

Gender Empowerment in Jordan

HABILITATION DES FEMMES EN JORDANIE

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Abstract

The paper addresses the factors that hinder women's participation in the private sector in Jordan, through assessing the basic factors that hinder women's empowerment and the role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Jordan in order to achieve the following objectives: explore the meaning of 'Women empowerment' concept and how to integrate her in development and its relation to Gender concept; explore the factors empower the Jordanian women; and suggest more factors that have better influence on women empowerment and participation in labor force. The paper reached some findings for empowering women in Jordan such as: Political authority as a main contributor to the advancement of women role in the society in Jordan and changing cultural norms and religious interpretations that aggravate gender inequalities is a must.

Key words: Women; Participation; SMEs; Empowerment; Inequalities

Résumé

Ce travail s'adresse aux facteurs empêchant la participation des femmes dans le secteur privé en Jordanie. Il estime les facteurs de base qui empêchent l'habilitation des femmes et le rôle des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises (PME) en Jordanie, en ayant pour objectif: d'explorer

le concept d' «habilitation des femmes» et comment l'intégrer dans le développement et ses relations par rapport à la notion de parité; d'explorer les facteurs habilitant les femmes jordaniennes; de proposer d'autres facteurs ayant plus d'influence sur l'habilitation des femmes et la participation de la population active. Cet article montre certains résultats pouvant habilitier les femmes jordaniennes tels que: le pouvoir politique est le principal contributeur à l'avancement des femmes dans la société jordannienne; il faut faire évoluer certaines normes culturelles et interprétations religieuses qui aggravent l'inégalité de genre.

Mots clés: Femmes; Participation; PME; Habilitation; Inégalité

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INTRODUCTION

A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the issue of women empowerment, with a focus on identifying and restoring power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all.

The term "Gender equality" refers to a society where men and women have the same rights, obligations, and opportunities, in all aspects of life¹. Hence, gender equality exists when men and women are able to equally share the distribution of power and influence; equal opportunities for financial independence through work;

¹ United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues.

enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions.

Jordanian women accomplished ahead start toward public participation in various development aspects, but their share still behind the targeted objectives. Therefore, development policies and mechanisms of the Jordan national and local development plans tend to be more aggressive towards better enrolment of women in the labor force.

The paper at hand is to shed some light on the issues regarding the gender issue globally, the status of women in Jordan, challenges of women's empowerment and recent developments in the country, and finally identifies the main factors affecting women's participation in the labor market. In an attempt to address the position of women in development analysis and policy, the research will stand back from much of the literature to look more closely at gender relations from an historical perspective.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The paper's main focus is to explore the factors that hinder women's participation in the private sector in Jordan. Therefore, this paper tries to assess the basic factors that hinder women's empowerment and the role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Jordan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a desk review of primary and secondary sources and on the conducting assessment interviews with various stakeholders. The findings of both the review and the interviews are embedded in the paper frameworks.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. The paper tries to achieve the following objectives;
2. Explore the meaning of 'Women empowerment' concept and how to integrate her in development; and its relation to Gender concept.
3. Explore the factors empower the Jordanian women.
4. Suggest more factors that have better influence on women empowerment and participation in labor force.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature covers many aspects of empowerment, with a specific focus on two issues of employment, as a mean to improve the women position in the labor market, and

the capacity of private sector to advance women careers within the society. In terms of employment, SMEs tend to employ more constituents of disadvantaged economic groups, including women and youth. The reason being is that these groups and the SMEs have a common feature that is weak market power, thus limiting the terms offered to such groups in the marketplace. Hence, when employed on fair and equal grounds, employment can have a substantial impact on household income, in order to meet education and health needs².

