The Role of women's Participation in the field of Local Political Development

Field Study of a sample of political activists in the city of Mostaganem

دور مشاركة المرأة في مجال التنمية السياسية المحلية

-دراسة ميدانية لعينة من الناشطات السياسيات بمدينة مستغانم-

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Abstract:

Women have played a crucial role in the development field throughout contemporary history. It has become widely known that significant social changes cannot occur in any society without their active role. In the framework of understanding the close connection between the issue of women's liberation and the liberation of society as a whole, this paper aims to shed light on the efforts that empower women, particularly in the context of local political contribution. It also explores the obstacles that hinder their involvement and the impact of such obstacles on political development. The paper adopts a socio-political approach to highlight the real role of women in political development, utilizing qualitative methodology and interview techniques with a sample of activists. It focuses mainly on one specific case study, while other cases were selected based on snowball sampling.

Keywords: Political development, gender, political participation, The Role, women.

1. Introduction

It is widely known that all societies are governed by a given political authority, whether it be democratic, dictatorial, monarchical, or republican. It is necessary and obvious for each country to have a ruler. However, the importance lies in the ruler's participation in decision-making and the policies they adopt, often with the guidance of chosen chancellors.

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This implies that political participation, in its simplest sense, has existed since the emergence of governance. However, it varies from one stage to another and from one system to another. In the context of women's participation in politics, it was not desirable. Queens had the right to participate politically by advising their husbands and influencing certain decisions but in a discrete way, without drawing the ruler's attention to their intervention. Thus, it can be said that women were dependent and attributed to men, acting under their command. Men represented women's interests, and women held a lower status compared to men who had the final word, despite women's involvement in many political issues. This has been historically known in tales of governance and politics.

Over time, women's political participation has become one of the most significant phenomenon and current issues that began with the Mexico conference in 1975 and concluded with the Nairobi conference in 1985. And given the importance of the topic, this issue was reintroduced at the Beijing conference in 1995, in order to empower women in all fields, including the political one. The feminist movement with its various discourses and orientations also played a significant role in this regard prioritizing women's political participation as an entry to social change in their favor, by providing a number of mechanisms and means to support this participation (Harizi Zakaria, 2010, P. 05).

And with the emergence of development as a new term in developed countries, women have recognized their role in the field of development and that the problem of discrimination against them is an obstacle to their success and capabilities. This has led development experts to review development in its comprehensive sense and its close relationship with democracy and human rights. Although recent decades have witnessed significant progress in women's political participation, the number of women's organizations, associations, and movements has increased worldwide, and their influence has grown in local, national, and international policies. At the same time, a few women have succeeded in

assuming important political positions (The role of women in the decision-making process and assuming responsibilities https://bit.ly/2RU74Qs2017).

And despite all these outcomes, discrimination based on gender remains an obstacle that hinders women's official participation in decision-making processes and their control over material and political resources. Until now, women in any country around the world do not enjoy equality with men in political status or political influence. Even in the 21st century, most decisions affecting the fate of our planet are still made without the participation of half of its population, women. The exclusion of women from political participation has historical, economic, and legal roots compared to men. Women have a shorter history of participating in political elections, which has resulted in less experience in all areas of the political process (Mohammed Al-Fateh Abdulwahab Al-Otaibi, 2017,. http://www.m.ahewar.org/s.asp?aid=550827&r=0)

This paper aims to explore the reality of women's political participation and its role in the political development of the state and society. It seeks to answer the sociological question of the significance of Algerian women's participation in the political field and how it may contribute to the political and social development, as well as sustainable development fields. Can women's political empowerment achieve a higher level of political development? Accordingly, the study delved into exploring women's political rights, which reflect the reality of political participation and the various forms of women's political participation.

2. Study hypotheses

The study formulated the following hypotheses:

- Women's political participation plays a prominent role in enhancing the level of development in society.

- The higher the educational level of Algerian women and their involvement in the labor market, the greater their political participation and empowerment.

Despite the adoption of the 1976, 1989, and 1996 constitutions affirming women's political rights, numerous obstacles continue to hinder women's progress.

