

October 2012

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### Recommended Citation

Al Maaitah, Rowaida; Oweis, Arwa; Olimat, Hmoud; Altarawneh, Ikhlas; and Al Maaitah, Hadeel (2012). Barriers Hindering Jordanian Women's Advancement to Higher Political and Leadership Positions. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 13(5), 101-122.  
Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol13/iss5/10>

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## Barriers Hindering Jordanian Women's Advancement to Higher Political and Leadership Positions

By Rowaida Al Maaitah<sup>1</sup>, Arwa Oweis, Hmoud Olimat, Ikhlas Altarawneh,  
Hadeel Al Maaitah

### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purposes of this study were to identify barriers hindering Jordanian women's advancement to higher political and leadership positions and to identify main actions/strategies to facilitate Jordanian women's advancement to higher political and leadership positions. **Methodology:** A cross sectional survey was used where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected utilizing a self-administered questionnaire. A convenience sample of 500 Jordanian women was selected from women working in political and leadership positions in various settings including government, Non Government Organizations (NGOs), business, educational and academic institutions. The Study involved a self administered questionnaire with closed and open ended questions that include the demographic and personal questions, barriers hindering Jordanian women's advancement to higher political and leadership positions and main actions/strategies to facilitate Jordanian women's advancement to higher political and leadership positions. **Findings:** In their endeavour toward advancement in leadership positions in work and community, women face major obstacles and impediments. These barriers encompass a wide range of obstacles, which include political and legal, personal, family, socio-cultural, and economic barriers. Discrimination against women was a cross cutting issue for all barriers. Political and Legal support, awareness raising and empowerment of women were main issues suggested by women leaders to enhance to higher political and leadership positions. Women should work hard to stick to the heart of the Awakening and fight rather than demand by the name of democracy for their rights in politics and the building of their nation. **Recommendations:** The study suggests establishment of solid gender-sensitive policies, empowerment of women by strengthening their leadership abilities and capabilities, awareness raising of society about women role in development and involvement of women in the making of democracy and political reform to play an active role in all higher national committees and task groups of political reform

*Key words:* Arab Spring, Barriers to women advancement, Barriers to women advancement, Democracy, Jordanian women

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\*The Study was supported by The National Scientific Research Fund, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research- Jordan

## Background

During the last twenty years more efforts have been exerted to improve women status in the world. The women journey to attain their rights is *replete* with different waves of struggles, progress and drawbacks all around the world. In the past, women struggled to (gain) their right to vote and now women in many countries struggle to guarantee their seats in parliaments and governments. Efforts at the international and national levels are concentrated on introducing quotas to increase women representation at the higher decision making level with more focus on the numbers of women elected representatives. In its Article 3, The United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights emphasizes the importance of equal right for men and women on all civil and political rights (United Nations, 1966).

The world realizes that there is no democracy without women as there is no democracy with a paralyzed half of the world population. Moreover, there is no social and economic development and no prosperity without democracy. Many researchers found a positive relationship between socio-economic development and political democracy (Diamond, 1992; Huntington, 1991; Inglehart, 1997; Muller & Seligson, 1994).

Debate on democracy definition and scope has been active especially with the expansion of the concept of democracy over time to include the number of people rather than the type of people as well as human rights. However, with all the expansion in the definition in Democracy, competition, participation, and civil liberties are still considered as at least three main components of democracy (Paxton, 2000). According to (Karl & Schmitter, 1991), inclusion “all native-born adults” has been emphasized as a criterion for democracy by many authors (Karl & Schmitter, 1991). Similarly both (Muller, 1988) and (Huntington, 1991) emphasized the importance of the inclusion of all adults in their definition of democracy. According to (Muller, 1988) definition of democracy means: “the egalitarian political institutions of modern democracy provide *all citizens* with both the opportunity to participate in the governing process, as manifested by *universal adult suffrage* and free and fair elections, and the opportunity to contest governmental decisions, as manifested by rights of freedom of expression and association.” (Muller, 1988). Huntington (1991) also defines a government as “democratic to the extent that its most powerful collective decision-makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which *virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote*” (Huntington, 1991).

Therefore, as we talk about all adult population, women who represent more than fifty percent of the world population should have a strong stake in democracy. However, discrimination against women hinders women advancement and development in the world. Women’s representation in politics and decision making has been received much attention over the last decades and it is still an issue at the global level. The (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2012a) recognized that in spite of the world efforts, political life and parliaments are still dominated by men. Therefore, the discrimination against women remained a real struggle for women in many countries as it is evident in their absence in decision and policy making in government.

The main alarming bell of the ongoing global discrimination against women was initiated by the United Nations in its First World Conference on Women which was held in Mexico City in 1975. Achievements of countries on women status and development were evaluated in 1985 during the World Conference by the United Nations on Women: Equality,

Development and Peace in Nairobi to further promote gender equality in all areas of political life. Ten years later this was consolidated in the Beijing Plan of Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 as well as the declaration of the Millennium development goals in 2000 by the United Nations. The Beijing conference in 1995 declared that all governments develop their own strategies to promote the equal participation of women in development of their countries. Moreover, countries were called upon to create special mechanisms to monitor and follow up on women advancement and development (Al Maaitah, et al. 2011; Katbi, 2010).