According to the National Foundation for Women Business Owners (NFWBO) in the United States, companies run by women provide a quarter of all private sector jobs. Furthermore, in Australia, the ratio is even higher at around 50%. A recent survey conducted by the United Nations (UN) on the role of women in development concluded that economic development is relatively correlated to the empowerment of women. In countries where women gained better positions in the economic activities, economic growth has grown steadily as well. On the contrary, countries that witnessed low levels of economic growth have seen decline in women's position in the society. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, female-owned companies in Tunisia are the most prominent, employing, on average, 19.3 employees per company. Tunisia is followed by the female-owned companies in the United Arab of Emirates and Bahrain, employing 13.9 and 13.3 workers on average, respectively. Female owned companies in Jordan contain, on average 6, staff members per company³. Women, empowered through jobs and business ownership, create a multiplier effect at both micro and macro levels, affecting the welfare of the family.

A regional study conducted by UNIDO on the effects of women employed in the manufacturing sector concluded that women in paid employment have an improved quality of life, educational levels and life expectancy, with a diminishing fertility rates. It also showed that paid employment opportunities enable women to fight poverty. Other studies have shown that women's ability to obtain resources, such as education, employment, finance, property, and technology, have a more significant impact on children welfare, as opposed to putting these resources in men's hands⁴.

Moreover, reports based on alternative research confirm that women's access to resources has a positive impact on the welfare of their children. Research has also shown that more women are driven by a sense of fulfillment and personal satisfaction, obtained from performing good work. There has been very low progress, regarding the levels of female representation at higher

² CPSD. March 2004. "Unleashing Entrepreneurship: Making Business Work for the Poor," Commission on the Private Sector and Development.

³ CAWTAR. 2009. "The Economic Impact of Women Owning Businesses in the United States," Center for Women's Business Research, Retrieved from www.womensbusinessresearchcenter.org on August 3, 2010.

⁴ Jordan Human Development Report 2011.

positions of economic power or in taking part in political affairs. However, women's entrepreneurial activities go beyond simply providing economic necessities; such activities have positive social externalities for women and the society.

On the participation front, young men in the MENA region show the lowest economic participation rates globally, measured at 50%, compared to 60% in South Asia, the next lower area. Young women in the MENA region also have the lowest participation rates globally, at 24% according to the 2003 figures⁵. SME development has been considered a primary tool for tackling low economic participation rates amongst a nation's youth, both as entrepreneurs, as well as employees.

Global Reality

The gender issue is not a zero-sum game implying men loss women win. It refers to both women and men status relative to each other. Gender equality refers to that stage of human social development at which "the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not be determined by the fact of being born male or female," or a stage where both men and women can realize their full potential.

The past three decades have witnessed a steadily increasing awareness of the need to empower women through increasing social, economic, and political equity, and broader access to fundamental human rights through improvements in education, basic health, and nutrition. Along with awareness of the subordinate status of women has come the concept of gender as an overarching socio-cultural variable, seen in relation to other factors, such as race, class, age and ethnicity⁶.

Acknowledging the importance of spreading gender equality around the world, in 1984 the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), established a separate fund within known the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Its main function was to ensure women's involvement with mainstream activities. The Platform of Action resulting from the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women, expanded this concept, calling it "gender mainstreaming" i.e. the application of gender perspectives to all legal and social norms and standards, to all policy development, research, planning, advocacy, development, implementation and monitoring, as a mandate for all member states⁷. That is to ensure that the gender factor is no longer to be only a supplement to development but central to the practice of development. As a result of the Beijing conference, more than 100 member countries announced new initiatives to improve

the status of women. In 2000, the follow-up Beijing +5 conference further strengthened the application of the mainstreaming concept, and used it to highlight the need for more progress in reaching equality worldwide.

Achieving gender equality, however, is a grindingly slow process, since it challenges one of the most deeply entrenched of all human attitudes. Despite the intense efforts of many agencies and organizations, and numerous inspiring successes, the picture is still disheartening, as it takes far more than changes in laws, or stated policy to change attitudes in homes, practices in communities, and in the decision-making environment. In many parts of the world, even in highly developed countries, violence against women is still a routine, forced marriage and bride-burning are still prevalent in the Asian sub-continent⁸. A pregnant woman in Africa is more likely to die of pregnancy complications than in Western Europe. These are some of the prevalent issues to be changed through changing concepts and believe, this is not an easy task to do.

