
Women's Political Empowerment: a Theoretical Study of Impediments and Avenues for Progress.



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Abstract:

This paper aims to shed light on the role of women in political development by discussing the obstacles to its being put into practice, and by analyzing and monitoring the determinants of the relationship between women's active participation in political life and its implications for women's development initiatives. This is the central question the study has attempted to answer. Based on the main premise that there is a relationship between women's political empowerment and development, the conclusion being that the study identifies the most important mechanisms and means to contribute to the promotion and development of women's role in political development.

Keywords: Political Empowerment; Women; Political Participation; Political Development.

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Introduction:

The attention given to this type of issue is perhaps due to the fact that women account for an important part of the development process. Because they represent half of society's productive capacity, a large number of experts and researchers have emphasized that investing in women's potential will be a political pillar in the construction of a strong, cohesive society. For this reason, governments around the world are striving to enact laws and develop policies aimed at advancing the status of women and elevating them in society, as well as discussing the most important challenges and issues facing them through the allocation of a ministerial portfolio. Perhaps the greatest challenge facing women today is their low profile in political decision-making and in political life in general. Women's participation in political life is intimately linked to the development process. Our paper, thus, examines the main obstacles to activating women's role in political life, as well as ways of strengthening and improving the status of women in politics. In this respect, the challenge of this paper lies in the following formulation:

What are the main obstacles to women's role in political life? How can they be overcome?

To address this issue, we have formulated the following main hypothesis:

There is an interactive link between women's political empowerment and development.

As far as the program adopted is concerned, the descriptive analytical program, one of the most widely used in social studies, will be based on the analysis and discussion of the interrelationship between women's political empowerment and development.

From this perspective, in order to respond to this question and verify the validity of the hypothesis, this study has been divided into three policy areas:

First chapter: Analysis of the determinants of the relationship between women's political empowerment and development :

Inclusive development is a prerequisite for all contemporary societies, as a measure of their progress. It has therefore received particular attention in mobilizing society's human potential without discrimination between women and men. The attention and role of women in achieving inclusive development has become an essential part of the development process itself. The adage goes that woman make up half of society, and therefore half of its productive capacity, and they must contribute to the science of development on an equal footing with men. Moreover, the progress of any society is now closely linked to the advancement of women and their ability to participate in all aspects of development (Al-Arabi 2012, p. 2). This is the reason why one of the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 has explicitly identified the importance of women's development in

Goal III, which calls for "the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women" (Al Maaitah 2011, p08). (Al Maaitah 2011, p08) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was unanimously adopted in October 2000, urging each UN member to ensure the full participation of women at all levels of decision-making in all areas in general, in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in particular (Falch 2010, p1). However, a wide range of women activists consider that it is not enough to stipulate their rights in charters and laws, and ask many questions in this regard: (Bradshaw (2013, p2)

What are the most important strategies for investing in women? What are the current constraints to optimizing women's full potential in development processes? What are the priority areas for action to surmount these obstacles?

Women's participation in political life is considered an integral part of comprehensive development; so many experts consider that there is a significant impact of women's political participation on their other developmental roles, as evidenced by the following points: (Al-Azab 2012, pp. 85-92)

01- Self-development: It is a type of development that relates to the acquisition of knowledge and the development of personal skills and abilities, including educational development, and all skills and abilities acquired in various fields. Therefore, the existence of broad political participation available to women will result in successful female political models, which will be an encouraging incentive for women to develop themselves, their capabilities and talents, as it helps in creating appropriate climates for women's education and qualification.

02- Family development: This level of development is of paramount importance, as it is concerned with the development of the family and its members, which is the basis for building communities and nations, in which the role of women and men is equal and strongly shared, and therefore it is important that the first pioneer of development in the family, the mother, has skills, competence and knowledge, and this cannot be achieved unless there is a general atmosphere in countries and societies that allows women to obtain their educational and skill needs, and this is not possible unless there is a general atmosphere in countries and societies that allows women to obtain their access to their educational and professional needs, and this is what widens the culture of exclusion among men. Therefore, the political exclusion of women will produce a society devoid of any female leadership models that succeed in society, which expands the culture of exclusion among men, so they are reluctant to take the initiative to give their women wider participation spaces, while if society does not favor the political exclusion of women and shows successful female leaders and role models, this will undoubtedly affect the culture of men and make them convinced to give their women more participation spaces.