3. Study Methodology

The researcher adopted the case study methodology that involves an in-depth examination of a single case. Despite interviewing several activists in the political field who hold important positions in political institutions such as elected councils and political parties, as well as other activists and actors, our sample was a snowball sample, where they perform various tasks within these political bodies and civil society institutions in the Research Center of Mostaganem city. However, the researcher could only focus on a single case due to several obstacles and circumstances that hindered them from interviewing the participants more than once. Even though we could meet with 10 participants, but their time and schedule did not allow for multiple interviews except for one case, which dedicated all their time to the study and interviews. The researcher employed a qualitative and descriptive-analytical methodology to describe and explore the phenomenon through collecting accurate information. The techniques used included direct observation and semi-structured interviews.

4. Study concepts

4.1. Political development

Linguistically speaking, development means the increase of something from one position to another, for example, if we say the money grew, it means it increased and multiplied (The Concise Dictionary, 1993, P.66).

In terms of terminology, one of the most important definitions for this term can be stated as follows: "Development is the process of transitioning societies from a lower state

and level to a better state and level, and from a traditional pattern to another advanced pattern, both in terms of quantity and quality. It is an essential solution to meet national requirements in the fields of production and services (Maryam Ahmed Mustafa, Ehsan Hafzi. (n.d.).)

Development refers to achieving progress in a particular field through the intervention of parties and the use of tools to achieve advancement and improvement. It is essentially an interventionist process or a deliberate intervention by the state. It entails achieving rapid cumulative growth in services and brings about positive change aimed at transitioning society from one state to a better state (Ibid).

Lucien Paye defines political development as a set of policies characterized by industrial societies and focused on political modernization for the purpose of nation-building. It encompasses administrative and legal development. In order to achieve political development, it is necessary to mobilize and engage the masses in the political domain, as it involves democratic building for the development of political culture in society (Boumedienne Tachma, 2011, P. 34-40).

4.2. Political participation

Participation in a work means contributing in it implies actively engaging or having involvement in the matter at hand(Al Maany Dictionary https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar).

With regards to the terminological use of this concept, it is used to refer to the most significant issues that political societies focus on. It is a social political process through which individuals play a role in the political life of their society. It includes both direct and indirect activities such as holding a political position, party membership, running for elections, voting, participating in public discussions, and joining public demonstrations (Mohammed Al-Swaidi, 1990, P. 159). Some define it as a social behavior based on voluntary efforts and

administrative activities carried out by individuals in society to achieve legitimate goals. This voluntary behavior is acquired based on specific foundations, with varying degrees and forms of participation. Its dynamic nature is realized as a continuous social process (Saad Ibrahim Jumaa, 1984, P. 32).

4.3. The social gender

The term "gender" in English as a concept refer to the process of studying the interconnected relationships between men and women. This relationship determines and is governed by various social, political, environmental and cultural factos as they influence the value of work in reproductive and productive roles that both men and women perform together (Oumeima Abu Bakr, Sharif Shukri, 2020, P. 103).

5. The most important articles and conventions about women's participation in the political domain

5.1. Worldwide

In 1995, the United Nations held the most prominent conference that addressed the official reports on the status of women and exerted pressure on governments to address the obstacles facing women's participation and access to political, economic, and educational resources. This conference was called the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women and focused on establishing an economic and political system that would ensure greater participation of women in the political process and their involvement in global development (On Women's International Day. https://bit.ly/2RU74Qs) The international legitimacy of human rights, from its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, also includes the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which includes the right of women to participate in political life. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, through Article 21, affirms that everyone has the right to take part in the government of their country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. It also highlights that the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government and that this will should be expressed through

periodic and genuine elections conducted by universal and equal suffrage. Indeed, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in Article 25, states that every citizen, without any form of discrimination, has the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs, to vote, to be elected, and to have access, on general terms of equality, to public service positions in their country. This article emphasizes the principle of equal opportunity for citizens to engage in public life and hold public office without discrimination (Bouthaina Quraibaa, 2009, P. 46).

The CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) has also played an effective role in addressing gender equality issues in political life. Article 7 of the convention recognizes women's right to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy, to hold public office, to perform all public functions at all levels of government, and to participate in all non-governmental organizations and associations that are concerned with the public and political life of the country. The convention also emphasized that the realization of this right, as a human right, can only be achieved through reviewing and amending social traditions that perpetuate gender bias. Article 8 of the convention states that the States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that women, on an equal basis with men and without any discrimination, have the opportunity to represent their government at the international level and participate in the work of international organizations (Ibid).

In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action identified women's empowerment and decision-making as one of its critical areas of concern. It outlined the broad framework for practical measures that governments, the private sector, academic institutions, regional bodies, non-governmental organizations, and the United Nations system should undertake to enhance women's access to positions of power, decision-making, and their full participation in these structures. In 2006, the United Nations chose the theme of "Women in

Decision-Making: The Time is Now" to commemorate International Women's Day. This theme provided an opportunity to assess the extent to which women's voices are heard in boardrooms, parliaments, and courts.

On this occasion, the Secretary-General of the United Nations delivered a message emphasizing that the theme of International Women's Day, which is the role of women in decision-making, is fundamental for the advancement of women worldwide and for the progress of humanity as a whole, as stated in the Beijing Declaration. The international community believes that women, just like men, are profoundly affected by the challenges facing humanity in the twenty-first century, whether in terms of economic and social development or peace and security. In fact, women often bear the brunt of these challenges. Therefore, they must participate in decision-making processes in all fields with equal strength and representation.

The world is increasingly recognizing that there is no policy more effective in promoting development, health, and education than women's empowerment. Likewise, there is no policy more crucial in preventing conflicts or achieving reconciliation after conflicts than empowering women (The Bahrain News Agency , March 2006, www.bna.bh).

However, despite this leap in increasing women's participation in political parties and non-governmental organizations, they still represent a small percentage in the higher and leadership positions that influence the process of enacting laws and legislation in favor of women's rights and equality in society. A report submitted to the United Nations by the Committee on the Status of Women in 2005 showed that women's participation in high-level decision-making processes in the economic field remains low, even in advanced and prosperous countries, despite the progress made in women's education worldwide. According to a research conducted by the International Labour Organization between 2000 and 2002, the overall share of women in managerial positions ranged from only 20% to 40% in 48 out of 63 countries for which data was available. The report also revealed that while

women's participation in parliaments has reached its highest-ever rate at an average of 16.3% across all parliaments, this represents only a slight increase since 1975 when the participation rate was 10.9%. Although women's representation in parliaments remains low, especially in Arab countries (with an average of 8.2% women's participation in the region's parliaments), their participation has doubled in the past eight years. This has been significantly aided by the implementation of quotas in countries such as Djibouti, Jordan, Iraq, Morocco, and Tunisia. (Ibid)

Article 29 of the Algerian Constitution states that all citizens are equal before the law, and no one can invoke any form of discrimination based on birth, race, sex, opinion, or any other personal or social condition. Article 31 further reaffirmed the institutions' goal of ensuring equality among all people by reducing barriers to everyone's full involvement in social, political, economic, and cultural life. In addition, Article 51 states that all citizens are entitled to hold positions and jobs within the state on an equal basis, subject only to the limitations set down by law.

Algeria also granted women the right to vote in 1962, and the right to vote and run for office is guaranteed by Article 50 of the Constitution, which states that "every citizen who meets these legal conditions has the right to vote and be elected." Various election laws ensure equal and fair representation for women and men in elected councils, especially the Fundamental Law 17-91 dated October 14, 1991, amended and supplemented by Law 13-89 dated August 17, 1989, which includes the electoral law and abolishes proxy voting, a measure that allowed women to express their political choices freely. (Republic of Algeria, http://ministere-famille.gov.dz).