Women, mostly in rural areas, represent more than two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults. In the United States, 90% of AIDS cases are for girls under 20 years of age. In many developed countries, where basic gender equality appears to have been achieved, the battlefield has shifted to removing the more intangible discrimination against working women. Women hold approximately 16% of elected parliamentary seats worldwide and even fewer percent when it comes to high ranking government positions, presidents, prim-ministers, or even executive government officers⁹. It is clear that achieving equality will not happen overnight, and that the world still has a long way to go to recognize equality, through global efforts on many fronts.

The work of the United Nations and other agencies in advancing gender equality has converged in three closely interconnected areas:

1. strengthening women's economic capacity, with a focus on new technologies and the new trade agenda;
2. promoting women's leadership and political participation;
3. Eliminating violence against women and supporting the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Recently, Women Leaders Program of the World Economic Forum has been supporting the advancement of women to leadership positions in society, and promoting other issues affecting women's lives. Moreover, the

⁵ Jordan Human Development Report 2011, pp.107.

⁶ World Economic Forum, "Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap" 2005, pp.1.

⁷ United Nations, 2001.

⁸ World Economic Forum, "Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap", 2005, pp.2.

⁹ World Economic Forum, "Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap", 2005, pp.5.

Forum's Global Competitiveness Reports have provided data on the qualitative aspects of women's participation in the workforce. The Forum explicitly incorporates in its measures of competitiveness aspects of gender equality, recognizing that the advancement of women is an important strategic issue. Countries which do not capitalize on the full potential of one half of their societies are misallocating their human resources and compromising their competitive potential¹⁰.

Despite worldwide evidence of the low levels of female participation in social, educational, economic and political ventures, there is still a tendency to see it as a real problem only in a limited number of countries. The reality is that no country in the world, regardless of its development level, has achieved true gender equality, as measured by comparable decision making power, equal opportunity for education and advancement, and equal participation and status in all vendors of human endeavor. Gender disparities exist, even in countries without glaring male-domination, and acknowledging these disparities is a necessary step towards implementing corrective actions and policies.

Women in Jordan

The relationship between Jordanian women and the formal labor force is a complex and historical issue. Contrary to many beliefs, during the early Islamic era, women were active participants in the economy. They worked, earned money, owned assets, and they administered and supervised resources. Their participation in the various economic activities was not seen as unusual or challenging to scholars of the time (El-Azhary Sonbol, 2003, p.54-71), and this continued all the way through till the modernity pursuit of state structure. The modernity strivings of Jordan afflicted women labor and made women neglected. Due to the creation of the division of formal and informal economic activities, women's participation in the economy became marginal. Traditional female occupations like taking care of agriculture and livestock did no longer count and were seen as part of the family activities, not as individual contributions from women to society (Hijab, 1996, p.41, 46).

Over the years, Jordan has been receiving external funds (from the West and Gulf countries) to help in sustaining its socio-economic needs. The "dependency" on external supporting incomes instead of domestic economy, has affected women role and women labor negatively. The state expenditures on military have been carried through at the expense of the female-dominated parts of private and public sector. This policy affected the private sector negatively which stalled the development of the active industrial sector. During the late 1970s,

because of male migration to the Gulf States, Jordan faced labor shortages. The government then advocated female entry into the labor force through raising awareness, and media campaigns. This interest later declined when the men returned from migration during the early 1990's, and suddenly female labor became undesired. The last twenty years, although the numbers of female students have increased substantially, the figures of female labor force participation have been quite stable and have remained at 11-15.6 % (Moghadam, 2006, p.241; DoS, 2008).