Women only become a strong and an effective voice as legislators when they amount to a critical mass with sufficient numbers in parliaments. Therefore, the UN Fourth World Conference on Women which was held in Beijing in 1995 adopted a crucial target for all countries which indicates that women should occupy 30 percent of parliamentary seats. Many countries of the world failed to achieve the target; even today women represent only 19.6% of all legislators in the world's parliaments. The only countries that exceeded the Beijing, 1995 benchmarks are the Nordic countries which reach up to 42% in the lower house of parliament (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2012b). Unfortunately, the Arab World reported the least participation in the world as it amounts to 10.6% (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2012b). Declaration of the Arab Summit that was held in Tunis in May 2004 (Al Maaitah, 2004; UNIFEM, 2004).

The Arab Human Development Report in 2002 reported the lack of women empowerment as a main factor of the Arab world's backwardness. It stated that "The utilization of Arab women's capabilities through political and economic participation remains the lowest in the world in quantitative terms, as evidenced by the very low share of women in parliaments, cabinets, and the work force, and in the trend toward the feminization of unemployment" (United Nations Development Program, 2002). In addition the report noted a warning regarding the fact that societies as a whole suffer as a product of disabling and ignoring a huge proportion of its productive potential who are women in this case.

A global survey on women parliamentarians across the world was conducted to elicit women in parliament views and experiences of their work in parliament. The study revealed many challenges facing women including personal, family and professional, political and cultural challenges (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2000). Another global survey was conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union on Participation of Women in Political Life in 1999 (Inter Parliamentary Union, 1999a). The survey of the Inter-Parliamentary Union concluded that the barriers to access to women political participation are general and universal. Main barriers include: prejudices and stereotypes, the complications of everyday life, lack of time and family responsibilities, lack of motivation and the bad image of politics, lack of resources, lack of self-confidence, obstacles within parties, lack of solidarity among women, lack of training, lack of money and insufficient media support.

Similarly, in her paper on Women's Political Participation and Strategies for Greater Equality (Kim, 2006) indicated that Women face tremendous challenges in their attempt to become legislators which include dearth of women who wish to take part in politics, patriarchal culture, religion, unfair party nomination process, lack of experienced women, election system (Kim, 2006). The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in 2011, also reported that they were different factors holding women political participation in the Americas such as: discriminatory gender stereotypes of women, cultural practices, absence of special temporary measures or the limited scope of quota law implementation (Inter American commission on human rights, 2011).

Similar challenges facing Arab women development which include: cultural factors, the stereotyped image of women, women's low self-confidence, lack of coordination among women's organizations, effectiveness/efficiency of women empowerment programs, shortcomings in the institutional and legal frameworks, practices of political parties and election process, scepticism about the Agenda for Women empowerment, the process of development of Women empowerment strategies (Katbi, 2010). (Sika, 2011) also indicated that Arab women suffer discriminatory social norms, laws, and practices.

Main reasons hindering Jordanian women participation in parliament over the period of 1989-2003 were identified by the United Nations Development Fund for Women study on Jordanian women participation in political life which assess the performance of women parliamentarians (United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2007). Reasons include: the new experience of democracy among women as it was the first real experience in 1989 for women to vote and stand for election, lack of quota, tribal bias to male domination, 'one person *one vote*' system in the electoral law, weakness of the political parties and Non Governmental Organizations, lack of confidence in women as politicians, culture and customs in Jordan, lack of resources especially financial resource and high economic dependency of women on men, lack of national and women awareness on the importance of women in development as well as lack of support among women for each other.

As for gender roles, a study on Determinant of Gender Roles among Jordanian Youth was conducted by (Salem Olimat & Hamdan Al-Louzi, 2010) to investigate young schools and university students' attitudes toward women's roles as they agreed on equal opportunity in education and disagreed on equal opportunity in employment and they showed negative attitudes concerning women leadership and managerial roles.

Discrimination against women was identified in public sector which was demonstrated by the exclusion of women from important posts and from participation in them ignoring them when making important decisions related to their work (Al Adayleh, 1998). Many scholars addressed the low chances of women to emerge as leaders and obtain higher leadership positions and women were often unfairly evaluated than their male counterparts (Carli, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Rudman & Glick, 2001) since leadership is viewed as mainly a man traits such as masculine, unfeminine as well as uncomfortable zone for women (Lips, 2001; Ridgeway, 2001; Schein, 2001).

A number of obstacles hindering women enhancement to higher leadership positions, the most significant of these obstacles were the negative official attitude towards leadership of women, the social norms and stereotype, sex discrimination against women for promotion to higher positions, as well as personal women's circumstances such as families' relations and husband lack of understanding of women roles and reluctance of employee to be headed by women (Azzam & Al- Shhabi, 2003; Shoqm, 1999). (Al Barak, 2005) studied the perspective of female employees on Effect of the social, organizational and personal obstacles on woman's holding leadership positions and found that there is a relationship between social, organizational and personal obstacles with the attainment of leadership positions by women. Interestingly, Jordanian women in (Al-Hmood, 1994) were more into democracy than men at organizations as they manage and were more peaceful and friendly with their subordinates. (Al-Hmood, 1994) study also showed that women were more patients, independent, committed and hard workers than men.

Although, Jordanian women have actively participated in women movement since 1945 to realize women advancement, few women has made it to higher leadership and political positions. Few women in Jordan have actively occupied political and higher leadership positions. Jordan is a Middle East country with an area of 89,318 square kilometers and a population of 5,980,000 and women comprised about 48.5% of the

population and Jordan with a sex ratio of 106.4 (Department of Statistics, 2008, 2009, 2010). The adult male literacy rate was 3.7% as compared to 10.8% for females with an average of 7.2% at the country level. In 2009, the population growth rate was 2.2 and the average life expectancy at birth was 73 years (Department of Statistics, 2010).

