



In search for commitments towards political reform and women's rights

CONCLUSIONS

FROM THE ROUNDTABLE TOWARDS THE FULL PARTICIPATION WOMEN IN POLITICS 9th June 2014 Amman

Arab Women Organization of Jordan (AWO), Arab Network for Civic Education (ANHR), European Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI and Solidaridad Internacional (SI) held a roundtable on 9th of June 2014 to contribute to the promotion of women's political participation in Jordan. The roundtable took place in the frame of project *"In search of commitments towards political reform and commitment towards women's rights"* funded by the EU.

The roundtable was attended by 30 participants from different background: Members of the Parliament, women's rights CSOs, political parties, academics, media and State institutions, who came together to examine challenges and opportunities and share experiences and good practices in order to contribute to the building of a common women's rights agenda for women in politics through:

- Identification and preparation of a joint analysis of the reasons and challenges/constraints for women with feminist agenda to access the political sphere.
- Exchange of experiences and best practices to overcome those challenges.
- Draft initial recommendations to prepare a "Common Agenda" and to overcome the challenges identified in Jordan.

In the deliberations, participants took into consideration the Conclusions of the Ministerial Conference of the Union for the Mediterranean on "Strengthening the Role of Women in Society" Paris, 2013; the Conclusions of regional seminar on "Women and Politics" held in Alexandria 2010 and the Recommendations from the Euro-Med Women's Rights Conference on "Women's Rights and Democracy Building: Promoting A Common Agenda for Equality between Women and Men" held in Amman, 2013.

The meeting demonstrated a qualitative step in the depth of the discussion concerning the women's representation and participation in the political life. The following conclusions from the discussions have been drawn.



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CONCLUSIONS

Participants numerated a large number of challenges and constraints that hinder women political participation, especially for those who are defenders of women's rights.

1. Constraints

Constraints on conceptual level:

- ❖ Participation of women in political decision making is not only a matter of democracy but also a matter of social justice. The exclusion of women from decision making does not happen overnight; there is a universal structured pattern of unequal power distribution between women and men. These structures sustain women's under-representation in the decision making spheres. The society, decision makers and legislative sphere view women's political participation as if women and men had equal access to power, not taking into account this historical structural exclusion and deprivation of women from public life and political sphere.
- ❖ Political processes are building upon a combination of specific patriarchal legacy of the society and universal traditional patriarchal values. This combination results in different forms of production or reproduction of discrimination against women in the reform processes. The traditional concept of democracy does not include gender perspective and therefore democratic reform often reproduce the same structural exclusion of women and women's rights that it wishes to address.
- ❖ There are no sufficient studies or research work done to put a light on the challenges and constraints that hinder women's participation in the political parties and formations, as well as in the whole public and political decision making life; there is not sufficient research work done to uncover the link between the low participation of women in the workforce and low participation in public and political life.

Constraints on legislative level:

- ❖ Political and legislative sphere resist gender equality. The Jordanian Constitution does not explicitly forbid discrimination based on gender and does not contain special provisions to enable equal access of women to political participation.



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- ❖ The quota system in Jordan does not adequately address discrimination against women and does not contribute to enabling of a just proportional representation and participation of women in the parliament and in the national assemblies. The “seat quota” does not contribute to equal distribution of power and diminishes the possibility of having a cross party parliamentary group on women's rights that affect positive change in the long run.
- ❖ There is no an affirmative measure, like woman quota, to place women at top of the proportional lists that have newly been introduced in the election law. Therefore, the participation of women in politics is still very weak and decorative. It needs a strong push forward based on power sharing in order for women to actively contribute in the political life of Jordan and in the modern history.
- ❖ Legislation strengthens the traditional stereotypical roles of women and men in the basic laws that control lives of the citizens like: family law, civil pension law, social security law, nationality law and the passport law.