When analyzing the labor force participation of Middle Eastern women, it is common to indicate that cultural and religious factors affect women's role more than economic factors (Moghadam, 1995, p.7-8). Sociology professor Valentine M. Moghadam instead introduces an alternative approach where she makes three propositions:

- (i) there is variation in female employment and occupational patterns across countries in the Middle East; some of these patterns are consistent with global patterns of female employment,
- (ii) women's employment patterns are largely shaped by the political economy of the region, and women's industrial employment in particular has been constrained by overall limited industrialization,
- (iii) a useful framework for examining and explaining patterns of female employment rests on the concepts of gender, class, state policy, development strategy and the world-system.

In the case of Jordan, Moghadam argues that the construction of gender and the orientation of state managers may explain the female employment pattern. Moghadam's propositions are insufficient in explaining the situation of Jordanian women, since the political economy of the country is suitable for high female employment. Although Moghadam's focus on other approaches than culture and religion is understandable, it is crucial to take into account how the cultural norms of a country are constituted, what role have women played in Jordan's history, how do women function in the tribal system, how are women portrayed in school books, media and literature, how society perceive the concept of a working woman. The construction of gender is implied to serve as an explanation to the exceptionally low female labor force participation in Jordan. The construction of gender can be interpreted as a part of a country's culture since the role that is created for women reveal the national culture.

Maisa Sabh¹¹, argues against Mogdaham's second proposition and means, that industrialization and trade liberalization do not necessarily lead to increased female employment. Sabh referred to the ground reality that

¹⁰ World Economic Forum, "Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap", 2005, pp.2.

¹¹ Maisa Sabh, "Economic Reform Policies and their Effect on the Status of Women in Arab Countries", 2006. pp.137-138.

trade liberalization in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco did not lead to the increase of female employment, especially in the industrial sector, as this result depends on many factors, among them the dependency on the temporary and informal sector and the timing of trade liberalization measures with the privatization of labor intensive sectors such as textiles, clothing and food. The privatization of these traditionally female labor dominated sectors resulted in many women losing their jobs. According to Sabh, the structural adjustment programs that Jordan went through during the 1980s are another reason for the low female participation in the economy. These programs, imposed by the World Bank and IMF, affected the female employment levels in the public sector negatively. Also a point worth mentioning is that unlike Moghadam, Sabh utilizes culture as one of the explanations to the low female labor participation, claiming that society and its cultural norms constrain women in their pursuit to participate in the economy (Sabh, 2006, p.137-138).

The most comprehensive explanation to the paradox of the gap between education and employment among women in Jordan is provided by Amira El- Azhary Sonbol, in her book *Women of Jordan* (2003), she presents explanations to the current status of Jordanian women. El-Azhary considers cultural and political factors as the main obstacles to why the employment rate among women in Jordan is so low. Conservative interpretations of Islam as well as tribalism shape and influence the Jordanian society to a large extent, standing in the way of female ambitions to engage her outside of her home. Furthermore, policy-makers and state managers lack a true will to pull through the necessary changes in the personal status law and state orientation, fearing to conflict with Islamists and scare away voters. El-Azhary focuses on three obstacles to the female participation in the Jordanian economy; the legal constraints, the stress on morality, and the notion of 'difference'.

El-Azhary points out that although the Jordanian constitution guarantees equal right to work regardless of gender differences. Women are marginalized and denied full legal competence. Also, anti-discrimination laws are lacking (El-Azhary, 2003, p.94, 220). The notion of difference provides a basis for discrimination as women seen as the weaker side and is therefore in need of protection. This way of thinking is externalized through the "special protection" laws which are aimed to lessen the work burden for women and keep them safe from high

risk jobs. Also many laws serve as double-edged swords, since in their aim of protecting women; they create employer preferences in favor of men. 'Special protection' laws also encourage women to retire early, which can be interpreted as the state not considering women's work as useful as men or as valuable to society (El-Azhary Sonbol, 2003, p.103-107).