03 -Development of the surrounding local environment: As for the developmental tasks at this level, they are politically colored on a micro level, as awareness and guidance are not without expressing opinions, defending certain rights, objecting to negatives and practices that may be wrong, and calling for virtues and positive things in people's lives, which are simple forms of political practice in its major forms at the level of governments. Should women be removed from these tasks in this environment, an imbalance will occur and gaps will appear due to the absence of half of the components of the local community, and the provision of awareness services and management tasks will go to one party, namely men, and if initially it is not total, it will certainly reach that after the lapse of time, as well as with regard to leadership tasks in small local communities.

04 -Development of nations: At this level, there are many areas of development that concern women and men, including social, political, economic, cultural and other types of development. Women suffer from significant exclusion in multiple aspects of development, as most development tasks are carried out by men and women share a narrow space. This will gradually push towards expanding and strengthening cultures that prevent women from any participation outside the family. On the contrary, if women are present in decision-making positions and allowed to participate in leadership, administrative and service roles, successful symbols and samples will reflect a positive impression of society towards the role and ability of women.

The role of women politicians in development, who are important opposition figures, is a case in point; In South Africa, for example, women were among the leading anti-apartheid leaders during apartheid, and are helping to lead a new government-sponsored effort to develop a post-apartheid women's agenda. In Islamic Iran, women have played a prominent and decisive role in determining election results and reaching sensitive political positions, despite the traditional government labeling them as impotent. On the closely related economic front, the widespread adoption of market-oriented reforms, often accompanied by austerity policies, has motivated women to organize against rising prices and the loss of health care and other public services. Women have created community kitchens in Chile and Peru to help feed their community, along with other Geneva-wide self-help programs (Ghazi 2010, p. 178)

Based on the importance of women's participation in political life and its implications for their other developmental roles, a group of experts, activists and thinkers discussed in Addis Ababa the topic of women's empowerment and their role in political development, which was issued in the form of a report, and concluded that women must be guaranteed equal opportunities and full participation in the following: Power structures, political leadership, political representation, decision-making, political leadership, political accountability. (United Nations 2005, p6)

Through the foregoing, it can be concluded that there is a close relationship between the status of women in political life and the rest of their developmental roles, as women's participation in political decision-making will help establish a culture that encourages women to contribute to the management of public affairs and activate their role in all sectors, as a partner and guardian of democratic values, especially since providing opportunities for women has become one of the indicators of development and good governance today.

Second chapter: Impediments to activating the role of women in political life.

The participation of women in the political process in general and the democratic process in particular, has become an integral part of the contemporary discourse on development and governance. For this, many efforts have been made by official and unofficial international organizations to establish their right to political life and activate their developmental role in this field (O.Ogbogu 2012, p182). Nevertheless, many studies indicate that their role in political life has not reached the required level due to a number of obstacles that prevent this from being achieved, perhaps the most prominent of which are the following:

- 01- Weak party support for women:** The restriction of political parties on women and the marginalization of their role in political work will only lead to ineffective practice in the political process and lack of participation in political decision-making. Hence, the United Nations Association urged all countries to remove all obstacles to women's participation in political life, and the official spokesperson stated, "We strongly encourage political parties to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against women's participation in political life, develop their ability to analyze issues from a social perspective, and adopt policies to enhance women's ability to fully participate at all levels of decision-making within those political parties (Nichols 2015, p5)." (Nichols 2015, p5).
- 02- The gap between legal text and implementation in legislation related to women:** Despite what is stipulated in international conventions related to guaranteeing women's political rights, which is embodied in most of the countries' legislations, their representation at the governmental level has remained rather weak on the ground in many countries, especially those in the South (Ammar 2013, p. 89).
- 03- Depriving women of education:** There is a close relationship between women's education levels and their representation in political life, as depriving women of their right to education will reflect negatively on their developmental role in political life and their representation in political affairs, so in recent years, many countries have tended to rely on literacy programs to overcome this issue (Goetz 2003, p2)

- 04- Economic obstacles:** The economic aspect plays a role in the limited participation of women in the political process, as economic transformations in society affect women more than men, as women in underdeveloped societies do not enjoy economic independence, so poverty and preoccupation with the demands of daily life represent the most important economic obstacles that prevent women from participating in public work (Bebars (B,S,N), p. 24)
- 05- Political violence:** One of the reasons that contributed significantly to the low level of women's participation in political work, especially that under political violence, political activists are killed and threatened, whether this violence is official (by the state) or unofficial (by groups or individuals) (Abubakar 2014, p. 69).
- 06- Lack of clear mechanisms and programs:** Women's organizations and civil society organizations in general, in the midst of their preoccupation with putting the demand to improve the political status of women on their list of priorities, did not consider the absence of women's initiative for political participation due to their fear of exercising tasks related to the authorities because they do not know the mechanisms of these authorities, in addition to the inability of women to face the financial requirements to run for elections. Added to this is the weak participation of women in the legislative, judicial and executive authorities in the state (Al-Azzawi 2012, p. 22)
- 07- Cultural practice:** It is another factor against women's participation in political life, as many societies prevent or prohibit women's participation in political life for cultural, religious or traditional reasons (Abubakar 2014, p69)