And despite the other rights and freedoms stipulated in Chapter Four of the First Section, the constitution was amended in November 2008 to expand women's participation in elected councils. Article 31 bis states that "the state works to promote women's political

rights by expanding their representation in elected councils." In accordance with the provisions of Article 31 bis of the Constitution, Fundamental Law No. 12-03 was issued on January 12, 2012, which specifies the methods for expanding women's representation in elected councils. This law stipulates the following: the number of women on each list of candidates, whether independent or presented by a party, should not be less than the specified percentages in the elections of the National People's Assembly: 20% when the number of seats is four, 30% when the number of seats is five or more, 35% when the number of seats is fourteen or more, 40% when the number of seats is thirty-two or more and 50% for seats representing the national community abroad. As for the specified percentages for women in the elections of the provincial councils according to this law: 30% when the number of seats is 35, 39, 43, or 47, and 35% when the number of seats is 51 to 55. (Republic of Algeria, http://ministere-famille.gov.dz)

As for percentages of women in people's municipal councils according to this law, it is set at 30% in the people's municipal councils located in district headquarters and in municipalities with a population exceeding 20,000 inhabitants. According to the same law, failure to comply with this requirement leads to the rejection of the entire list. On the other hand, the law states that a candidate or elected representative must be succeeded by a candidate or elected representative of the same gender. In an attempt by the authorities to encourage political parties to provide more opportunities for women, the state has promised special financial assistance to political parties based on the number of elected female candidates in municipal and provincial people's councils, as well as in parliament. (Algerian Republic, http://ministere-famille.gov.dz).

6. The sociopolitical reality of women's role

With the emergence of the feminist wave in the 19th century and the debates it raised on the level of critical thinking regarding issues concerning women in the public field by the male gender, this perception gradually began to change for the better, especially after a large

group of thinkers belonging to this movement put forth their ideas and feminist theories. In the beginning of their struggle for rights, many of these ideas focused on establishing the concept of gender equality on a global scale. Researcher "Mary Therese" argues that the calls for equality and justice among all humans in general, and between men and women in particular, have inculcated in intellectuals and rulers the desire to change the unjust conditions that women face, especially amidst the socio-economic and political movements that have affected the structure of contemporary societies, as well as the phenomenon of gender mixing resulting from migrations, in search of freedoms and a better standard of living. (Hamdad Sahbiya, 2015-2016, p. 52).

This has enabled women to demonstrate their ability to engage in various activities in social, cultural, and economic fields on a global scale. They have played a crucial role in advancing the state alongside men, and it has become clear that their participation in politics helps deepen their commitment to society and enhances their status. Internationally, several queens have emerged in Europe, such as Queen Isabella of Spain, Catherine the Great of Russia, Maria Theresa of Austria, Queen Elizabeth, and Queen Victoria. Additionally, Margaret Thatcher, known as the "Iron Lady," held the position of Prime Minister of the United Kingdom for eleven years. She played a significant role in successful governance and was an influential and effective factor in the country's domestic and foreign policies. In Asia, Indira Gandhi was known for her role as the former Prime Minister of India, while Benazir Bhutto served as the former Prime Minister of Pakistan and leader of the Pakistan People's Party. Khalida Zia, leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, also held a prominent position in Bangladesh. In the United States, Condoleezza Rice served as Secretary of State, playing a major political role during the Iraq War, followed by Hillary Clinton in the same position (Hussein Abdel Hamid Ahmed Rashwan, 2011, p. 143.).

In the Arab world, the Political Reform Document was issued in several forums with the support of Arab governments, particularly in terms of women's representation. Women have held various ministerial positions in many countries. Algeria was among the leading Arab countries in having a woman, Ms. Louisa Hanoune, as the head of a political party. Additionally, Ms. Fatima-Zohra Araroun was appointed as a Brigadier General in the Algerian army in 2009 by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

As for the United Nations, several women have held positions as directors of organizations such as the World Health Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, and as judges in the International Criminal Court for prosecuting war criminals. Women have also become Commissioners for Refugees and Commissioners for Human Rights.