Women and the Private Sector

In the private sector, the ratio of working women to men is approximately 1:6. One common reason is the higher costs associated with female employment, as a result of fringe benefits granted to females according to the Jordanian Labor Law signed in 1996.

Female employment in medium sized companies amounts to 37%, against the 29.3% of female employment found in SMEs¹². There are several reasons as to why medium sized firms employ a greater percentage of females than small businesses. Medium-sized companies have more complicated organizational structures, implying that they require such services as administrative support, in-house administrative assistants, and accounting departments, indicating that desk jobs are more satisfied by women compared to men.

Small and medium enterprises include over 90% of all enterprises in Jordan. However, female entrepreneurs make up 3.9% of Jordanian entrepreneurs. This is quite low by global standards that range from 25% to 33%, as it varies with the calculation method. This is further forced by the participation ratio which is 64.8% for males, and 14.9% for females¹³. Moreover, women account for around 20% of professional association members. Centered on typical female positions where teaching, nursing and pharmaceutical care account for the majority of the positions held by women.

Women have the potential to contribute significantly to economic activities globally. Moreover, women often play multiple roles, beyond earning income for the household, such as domestic services, community assistance and family caretakers¹⁴. Women in the MENA region face many challenges, which undermine their full participation in the community. In the MENA region, this is more prominent. The region is ranked according to a World Bank scale, along with South Asia, at the bottom of the Gender Equality Index¹⁵.

In terms of overall gender equality, the MENA region is the lowest in the world, achieving a 3.4 rating, while the highest group achieved a 4.9 rating¹⁶. This gender

¹² DOS. 2007. "Employment in Establishments," Department of Statistics.

¹³ MOPIC. 2010. "Keeping the Promise and Achieving Aspirations, Second National Millennium Development Goals Report, Jordan, 2010," Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, UN in Jordan.

¹⁴ Groot, T. 2001. "Women Entrepreneurship Development in Selected African Countries," Working Paper No. 7, UNIDO.

¹⁵ World Bank, 2001.

¹⁶ WEF. 2005. "Measuring Global Gender Gap" World Economic Forum.

¹⁷ "Gender and Development in The Middle East and North Africa," World Bank, 2004.

inequality has caused tangible economic retardation. If a greater percentage of women in the Arab World were employed in the national labor force, GDP per capita could have been 0.7% higher annually, achieving a growth rate of 2.6% instead of 1.9%¹⁷. Not only is gender equality a priority in terms of human development, it is also an economic necessity. The Department of Statistics in Jordan, places female participation rates at around 15% compared to 69% of men a considerably low figure given the MENA average of 28%, which also happens to be the lowest rate of any region in the world. A World Bank study clearly noted that compared to the region, given the rate of improvement in women's health and education, female employment rates should be higher in Jordan. Regarding political power, measured by the share of seats held by women in the parliament, Jordan is in line with the MENA region's average of 6%, but this is a weaker result than the 16% average found in similar developing nations.

Jordanian female employment accounted for (46.6%) in 2007 in the public sector. This concentration of females in the government is unlikely to lead to female empowerment, as few are able to reach higher ranking positions within the government. Males account for the bulk of public servants at top ranking levels, whereas the bulk of women are to be found in the middle levels. This indicates that when it comes to policies affecting the welfare of females, they have to rely on males!! which does not always lead to optimal outcomes. Note that men with monthly income levels that are below JD 100 amount to 5.4% of total male wage earners, compared to 10.2% for women. Within the range of 'Above JD 500,' the percentage of men is 8.1%, compared to 4.4% for women¹⁸. The gender gap according to the monthly income from work and gender for the year 2007 and for employed Jordanians aged 15 and above¹⁹.

According to the Segregation Index (Duncan Index), a method to calculate the share of female (or male) employees who would have to alter their places of work in order to balance the occupational distribution of the two groups, Jordan's Duncan Index for the whole economy is 0.44, much higher than the average for MENA (0.34). The Duncan Index is compiled for the various regions and countries. In order to promote gender empowerment, investment in training, as well as other policy measures, should be taken in order to increase the number of professions women could participate in²⁰.