It can be concluded that the role of women in political life is hindered by a set of constraints that prevent them from activating their role in political development, perhaps most notably the absence of clear mechanisms and programs that support women's political participation, the prevailing political culture in social and political circles that reject the idea of women holding public office, and political parties restricting women's political role, in addition to hurdles of an economic and social nature that limit the actual application of the legislative framework related to women's participation in political work.

Third chapter: Mechanisms for enhancing the role of women in political life

There are many mechanisms to activate the role of women in political development, including legal, political and social mechanisms:

01- Legal Mechanisms

Legislation must be prepared and enacted that deals with issues of positive discrimination for women, and that these legislations guarantee them a minimum level of representation in parliament [and elected councils in general], and that these legislations should not be temporary for a certain period of time, under the pretext of giving the opportunity to empower women and help them integrate into political life, and then after that they are like others, without guaranteeing minimum limits for their representation in elected councils, because women need to put legislative guarantees that help empower them and represent them in political life permanently, not because of their inability to compete with men, but due to the existence of wrong customs, traditions and inheritances that will not be easily eradicated in society (<https://cnn.it/47QHtvY>)

Among the most important legislations are those related to activating the role of women in political participation, which can be seen especially in the text of legislation that enshrines and increases the quota for women in elected councils, known as the women's quota system.

A quota is the allocation of a number of seats within parliamentary bodies, as in the case of the women's quota, to achieve the most appropriate representation of this group to express their interests and opinions within the parliamentary councils. The women's quota makes us discuss the following characteristics: (Bebars (BCN), pp. 26, 27)

- There is no discrimination in the quota system, as it limits women to the number of seats they would have occupied but for social barriers.
- Women, as citizens of the state, must have representation that is commensurate with their proportion in society.
- Political life is in need of feminist expertise that helps to develop society by raising the issues and needs of the half of society that is comprised of women.
- Women are just as qualified to hold leadership positions and seats in parliament as men, but their qualifications are reduced and diminished in a political life dominated by men who propagate the decline of women's abilities.

- Quotas do not diminish the rights of voters, as the choice of candidates is not a matter for voters, but for parties, backed by the popularity of voters for the candidate, which may be available to both men and women.

The quota system for women is not limited to elected councils, but also includes administrative and political positions appointed or through recruitment competitions.

02 - Political Mechanisms

The executive authority in any country must provide women with opportunities to participate in public life in general, and in political life in particular, in order to enhance their role in contributing to public affairs, through draft laws that governments submit to parliament, which must guarantee a minimum level of representation for women in political life, and through their assumption of leading public positions, given their ability to give competently for the benefit of the nation. Governments' concern for women should not be confined to theoretical studies only, but the reality must be a clear indication that these governments actually empower women, give them their right to participate in decision-making, and not exclude them from the public scene (<https://cnn.it/47QHtvY>). In other words, the government provides public policies to develop women's participation in political and social life (Mahoder 2013, p. 13).

Political mechanisms are numerous, including the following:

A. Political upbringing: It is the process by which an individual learns social norms through various social institutions [such as political parties, the media, educational institutions, religious institutions, etc. It is also the process by which individuals acquire political attitudes and values that enable them to perform certain social activities. Upbringing may transfer previous values to present and future generations, and may create new values, which greatly affects the political behavior of members of society (Ghazi, 1993, p. 107)

The role of political education in enhancing the role of women in political development emerges through the role played by political education tools in spreading a culture and values that urge the need to pay attention to women and open a wide field for them in political practice, because they are an effective element alongside men in achieving the desired political development, and abandoning values that restrict women's political freedom.

B. Political participation: It is a process practiced by individuals with the aim of influencing the decisions of those in charge of political power, and it is also a process of supporting or opposing certain political values (Qazdari 2015, p. 239).