Unemployment rate of Jordanian women aged +15 was 24.1% compared to 10.3% for men in 2009 and the refined activity rate for women in Jordan was 14.9% compared to 64.8% for men (Department of Statistics, 2010). Women comprised around 9.7% of the executive chamber, 11.7% of the upper house of parliament, 10.8% of the lower house of parliament, 24.8% of the local councils 17.7% of the diplomatic corps, 29.1% of the political parties, 26.2% of the voluntary associations, 22% in labour union, 33% of the professional unions, 22% in professional union boards, 8.5% chambers of industry and 1.3% chambers of commerce in 2012 (Department of Statistics, 2012; Inter Parliamentary Union, 2012a).

This study focuses on the participation component of democracy. Therefore, the purposes of this study is to identify barriers hindering Jordanian women's advancement to political and higher leadership positions as well as identify actions/strategies to facilitate Jordanian women's advancement to higher political and leadership positions. The study will set the stage to mobilize women and men from different sectors; government and private sectors in order to encourage a national dialogue on enhancing women leadership skills and improve strategies for women advancement to political and higher leadership positions, taking into account the unique context of our country. The findings of this study will also provide timely information for decision makers and legislators to inform their policies and legislation to enhance women's advancement in leadership positions.

**Therefore, the objectives of this study are:**

- To identify barriers hindering Jordanian women's advancement to higher political and leadership positions.
- To identify main actions/strategies to facilitate Jordanian women's advancement to higher political and leadership positions.

**Methodology**

*Design*

For the purpose of this study a cross sectional survey was used where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected utilizing a self-administered questionnaire.

**Sampling and Setting**

A convenience sample of 500 Jordanian women was selected from women working in political and leadership positions in various settings including government, Non Government Organizations (NGOs), business, educational and academic institutions.

**The research instruments**

The Study involved a self administered questionnaire with closed and open ended questions. The demographic and personal questions included data on age, marital status, and number of children, family size, residency, education, employment sector, and leadership positions.

Open ended questions covered barriers hindering Jordanian women's advancement to higher political and leadership positions and main actions/strategies to facilitate Jordanian women's advancement to higher political and leadership positions.

### **Data Collection and analysis**

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board IRB at the Hashemite University. Data was collected over a period of six months from January –June 2010. All approvals and permissions to distribute the questionnaires to collect data for the study were obtained from women and related institutions. Women who were approached and were asked to voluntarily participate in the study and those who consented were provided with full explanation about the nature and purposes of the study. Anonymity and confidentiality were also assured. For the purpose of this study, thematic content analysis was used. The initial findings were pooled by the researchers who collected and analyzed the data; common ideas, phrases, or occurrences that appeared important to the participants were identified to validate the consistency and frequency of themes across all responses (Flick, 2009; Overcash, 2003). All responses were categorized under main themes for the barriers and actions/strategies to advance women into higher political and leadership positions. The barriers were categorized under the following main themes: political and legal, discrimination and economic, and family, socio-cultural and stereotype. Whereas the actions/strategies were categorized under the political and legal support, awareness raising, and empowerment themes.

## **RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

This section represents the study quantitative and qualitative findings gathered through the self-administrated questionnaire. Specifically it presents a description of the major characteristics of the study sample. Also this section provides description of the barriers to women advancement to higher political and leadership positions and actions/strategies to enhance women advancement to higher political and leadership positions.

### **Demographic and characteristics of the study participants**

The average age for the participants was 41.3 years old. Further analysis showed that large percentages of participants are in the age groups 31-40 and 41-50 (36.4%, 38% of the participants respectively). More than two-thirds of the study participants were married (67.2%), while around one-fourth of them were single (24.0%). Data shows that women leaders in this sample have smaller family size (3.5 persons on average), which is below the national average (5.1) according to latest department of Jordanian statistics.

More than half (54.4%) of the participants hold a bachelor degree or a diploma, while 28.8% hold a Master degree or above and 90.4% of the study participants live in urban areas of Jordan. The average general work experiences for study participants was 9.56 years. As for the administrative level of participants, more than half of the study participants (52.6%) hold intermediate leadership positions, while around one-fourth (25.8%) of them hold higher leadership (management) positions, and around one-fifth hold lower level management positions (18.8%). These important findings indicate that most of women participated in the study were in their middle management level rather than in top management level.

## **Barriers hindering Jordanian women's advancement to higher political and leadership positions.**

Participants in this study were asked to identify the main barriers that impede their career and leadership advancement. All participants responded to the related set of questions. Responses were subdivided into the following themes: political and legal, discrimination and economic, and family, socio-cultural and stereotype.