It is noteworthy that Islam, despite more than 14 centuries having passed since the advent of the Islamic religion, there is still an ongoing debate about women's right to political participation. However, the reality shows the significant contribution of women during the time of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. They had active political participation in society, ranging from caring for the affairs of Muslims to consultation and even engaging in Jihad. This demonstrates that Islam does not prohibit women from political participation. They are empowered and entrusted with their humanity, not limited by their femininity. (Samia Badi, December 2015)

As for Algeria, when the revolution of November 1st, 1954 broke out, Algerian women were ready to participate alongside men in cities, villages, and rural areas. They engaged in activities such as medical treatment, sheltering, communication, transporting news and weapons, planting bombs, and carrying out acts of sacrifice. They achieved remarkable valor, and many heroines emerged, whose reputation spread worldwide, such as Djamila Bouhired and many others. It becomes clear here that women play an important role in the social and political fields, and society is always in great need of their participation in all fields, just like men.

7. Women and local political development

The interest in politics is considered the first step towards political participation and development. This is confirmed by interviewees that emphasized women's growing interest in politics. The case we interviewed is that of a member of a people's provincial council in the city of Mostaganem, who was a French language teacher and became a school principal before entering political participation and becoming a member of the people's provincial council. The interviewee stated that she had no prior involvement in politics, but her interest in this field began when she started to notice the marginalization experienced by women in society and the denial of their rights and participation in decision-making. She said: "My goal was to convey what the women of Mostaganem want to achieve in all fields. I wanted to represent them, to bring them to a better position, and contribute to improving development. I have a great interest in the political aspect, dedicating time to read and research politics, whether it's about current events, laws, or anything new."

We have observed with the interviewee that her engagement in the political field is primarily driven by her love for politics, despite not having studied this field. However, she had a strong determination to enter it in order to contribute to improving the situation of women in the province. Based on what was mentioned, it is confirmed that the interest of interviewees in this field, especially since following and discussing events are considered important manifestations or evidence of interest in politics. Previous studies they reviewed indicate that women's interest in the political field makes them fully prepared to engage in all the experiences related to it, in order to acquire political skills and demonstrate their abilities in this field. As Jizzo states in his book "Lessons in Public Law," politics is considered one of the branches of intellectual activity that has its own technical or specialized professionals, the politicians, who acquire this characteristic through their experience (Hamdad Sahbiya, p. 131).

The political activists we met believe that women are capable of holding high political positions and participating in decision-making. One of them stated, "I believe that women have been able to break into fields that were dominated by men, especially in the security and military sectors. Therefore, they are capable of engaging in politics and decision-making. The world has witnessed strong and well-known female figures, and if competent women are given the right to participate in decision-making, they will undoubtedly succeed."

This clearly demonstrates that women can succeed in the political field, just as they have succeeded before. History remembers them and they have achieved numerous successes for their societies. Some of them have been mentioned previously. However, based on the field study we conducted, the female interviewees who entered the world of politics encountered obstacles that hindered their work in this field. In the case we studied, most of the women who stopped their political work lost their courage and ability to work in this field due to the discouragement they faced from male figures in their families, such as husbands, fathers, or brothers. They were told that men are more suited for politics, so how can a woman like you succeed in it? They also believed that women who enter the political world, such as political parties, are masculinized, meaning they resemble men. Political work requires constant dedication, attending meetings, and interacting with men and various segments of society day and night. However, despite these challenges, women have managed to bring many societal issues to the attention of higher authorities through their struggle and continuous defiance of traditions and ongoing rejection. This is what the female interviewees, especially the case we studied, emphasized. Although she faced rejection from her family, after her marriage, she found support in the political field from her husband, who understood her message and helped her in advocating for women like her, conveying their voices, and defending their rights.

After analyzing these obtained data, we found that women in the political field face difficulties when entering this field. Therefore, they will live in a significant challenge for

themselves and society, and they will do their best to fulfill balance between the domestic and political fields. In this regard, according to statements from some female political activists, despite the general orientation of the Algerian state aiming to develop the political life after the transitional phase towards political reform and enhancing political development, and activating the role of women based on the political will of the state, their role remains marginal in the face of men's monopoly over the essential roles in politics.

8. Results and Discussions

According to the hypotheses we have proposed in this research and the data obtained, this research confirms that women's contribution to the country's development can be achieved through their roles both in their homes as mothers, as they contribute to building generations and families that society needs. Alternatively, women can contribute outside the home in various other fields they have been able to enter and practice, such as politics, through which they can participate in shaping opinions for the sake of serving the nation and the public interest, as well as representing women.