A high percentage of economically inactive women is alarming when women would prefer to work, but are compelled to stay at home²¹. This horizontal segregation is prominent among females; in 2009, health and education, together, employed almost 53% of all employed Jordanian females²². However, in education alone, there were 89,512 teachers in the 2007/2008 school year in Jordan, of whom 57,793 (or 64.6%) were women. While the public sector represents the main employer of females, its ability to absorb the continuous flow of employees is declining. In 2008, according to the a Department of Statistics²³, Jordan was able to create almost 64,000 new jobs out of which the public sector was able to absorb only 41.4%, with almost 82.5% being occupied by males. The number of applicants to the Civil Service Bureau increased from around 62,000 in 2005 to almost 203,000 in 2009, 26% of these applicants was male and 74% female²⁴.

These trends highlight two main issues, first; is that women are leaning towards a saturated public sector. Second; is that within the public sector they face a glass ceiling where males are in the top posts. Therefore, much remains to be corrected for by SMEs and the private sector in general, to fill this gap, especially if the trends in the public sector persist. Furthermore, reforms are most likely to decrease the size of the workforce in the public sector; it is not infeasible that the majority of those released will be women. SMEs are actually more gender neutral, due to the more equal male to female employment ratio. Specifically, medium-sized companies, employing 50-99 employees, have a greater tendency to hire female employees, as opposed to smaller companies.

Gender disparities in work positions are less apparent in SMEs the trend of employability of women has meant that more women are finding employment in low level, low salary, and low average female employee in Jordan will have approximately 12 years of education, as opposed to the 9 years of education a male will have in similar employment²⁵. Within SMEs, at the management level, women are poorly represented. Only 18% of management positions in the Jordanian private sector as a whole are held by women. This reveals that the greatest levels of discrimination exist in primary industries and services. SMEs have shed a slightly different light on this, tending to promote women to higher positions more easily. Looking at the positions of women within SMEs in Jordan from the results of the Report SME Survey, one finds

¹⁸ World Bank. 2005. "The Economic Advancement of Women in Jordan: A Country Gender Assessment", Social and Economic Development Group

¹⁹ DOS. 2008. "Women and Men in Jordan in Figures," Department of Statistics

²⁰ World Bank. 2005. "The Economic Advancement of Women in Jordan: A Country Gender Assessment", Social and Economic Development Group.

²¹ USAID. January 2007. "Jordan Gender Assessment"

²² DOS. 2004. "DOS Population and Housing Census, 2004"

²³ DOS. 2008. "Employment Survey, 2008"

²⁴ Civil Service Bureau. 2005-2009. "Number of job application, those who were appointed, and those who refrained distributed according to governorate and gender"

²⁵ USAID. January 2007. "Jordan Gender Assessment"

a relatively even distribution in terms of management, although a slightly higher percentage of males (at 15%) are in management positions, compared to females (at 13%). This is less true, regarding the overall economy.

Breaching the Gap

Based on the findings of UNIFEM, five important dimensions of female empowerment that need to be tackled to improve gender inequality. These factors can be summarized in the following sense:

Economic participation of women, this refers to women presence in the workforce as a quantitative measure, this is important not only for lowering the disproportionate levels of poverty among women, but also as a mandatory step toward raising household income and encouraging economic development in countries as a whole.

Economic opportunity, this is a follow-up step, as it focuses on the quality of women's economic involvement, and not only their mere presence in the workforce. This is a rather crucial problem in developed countries, where women may acquire employment with relative ease, but where their employment is either in poorly paid or unskilled jobs characterized by the absence of career advancement. This is most commonly the result of negative and obstructive attitudes, and of legal and social systems that use maternity benefits to penalize women economically for childbirth and child care responsibilities, and discourage men from sharing family responsibilities.