### **1- Political and Legal Barriers**

- **Discriminatory policy against women**

Interestingly more than half of responses were found on the area of political and governmental induced difficulties. Their views on this issue are grouped as follows:

- Discrimination against women in assuming political and higher leadership positions. Remarkable number of the surveyed participants indicated the existence of favouritism and bias against women when selecting for higher positions as the main political difficulties facing women advancement to higher leadership positions. Some outstanding responses were
    - *"it is important for woman to have some relations with people in higher positions in order for her to get higher position".*
    - *"They support the same names and faces they know and they do not give the opportunity for other people".*
    - *"The same difficulties facing men advancement; nepotism and favouritism when selecting leaders"*
  - Inadequate public support for women advancement. The participants believed that government did support women but this support was still not sufficient. Other women indicated that government's support comes for pathetic reasons only while others viewed negatively the (quota) policies for women which was approved by the government for municipalities and parliament.
    - *"Government supports us but still not sufficient to ensure women advancement to top positions"*
    - *"Our government and its policies support women but not because of her intelligence but for pathetic sake".*
  - Parliamentary election problems. Women are not satisfied with the parliament election procedures and process which is in favour for male candidates. In addition the tribal bias to men in higher political positions and seats in parliament.
  - The emerging problems of political money in the last elations of parliament which also decreases the chances of women to compete
  - Unsystematic distributions of women empowerment initiatives. Women indicated that the empowerment activities in Jordan are mainly focused in the capital; Amman which provide women in the capital with more opportunities to advance in their careers than other women in the other governorates in Jordan.
  - The lack of media attention on women's contributions to sustainable development.
- **Laws and regulations' bias toward women:**
    - Existing gaps and discrepancies between legislation and its implementation. Women indicated that there is a gap between legislation and its implementation in Jordan. Moreover many indicated that the gap is affected

by social practices and culture which sometimes affect the legal system such as the issue of the age of marriage, problems of alimony and custody, inheritance bias for men, and violence against women.

- The limited quota for women in the parliament which is 12 seats out 120 seats.
- The existence of many laws and regulations that hinder women economic participation compared with men such as the social security law, personal status law, promotion and appointment, maternity leave and lower wages.

## **2- Discrimination and Economic Barriers**

- **Discrimination and lack of confidence on women as equal partners.**

**Details are as follow:**

- Discrimination against women in recruitment and appointment in higher positions in politics and other organizations and the biased preferences for male in higher positions.
- Ineffective employment practices accompanied with lack of solid promotion criteria that recognizes high professionals for higher political and leadership posts as well as lack of promotion opportunities for women.
- Lack of trust in women capabilities and abilities in managing hard tasks and assignments with the idea that women can only deal with soft issues only, therefore, main leadership and management positions are created for men only.

One woman said:

*"University presidents rarely believe in women capabilities as managers thus it is hardly to find women in leadership positions".*

- Male dominant culture when assigning for top level jobs as women are seen as a second class.
- Men disagreement with the idea of women assuming high political and leadership positions.
- Women difficulties to work and participate in teams, groups or committees because of a male dominated environment.
- The centralization problem in government and organizations and lack of tasks delegation, in addition to lack of proficiency in organizations as most decisions are based on top managers' personal preferences and favours.

- **Economic barriers.**

- Limited financial resources and support, especially to start own businesses and run for elections.
- High unemployment rate among women and high life expenses
- Working women obligations to financially support husbands and families in many cases on the other hand there is still high economic dependency of many women on men

### 3- Family, Socio-Cultural and Stereotypes Barriers:

This section reflects the family, social, and cultural practices of the Jordanian community as perceived by women respondents to this part which mainly include the following points:

- The glass ceiling and negative stereotype that prevent Jordanian women of progressing to higher political and leadership positions.
- Women's multiple roles responsibilities and obligations toward their families in addition to their work responsibilities and inability to balance between work and family responsibilities and lack of time management skills.
- Lack of family and tribal support and frustration of women caused by the dominating male family members therefore women shy away in taking important decisions in their personal life in addition to increased violence against women.
- Lack of confidence and trust by the society in women as politicians and leaders and overt bias of tribes to male candidates.
- Women stereotype as followers rather than politicians and leaders as a result of the lack of confidence and trust by the society in women as politicians and leaders as well as the overt bias of tribes to male candidates which reflects the social underestimation of women capabilities and their role in politics and development.
- Male guardianship over female members of the family. Male dominance culture and discrimination against women is a drawback in Jordan and the Arab world. One respondent said: "*Jordanian society is a male dominated culture which gives everything to men over women*".
- Negative social norms, traditions and customs regarding women work
- Female freedom and movement is still restricted for some women by the society and culture. Men have more freedom to socialize, stay late at night, and travel and work outside the country.
- Social stigma that working women are always careless about their families and house responsibilities.
- Society does not prefer innovative woman politician or leader, on the contrary women leaders are considered as "tomboys" like a man. One respondent said:  
  
*"Excellent woman is still struggling in the society which consider her as a low class"*
- Lack of confidence among women which decreases their ambition and competitive spirits. Two respondents said:  
*"There are no measures or initiatives to enhance women confidence".*  
*"Women who lack confidence are reluctant to be involved in any public activities"*
- Woman invisibility and continuous struggles to prove her abilities and herself as a true leader.
- The existing guilt feeling among women for leaving to work away from families and children responsibilities.

## **Main actions/strategies to facilitate Jordanian women's advancement to higher political and leadership positions.**

Respondents of this study recommended many actions and strategies to overcome the barriers of women's advancement to political and leadership positions. These strategies and actions were categorized in the following themes: political and legal support; Awareness raising and empowerment of women.