As for the second hypothesis, the higher the educational level of Algerian women and their commitment in the labor market, the greater their political participation and empowerment. It seems that through the field study, a higher level of education and women's entry into the workforce opens up opportunities in various fields. However, it is not sufficient on its own. Women may have a high level of education but lack the desire to engage in politics, meaning they may not have the political will. This is what we found through the case study we conducted. The woman in question had reached a respectable level of education but was not involved in politics. However, this did not prevent her from engaging in politics, as it was due to her strong will or desire to empower women in the state where she lives. This indicates that political desire and will play a significant role in women's engagement in politics.

We conclude that humans, in general, are the fundamental element of development, not only as beneficiaries but also as creators of it. This requires positive participation from all members of society, including women. This participation is closely linked to their economic and social status, as well as cultural constraints and other factors that hinder their involvement. It has become evident that sustainable development cannot be achieved without the participation of women at various levels, whether social, political, or economic, as they are important social actors.

Therefore, women's political participation means enhancing their role within the political system by ensuring their contribution to the process of policy-making and political decision-making, or influencing them. It means women's direct or indirect involvement in the decision-making process and the management of public affairs. Women's political participation is a clear indicator of the maturity of societies and a prominent indicator of the success of sustainable development programs. The involvement of women in the political development process and the improvement of their status are crucial elements in any strategy that seeks to promote democracy and inclusive participation for all.

Indeed, empowering women politically through parliamentary representation in legislative bodies significantly contributes to improving the image of the state and its democratic experience. The value of this representation and its impact on the image of the state increases, especially if it pertains to third-world countries and Arab Muslim countries where their societies are often accused of being conservative and committed, with women not enjoying equal rights as men.

Furthermore, women's parliamentary and political representation contributes to gradually changing the perception of conservative societies regarding the role of women in public life. Women's participation in political life, particularly in parliament, is a necessary condition for them to fully exercise their citizenship. It allows them to directly engage with the public, the public opinion, and be aware of the importance of their role. This creates a

state of familiarity and acceptance of women's political participation. (Khodr Zakaria, 1999, p. 22)

9. Conclusion

The political role played by Algerian women is an undeniable fact; even for those who are conservative with regards to this issue or those who view that women's role is limited to household affairs. One can never deny the struggle of Algerian women throughout a century of colonialism, which has granted them significant political awareness and culture. This eventually led to the involvement of many Algerian women in the political field. Their affiliation with political parties and frameworks has greatly contributed to empowering women and strengthening their position, creating a generation of women who have successfully linked national, political, and social aspects.

However, some women believe that political parties have not done enough to address the reasons for the low political participation of Algerian women. Others argue that despite women's participation in the political field, it remains insufficient. Our field study has shown that few women are convinced of their ability to enter the political sphere in its various fields, as they prefer to leave this domain to men, with the belief that it does not suit them. Another reason is the societal conservation towards women's involvement in politics due to prevailing customs and traditions. All these factors have contributed to marginalizing women's role and reinforcing the authority of the family over women.

The cultural heritage also plays a crucial role, as well as the prevailing social system that views women as second-class citizens, with their role limited to reproductive tasks and household chores. The world of politics and occupying leadership positions is reserved for men. Even when we see a female minister or a female general director, they are often appointed to these positions for esthetic reasons related to the state's image in the democratic world or to secure funding from countries advocating for change and equality. As

a result, these experiences do not accumulate credibility or establish a consistent approach in society, and they end when the circumstances that produced them come to an end.

Women, just like men, contribute to general development and particularly to political development through proposing solutions, making decisions, and participating in nation-building. They are partners in life, so how can they not be partners in the political field? Algerian women, despite lack political will, with their respectable level of education and culture, they still participate significantly in political life, whether through voting in elections, running for parliamentary or municipal councils, or striving for public positions. They play an active role and hold an important position on the political map and in comprehensive decision-making for nation-building.

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