Political empowerment, it refers to the equal representation of men and women in the decision-making process hierarchy, both formal and informal, and their contribution in the formulation of policies affecting their societies. The Inter-Parliamentary Union; reports a world average of around 16% in combined houses of parliament. While regional statistics provide few surprises, ranging from the extremely low representation of women in the Arab States of (6.8%), to the Americas by 18.6%, and to 39.7% in the Nordic states²⁶. While women are poorly represented in the lower levels of government, they are rarely in the upper levels of decision-making. The absence of women from structures of governance inevitably means that national, regional and local allocation of resources are defined without meaningful input from women, whose life experience gives them a different awareness of the community's needs, concerns and interests from that of men.

Educational attainment is the most fundamental prerequisite for empowering women in all spheres of society, as without comparable quality of education and content, and relevant to existing knowledge and real needs, women are unable to access well-paid, formal sector jobs, advance within them, participate in, and be

represented in government, and gain political influence. The importance of literacy for women is by far the major issue, considering that women still constitute two-thirds of the world's illiterate population (Hill *et al.*, 1995; Klasen, 2002). Although the ECOSOC statistics show that girls actually outnumber boys in tertiary level education in a very few countries, especially the Middle East and former Soviet bloc countries, an evident gender gap in education tends to appear early in most of these countries, and grows more severe with each level of education. In addition, the number of women represented among tertiary level educators is lower than among primary level educators (Leach, 1998). Hence, schooling as a catalyst for change in gender relations will be more effective only if appropriate attention is also given to curriculum content and the retraining of those who deliver it.

Health and well-being is a concept related to the substantial differences between women and men in their access to sufficient nutrition, healthcare and reproductive facilities, and to issues of fundamental safety and integrity of person. According to the World Health Organization, over 1600 women die every day, from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth²⁷. The Planned Parenthood Federation of America quotes estimates that of the annual 46 million abortions worldwide, some 20 million are performed unsafely, resulting in the deaths of 80,000 women from complications, accounting for at least 13% of global maternal mortality, and causing a wide range of long term health problems.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve active role of women position, collective and collaborated efforts need to be pursued from all parties concerned with the issue. Cooperation and integration of the efforts of government, society, and private sector is a must to achieve the desired objectives.

There is a consensus among stakeholders that the political authority is the main contributor to the advancement of women role in the society in Jordan. But, change does not take place with political will alone; changing cultural norms and religious interpretations that aggravates gender inequalities is a must. Generally speaking, the key players know that the progress of gender equality is relatively advanced in Jordan, as evidenced by legal reforms, better women's access to decision-making and leadership positions, and increasing economic participation. Although, it is obvious nowadays that women have better access to health care facilities, and education, but revision of school curricula and textbooks are still required efforts to clarify gender stereotypes.

Followers of the gender equality matters can notice

²⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2004.

²⁷ World Health Organization/UNICEF, 1996.

the large gap between women in the capital city of Amman and other Jordanian governorates with respect to employment opportunities, and access to training and rehabilitation that contribute to the implementation of women's social and economic rights. Despite the fact that legal reforms have taken place in the form of Labor and Penal Codes, Law to protect from domestic violence, Personal Status Code, several conflicts remains evident. To strengthen and raise awareness on international standards of women's rights, follow up measures should be strengthened in the form of speeding the process of implementing the policies and recommendations of the national strategy for Jordanian women and the initiatives that have been suggested by line ministries.

The Jordanian National Council for Women must take the role of a lead player in the reform process and actively open up legal debates concerning raising awareness of women's rights. Although, the government is currently pursuing a special initiative concerning the allocation of gender-sensitive budget that required setting up gender units in several Ministries, but shortage of resources and capacities hinder the effect of these initiatives. Further, the development of partnerships with civil society organizations that is able to supplement decision makers with measures that advance women's status would be fruitful in supporting the implementation of international commitments.

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