### **1- Political and Legal support**

Strategies and actions to overcome the legal barriers were concentrated on ratifying the laws and regulations to improve women status as follow:

- Laws and regulations adjustments to enhance women participation in politics and public life.
- Establish solid policies to prevent discrimination against women in the workplace and the society.
- Continuous revision and strengthening of strategic plans for women political development and empowerment.
- Ensure Justice, honesty and equal opportunities in promotion and appointment in higher political and leadership positions regardless of gender and personal preferences.
- Identify clear promotion criteria for higher political and leadership positions that consider efficiency, justice, capabilities and talent as essential issues for promotion.
- Respect and ensure women's rights
- Ensure equal opportunities for women in rights within family, society and work.
- Improve work regulations regarding leaves and vacations and increase the maternity leave for working women.

### **2- Awareness raising**

Awareness raising campaigns by the government were perceived as corrective strategies and actions to overcome the barriers of women's advancement in political and leadership positions as follow:

- Enhance women awareness of their rights and roles in the sustainable development of their country.
- Design awareness campaigns and programs for changing the society attitudes toward the importance and value of women role in political development in Jordan through media, workshops and education system.
- Enhance the role of media in raising awareness of the society as well as establish orientation programs for husbands, and parents about women roles in society development.
- Offer training programs and workshops to improve women leadership skills and improve the education curricula and media to foster new important roles for women in the building of their country.
- Media programs on women development and exposure of role models of successful women in different political and leadership positions.
- Involvement of women in political and development dialogues and higher national development committees as well as public workshops, lectures and conferences about the importance of women empowerment and development.

### 3- Empowerment of women

Empowerment of women was perceived as a corrective strategy and action to overcome the barriers of women's advancement in political and leadership positions as follow:

- Enhance women participation in political and higher leadership positions to support their roles as decision makers.
- Offer solid training programs for women on leadership and decision making skills.
- Increase the quota for women in political and leadership posts at all levels to support women's social economical and political development.
- Support women associations to enhance their role in women empowerment and development in all sectors.
- Develop policies and actions required to overcome the educational and self development barriers including building the capacity and capabilities of women through.
- Enhance a positive culture by improving the society attitudes toward women's role in sustainable development.
- Revise curricula in universities and schools to emphasize the importance of political and leadership roles for women for the development of their country.
- Enhance freedom and financial independence of women by increasing the micro finance projects for women
- Ensure decentralization in the organization and delegation of more authority and power for women in organizations.
- Provide family support to maintain a balance between work and house responsibilities as follows:
- Prevent family violence against women to enhance women's status and development

## DISCUSSION

In their endeavour toward advancement in leadership positions in work and community, women face major obstacles and impediments. These barriers encompass a wide range of obstacles, which include political and legal, personal, family, socio-cultural, and economic barriers. The findings are consistent with the conclusion of the (Inter Parliamentary Union, 1999a) that barriers to access to women political participation are general and universal. Unfortunately, the general scene for barriers to women participation in politics and higher position has been caged in a static zone over time. Jordanian women also locked up in same static zone of barriers and challenges where we cannot differentiate the old from the modern as it becomes a trend by now. The challenges and barriers of this study are similar to that found in the United Nations Development Fund for Women study which identified main reasons hindering Jordanian women participation in parliament over the period of 1989-2003 (United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2007). In addition, (Al Barak, 2005), (Azzam & Al- Shhabi, 2003), (Shoqm, 1999) and (Al Adayleh, 1998) noted similar findings. Therefore, there is not much improvements and progress for women empowerment and enhancement in political and higher level leadership over the last three decades. The achievement of women in Jordan so far is an outcome of the higher political well rather than contentedness of the elite group of politicians and the public.

Indicators of women political rights in Jordan revealed that women obtained their right to vote in 1974 and their right to stand for election in 1980. However, women participation in politics started in 1989 as first women was elected for the lower parliament. Share of women in parliament was increased to 10.80 % in the lower parliament and 11.70% in the upper parliament in 2012 (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2012a). However, Since 2003 Jordan has a constitutional women quota for lower parliament which increased from 6 seats in 2003 to 12 seats in 2007.

Political and legal barriers are also universal for the Arab world. Many Arab countries has joined the race to increase women representation in politics by adopting special measures and introducing quotas in parliaments, appointing women to upper parliament (e.g. Jordan and Egypt) as well as women ministers and high-level government positions such as ambassadors and secretary generals. However, the increased attention on women's representation in decision-making did not reflect in the immediate results in the Arab world which is evident in the strikingly low numbers of women in parliament which accounted for only 10.6% in 2012, a percentage that is lower than the world average in 1997 which accounted to 11.3% (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2012a). The progress of women participation in parliaments in the Arab world was slow as it increases less than two folds over the period of 1997-2012 as shown in Table (1).

**Table (1): World and Arab Region Averages of Women representation  
in Parliaments over the period of 1997-2012\***

Year	Single House or lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses combined	World Both Houses combined
2012	11.7%	6.4%	10.6%	19.6%
2010	12.5%	8.4%	11.7%	19.0%
2005	7.0%	5.9%	6.8%	16.2%
2000	3.8%	2.7%	3.6%	13.8%
1997	3.7%	1.1%	3.4%	11.3%

\*Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2012b <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif310312.htm>

Therefore, with all measures and strategies to improve women status in the Arab world, women participation in decision making is still a persistent problem. That means that there is disfiguration between the countries' efforts to enhance women status and real implantation on the ground which evident in the lack of women participation in public life. Such persistent problem is not working in a vacuum; it is an outcome of many personal, social, economic, political factors and mentality of people.

