieve equal opportunities for men and women;
- Pay special attention to changing prejudices about women's role in society through CSOs.

They should make people aware of the law and the various local and international conventions and treaties as well as local legislation, which states equality in terms of rights. The general public is not aware that the right to participate in political activity for women is a right guaranteed by international laws;

- Encourage programmes to promote women in their election campaigns and help them influence the biggest election base.

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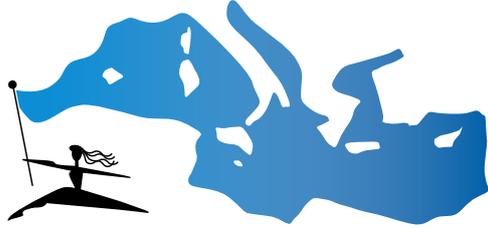
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According to its mandate, the **Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation (EMWF)** analyses women's local realities and public policies through consultations and dialogues at a grass-roots level. Concretely, the Foundation sets up **local clusters of gender equality actors**® every year, in the following countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia (1 per country).

Each local cluster of gender equality actors© is coordinated by an association as the Foundation recognises that civil society is the real motor of change in our societies to improve women's conditions.

The local clusters' approach is an innovative and participatory process, which supports networking and sharing of good practices in favour of gender equality at a decentralized level and promotes the emergence of projects rooted in the territory.

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