Constraints on social level:

- ❖ There are social entrenched problems that need to be tackled to open up a window for possible solutions. The persistence of gender-based violence is an intrinsic component of the patriarchal system, which hinders gender equality and encourages domination and discrimination against women.
- ❖ Political parties themselves are still of predominantly male composition, structure, functioning and history. Women are invited to deal with "specific women's questions", even if women are as little "specific" as men. There is no Gender Quota in the political parties' law.
- ❖ Women rights CSOs do not involve progressive men who share the same vision and values of equality in their programmes and initiatives to face social polarization and find solutions to lingering societal problems.
- ❖ There is a lack of cooperation based on mutual interest and solidarity among women's rights CSOs and between women's rights CSOs and female politicians, which is a key to strengthening those who face strong common challenges.
- ❖ There are no structural spaces for multi-stakeholder dialogues - women's rights activists, researchers, politicians, human rights activists, and policy and decision makers – where notions



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as democracy, participation and gender power relations can be together re-examine from gender equality perspective.

- ❖ There is a strong socio-cultural gender stereotypical portrayal of women, a so called feminine identity characterized by a lack of interest or ability to take on power and inability for tough negotiations. This “womanhood” is a historic fabrication whose direct consequence is the exclusion of women from the public and political life.

2. Entry points and best practices to overcome challenges

The participants also discussed entry points to change this situation on the different levels. The discussion moved forward with a vision that is based on democracy, inclusive of gender equality, human rights, and social justice. In this sense, democracy requests equal participation and sharing of power, duties and responsibilities and full citizenship rights. The following entry points to improving women's participation came along:

- ❖ Contribution to an enabling environment for women's participation in political life with women's rights agenda is successful when two discourses are combined: the rights discourse and social justice discourse, and where there are structural spaces for cross sector dialogues on democracy and reform from gender perspective, where all different stakeholders can continuously and together re-examine and broaden the traditional concepts.
- ❖ Address the issue of women's participation in the decision making spheres comprehensively, as a genuine issue based on social and gender justice, not on “efficiency “. In other words analyse the presence of women a measure of democracy and not just in terms of impact have proved supportive for advancing the women's rights agenda.
- ❖ Promote women's participation as their citizenship rights and obligation, linking it with international law. Holding reservation to CEDAW is not possible as it results in denying women their citizenship right and sustains their formal and legal discrimination, therefore exclusion from political decision making.
- ❖ There is a need of an electoral law that give better opportunities for women, i.e. the one-person-one vote hinders the possibility of women participation and therefore should be replaced. A quota system is needed to overcome the historical gap, end discrimination and reach just and proportional representation of all components of the society; the “seat quota” should be replaced with another form of quota guaranteeing minimum 30% of women's representation in the national parliament and local self-governments.



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- ❖ Women participation is more successful when women's rights CSOs engage grassroots in the work on local level and create space for empowerment and discussions on women's rights related issue.
- ❖ Research and surveys on national and local level that make visible the structural obstacles and barriers that women have to face to reach decision making positions, in particular with women's rights agenda, help the lobby and advocacy work towards political parties and government and towards the whole society.
- ❖ The regional and international women's rights instruments are a needed reference. The Ministerial Conclusions Paris 2013 paved a way for improving women's political participation and should be spread and debated both nationally and locally.

3. Mechanisms

Achieving gender balance in the decision making sphere requires changes in legislation and in public attitudes from global to local. To face such heavy historical and cultural background, and counteract the increasing conservatism and intrusion of the religious fundamentalisms in the public sphere it is needed to shake up standards, to set very high the requirement for political means to address stereotypes on gender identities and build societies where women and men are of equal worth.

- ❖ A national social dialogue for women political participation, including different social and political actors as female and male members of parliament, political parties, civil society and academics together with State actors with the aim of bridging the differences over the understanding of women political participation and taking affirmative measures.
- ❖ The national dialogue should come up with a "common agenda" emphasizing cooperation amongst all parties to push forward legislation, procedures and practices for gender-sensitive approach of participation and representation in the political sphere.
- ❖ A national debate on Gender Quota issues engaging and accumulating positive public opinion.
- ❖ Broad based alliances among women over increasing/strengthening public and political participation of women and women's rights agenda.
- ❖ Empowerment spaces where women's rights activists and female politicians can gather and discuss women's rights related issues.



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