Despite considerable achievements that women in Jordan have which are mainly occurred in response to the higher political well, however, obstacles remain in the way of bringing more women into higher political and leadership positions. High percentage of the participants identified political barriers as the major impediment to their advancement. These include, bias and favouritism, lack of government support for women advancement, centralization of initiatives aimed at women political empowerment in the capitol city of Amman, and relatively depriving other areas from such opportunity.

One of the major issues of concern is that laws on books are different from laws on reality. Discrimination against women is not only prevalent in discriminatory laws, but also it is "absent or limited implementations mechanisms; insufficient dissemination of correct information on reformed legislation; resistance to giving women more rights; a judicial system subject to corruption; and arbitrary ruling by judges" (El Solh & Hijab, 2008; Sika, 2011). Thus, even in cases where discriminatory laws have been reduced, limited implantation mechanisms and discriminatory social norms and practices are extended to policy makers, which in many instances effectively impede reform from taking place (Sika, 2011). In addition to that women face unfair and in some cases discriminatory regulations that hinder their economic participation compared with men such as promotion and appointment to higher political and leadership positions. Full participation of women in politics and at all levels of the decision making cycle is a key factor for achieving international benchmarks including (R. Al Maaitah, 2004; Katbi, 2010; UNIFEM, 2004; United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2004, 2007). Similar findings on implements to women advancement in leadership and managerial positions were reported by regional and international studies (Inter-American commission on human rights, 2011; Inter Parliamentary Union, 1999a; M. Olimat, 2011; Sika, 2011).

Women also face several obstacles that impede their career advancement and political participation. The major barrier that women face is the lack of confidence and underestimation of women ability to assume leadership and top management positions. Prevalent political and corporate culture perceive women as incapable of assuming leadership positions especially in what so called hard tasks and assignments, with the view that women can only deal with soft issues only, therefore, main leadership and management positions are created for men only. These findings are supported by (Hmoud Olimat & Salah Al-Louzi, 2010) study who reported that youths refused to work in a job headed by a woman, or accept women assuming leadership roles.

The male dominant political and organizational cultures create more barriers for women. Therefore, women are not taken seriously when appointing top level political and leadership positions, or receiving the collegial support from their male colleagues. These stereotypical views deprive women from the opportunity to prove themselves and to assume political posts and advance at higher leadership levels, with their male colleagues viewing them as inferior counterparts.

The political and organizational barriers are even become worse when taken into consideration the lack of pronounced and approved criteria for recruitment and promotion, and the lack of sufficient training opportunities for women. Participants also complained of the centralization of power at the higher management and the lack of task delegation which deprive women from having the chance of experiencing leadership tasks and making crucial decisions.

Economic and financial constraints represent major obstacles before women advancement. Majority of respondents complained of the limitation of financial resources needed for them to advance in their abilities, education and training and even involvement in political life. Lack of financial resources impedes women entrepreneurs who want to establish income generation projects.

Social and cultural contexts also pose serious barriers to women advancement. The major hindrance is the multiple role women are expected to perform. Contrary to men, women have multiple roles and responsibilities and obligations toward their families in addition to their work responsibilities. They are responsible for caring for children, tutoring and educating them. Accordingly women experience role conflicts that create discomfort, mental dissonance and hindrances to their advancement in political and public life.

Economic constraints work in other ways, in some instances women are obliged to support their families financially, in other instances they are dependent on their male family members. In addition, working women have to pay for housekeepers and maids who will carry the burden of taking care of children and housework. It seems that if women work outside they are obliged to compensate for their absence from home, as if it their sole responsibility.

Considerable numbers of respondents complain of the lack or inadequate spouse's support, cooperation and understanding of working women needs and circumstances. As is culturally and socially known males in general do not share household chores and responsibilities (Salem Olimat & Hamdan Al-Louzi, 2010). Therefore, women will keep on carrying that burden in addition to their work. Besides, husbands and fathers still have much to say on issues regarding women work and personal life in general.

According to prevalent cultural practices female freedom is still restricted by family, society and culture. Men have more freedom to socialize, travel and work outside the country. In addition, women dedication to public life and work may be perceived as becoming on the expense of their household responsibilities. Consequently women creativity and innovation as politicians and leaders may not be appreciated and may be understood as "tomboys" like a man" (Khasawneh, 2009). Social and community barriers create negative stereotyping on abilities and capabilities of women in the mind of society members. Unfortunately, the stereotyping of women is a persistent problem not only among men but also among women themselves in some Arab Countries including Jordan.

Participants of the present study proposed a series of measures aiming at overcoming the myriad of barriers that impede their leadership advancement in political and leadership positions. An issue of utmost importance is the issue of laws and regulations concerning women roles. Although Jordan has achieved enormous progress in amending or initiating legislation to support women advancement and to remove bias and discrimination against women, there is still a long way to go (The Jordanian National Commission for Women,

2011). For example, there is a need to pass laws and regulations that widen women participation in politics and public life by increasing quotas for women, and to issue firm policies to prevent discrimination against women in the workplace and community in general. In fact we need to increase the quota for women at all levels including the executive branch and other leading positions to support women political development. The dire need for serious actions to combat discrimination against women is echoed by other researchers in the Arab World. For example (Sika, 2011) argues that public awareness campaigns, education reform and women empowerment projects need to take the problem of discrimination against women into consideration, for a broader implementation of development for all individuals within society.

Strategies for women advancement should be implemented and evaluated consistently. Strategies and plans should enhance women participation in politics and higher leadership jobs to support their roles as decision makers. Current strategies and plans are poorly implemented and monitored. The Arab women Organization (AWO) conducted surveys in 2005 in different Arab countries, including Jordan, with regards to projects directed to women empowerment and development (AbuZeid, 2008). In 2006, the AWO reported that all women projects and programs in the Arab region suffered from the absence of strategic vision, poor strategic planning, poor follow-up, poor monitoring and evaluation, poor coordination among stakeholders inadequate and imbalances in the implementation and funding at the level of governments and civil society institutions and the private sector (AbuZeid, 2008).

A new electoral law is under discussion right now. Some key members of the current lower parliament in Jordan declared that the quota for women is unacceptable as it defeat the equity concept. Such remarks have taken place in dialogues with youth and other political parties, if this is the case it means that we are creating more roadblocks to democracy and political reform by ignoring and paralyzing more than fifty percent of our population.

As mentioned before, women only become a strong and an effective voice in legislatures when they amount to a critical mass with sufficient numbers in parliaments and other key political positions. Main scholars and scientists such as (Karl & Schmitter, 1991), (Muller, 1988) and (Huntington, 1991) emphasized the importance of the inclusion of all adults as a criterion for democracy. In addition, Beijing conference in 1995 adopted a crucial target for all countries which indicate that women should occupy 30 percent of parliamentary seats and they encourage quotas to achieve the target. Therefore, people working against quotas in Jordan are watering the concept of democracy.

In addition to the United Nations concerns with regards to women participation in politics and decision making, (Inter Parliamentary Union, 1997) has been fully engaged in enhancing women representation in parliament as well as documenting the data and statistics on women in parliaments all over the world. The Inter-Parliamentary Union in September in 1997 adopted a very important initiative on the Universal Declaration on Democracy, which reaffirms democracy and gender equity in its item 4 in the first part on the Principles of Democracy which says: "*the achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences*" (Inter Parliamentary Union, 1997). This statement was based on the best famous Inter-Parliamentary Council statement on democracy and equity in April 1992 that states "*the concept of democracy will only assume true and dynamic significance when political policies and national legislation are decided upon jointly by men and women with equitable regard*

*for the interests and aptitudes of both halves of the population"* (Inter Parliamentary Union, 1999b). The Inter-Parliamentary Union stand on democracy and gender equity was the main inspiration for the development of the plan of action which was developed by the inter-parliamentary council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to correct present imbalances in the participation of men and women in political life and was adopted at the councils' 154th session that was held in Paris on 26 march in 1994 as a contribution to the fourth world conference on women held in Beijing in 1995 (Inter Parliamentary Union, 1994).

We all agree that quotas are temporary solutions to women representation in parliaments since the culture and people attitudes cannot be change with a policy or magic solutions. Stereotype of women will need time to change not only in Jordan but also in the Arab world since the negative stereotype is rooted in the Arab mentality. However, most of the world countries, including developed countries adopted quotas to increase women in politics.

In addition, participants stressed the need for improving work environment and conditions; ratify work regulations regarding promotion, payment, social security and increase the maternity leave for working women. The government should provide equal opportunities for women to assume leadership roles and opportunity for advancement on equal footing with male counterparts. This requires on the parts of government and women associations to offer educational and on-job training programs to equip women with the necessary knowledge and skills pertinent to their career advancement. Government and organizations should also stipulate and implement objective promotion criteria to upper political and leadership positions which ensure equal opportunities between men and women based on their capabilities and qualifications.

Perception and stereotyping of women (and others too) stem essentially from the prevailing culture. Culture refers to people's systems of thought, customs, traditions, attitudes and ways of conducting their daily life and interacting with their social and physical environment (H. Olimat, 2009). Within culture we find much of the misperceptions and conceptions on women leadership and roles in society and public life. Therefore much of the work is needed to change the prevailing negative attitudes and behaviours that hinder women advancement in politics and public life. Accordingly, awareness and education efforts should be organized and implemented to foster positive attitudes towards women role in politics, society development, leadership and governance. According to (R. Al Maaitah, Al Maaitah, Hadeel, Olimat, Hmoud, and Gharaeibeh, Muntaha, 2011)the government in Jordan, private sector, women's organizations and NGO's should react to address these gaps, improve measures, and confront cultural and legal constraints that impede women participation in politics and decision making.

Major responsibility for attitudinal change rests on the education system. Therefore public and university education curricula should be revised and refined to be supportive and to portray a positive image of women as a first class citizen capable of being major players in politics as well as their community and society at large. In this regard Media has a major role to play in presenting a proper picture of women politicians and leaders and contributors in their society.

Women' family members have a role to play in supporting women advancement in work and leadership positions. Male members should recognize the multiple roles that women have, and that these create struggle and conflict, and that they have to share some of those roles and carry their responsibilities.

### **The way foreword:**

The last two years have witnessed an "Arab Awakening" to defeat autocracy and slow movement to democracy. The Arab spring reflects a desire for dignity as well as democratic reform; however the region is still suffering from instability. Interestingly, the Arab spring in some Arab countries unveils many issues including the fact that democracy in the Arab world was not jeopardized by the exclusion of women in politics but also the exclusion of men who proved to have very little power as politicians and elected branches as well as governments to be truly engaged and fully participate in the ruling of their countries and to face the monopoly of power by the heads of states such as Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Tunisia. While the republics countries are the main cradle for revolution movements to overthrow its regimes, the monarchies have been more intelligent to surpass revolutionary actions by pursuing a number of positive concrete actions and strategies to realize political reforms.

Jordan has witnessed concrete steps in political reform to set a good political and democratization model in the region. Around one third of the Constitution was amended by a national task force group and approved by the parliament. The main highlights of the amendments enhance civil rights and freedoms and emphasize the separation of powers as well as widen representation and enable the formation and stronger role of political parties. In addition, new laws have been established and approved on political parties, new constitutional court and the independent elections commission. As mentioned before a new electoral is under discussion right now.

His Majesty King Abdallah the second noted in his remarks before the European Parliament in April , 2012 in France, that Jordan has taken the Arab spring as an opportunity to move the political reform forward by pushing all roadblocks hindering the reform in the past (His Majesty King Abdallah the second, 2012). National dialogues to build consensus on crucial political agenda and development is on the move right now. His Majesty said: "Only we, all Jordanians, can build Jordan's future. And we must do so in such a way that our country remains a secure, safe haven -- in spite of a region getting more turbulent around us; in spite of economic threats; in spite of neighbouring crises. This path demands consensus-based reform, based on structural, comprehensive change -- political, legal, economic, and social -- respecting the rights and freedoms of all our citizens. In the process, Jordan can set a regional model of peaceful political evolution and democratisation".

The question with regard to the Arab Awakening is what will happen next? The scene is still foggy in the Arab world, the concern is molding the achievements and impede future success by the absence of true democracy and well established political structure.

While women in the Arab countries such as Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria have played a positive role in the Arab Spring, the denouement of the Arab Spring toward women remains unclear. The Arab spring has opened a great opportunities for all people including the moderate Islamic parties as well as extremist Islamic parties. It is certain that the political map in the Arab world is undergoing a new structure and landscape of the region. Hopefully, the Arab Spring will lead to real democracy and greater stability that will ultimately improve people's life and choices to fulfil one's potentials including women.

We also hope that the Arab spring will sweep away all challenges hindering women enhancement in the Arab world to dramatically change the status quo of women. Therefore, women should work hard to stick to the heart of the Awakening and fight rather than demand

by the name of democracy for their rights in politics and the building of their nation. This time is the best for Arab women to unite and work together in the region to invest in this historical moment to win their battle for equity over the last decades by shaping an intelligent policy response with regards to women's political rights in the heart of democracy.

As for Jordanian women, they should realize that power comes from within. Therefore, women need to be the first fighters and advocate of their own affairs. Accordingly, women should instil the spirit and persistence in their well and to have the awareness and strong belief in their abilities and potentials. In order to achieve those personal qualities, there is a need to design education and awareness campaigns and programs aiming at changing women as well as society in general on the roles and potential of women and their long awaited contribution to their society.

Women organizations and associations can play major roles in enhancing women chances for active participation in politics and all aspects of their society. Interesting literature on the changing conception of leadership depicted an advantage edge for women to assume leadership positions. Both (Eagly & Carli, 2003) based on the cited literature argue that contemporary views of good leadership encourage teamwork and collaboration and emphasize the ability to empower and support each other.

Therefore, building the capacity and capabilities of women is the preconditions for advancement in politics and other leadership positions. More opportunities ought to be provided for women to participate in public and political meetings (dialogues, workshops, general meetings and conferences). Similar findings were also reported by (R. Al Maaitah, Al Maaitah, Hadeel, Olimat, Hmoud, and Gharaeibeh, Muntaha, 2011) where women emphasized the importance of building women capacities and capabilities through solid training and education programs to help women assuming high political and leadership positions to ensure gender equality and women advancement and development.

Let us be optimistic and take forward his Majesty's remarks by taking the Arab spring as an opportunity to help in moving the political reform forward by pushing away all roadblocks hindering women development in the past and create our solid chairs on the tables and corridors of politics.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish gender-sensitive policies at the national level as well as workplaces level and monitor and evaluate the implementation of these policies.
- Policies, laws and regulations should be revised and modified to reflect equal opportunity for both women and men on equal footings and to remove discriminatory legislations that impede women enjoyment of their equality and justice at levels and all sectors.
- Government strategies for economic, political and social development should enhance women participation in higher political leadership positions to enable women role in decision making.
- Strategies for women advancement should be implemented, monitored and evaluated consistently to ensure real progress on the ground.
- Increase the quota for women at all levels including parliament, executive and juristic branches as well as municipalities.
- Revise the process of election and election procedures and fight corruption and political money.
- Ensure that both men and women have the same rights and equal access to political and organisations' benefits and rewards regardless to their gender or marital status.
- Involve women in the making of democracy and political reform to play an active role in all higher national committees and task groups of political reform.
- Ensure gender equality and non-discrimination principles in recruitment, training and promotion for leadership positions in the public as well as the private sector.
- Ensure the decentralization of power and task delegation to allow more room for women to make decisions.
- Increase women's participation and exposure in political and public meetings (dialogues, workshops, general meetings and conferences) while avoid the centralization of women empowerment activities in the capital (Amman).
- Empowerment of women by increasing their economic independency which will help women to develop, grow and pursue their career.
- Establish media campaigns and awareness raising programs on women roles and development as politicians and leaders and increase of exposure of successful women as role models in different leadership positions.
- Provide special training programs on coaching and mentorship in leadership and how to create new learning opportunities for individuals with a supportive climate to grow and develop.
- Prepare children and youth as future leaders by improving the curricula and creating innovative teaching methods at schools and universities.

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