- According to Mr. Ghanem Abdulmuttalib, there are degrees of political participation: Holding a political position, seeking a political position, active or passive membership in a political organization, participation in political meetings,

demonstrations and voting, and general interest in politics. Political participation means involving all members of society in political life, regardless of their ethnic and racial affiliations [and their gender, male or female], and enabling them to play a clear role in the political process, as it is a true expression of the existence of democracy within the state (Qazdari 2015, pp. 239, 241)

The role of political participation in activating the role of women in political development is manifested through the provision by the ruling political authority of all legal, administrative and political facilities for women to participate in the political process. Among the most important of these mechanisms is their right to vote and run in elections (local, legislative, presidential), in addition to their right to be appointed to high positions in the state, and they are allowed to join and establish associations, unions and parties, so that through these informal institutions they can contribute to political development on the one hand and claim their rights and present their ideas on the other hand.

C. Media: The media plays an important role in the political and socialization process (Kazdari 2015, p. 246).

As for the media, its role lies in broadcasting educational sessions and programs for members of the public, revolving around the effective role of women in the political development of society, such as presenting vivid examples of women who held high political positions in the state, so that they performed their role well.

D. Political parties: It is the contemporary form of political organization, one of the main pivotal structures that occupy a unique and distinctive position in the context of the political system of society, so that it exercises many important functions and roles for political life, and in various stages and processes of development as well (Kazdari 2015, p. 250)

Political parties must adopt policies that encourage women to join them and enable them to assume leadership positions, as well as make them the first in their lists of candidates (Samina 2011, p. 80) .

In addition to giving them wide freedom in practicing their activities related to the party, meaning the existence of democracy, in addition to the spokespersons of their parties encouraging women to practice politics, and sensitizing members of the public to the importance of the role of women in political life.

3- Social Mechanisms

In this regard, we, especially males, have a very important societal responsibility. We must recognize women's pioneering role in development work in general and in political life in particular, and work to put aside wrong customs and legacies in order to expand the circle of political participation among all segments

of society, and that men and women have an important place in this circle to exchange visions and ideas that serve the issues of rights and freedoms, and the general interest of the nation. In this context, I mention civil society organizations, which should play a real and tangible role, away from merely reporting photos and documents, to satisfy some international bodies and obtain financial support from them to benefit a few, regardless of achieving the interests of peoples. The role of these organizations will be tangible and practical only through continuous awareness campaigns, especially for men, to believe in the role of women, and not to limit their role to the family sphere, and that history testifies to the merit of women, their status, and their ability to lead and give continuously (<https://cnn.it/47QHtvY>). In a comprehensive sense, a more broad and comprehensive social transformation is needed to activate women's participation in political work and civil society (Mahoder 2013, p. 2).

Christiana O. Ogbogu outlines a set of strategies that women should adopt to break the barrier that prevents them from playing a central role in the political process: (O. Ogbogu 2012, p. 190)

- Women in political parties should build a network of social relations with various parties.
- Mobilize women and build an agenda that will change the prevailing system in favor of women.
- Intensify awareness and gender equality campaigns.
- Organize awareness programs to encourage women to join the government.

Society can only enhance the role of women in political development by abandoning some of the restrictions imposed by customs and traditions, in addition to the role provided by some socialization institutions, such as the religious institution (mosque), educational institutions and the family, which is represented in spreading awareness related to the importance of women in political life, and the need to change society's traditional view that the role of women is limited primarily to domestic work to their ability to play important political roles, because societies live in an era in which males and females are equal in most jobs and tasks, and in many rights and duties defined by the law. This global trend is imposed on society, and it must adopt it in a form adapted to its inherited values.

Conclusion

In the end, we can only say that despite the civilizational progress that humanity knows, women still suffer in some countries from marginalization in their developmental role in the political field, and this is due to many different restrictions, represented in the values prevailing in their society, whether legal, political, social or customs and traditions, and this has negatively affected the path of political development in them, especially since the number of females in these

countries equals or exceeds the number of males, and therefore their large number obliges the state to provide all necessary facilities and appropriate conditions to enable them in political life, especially since our current era in light of globalization and openness encourages and even dictates this. Women have now acquired international and local human rights organizations that protect them from forms of tyranny and liberate them from unjust restrictions that deprive them of their legitimate rights. In addition to their involvement alongside men in associations and trade unions, they have proven their worth in fulfilling their roles in an efficient and effective manner, as they were able to assume high political positions in the state, and examples abound in this regard. Women's numerical strength in some countries has enabled them to promote development in all its dimensions through their effective participation in society

Recommendations :

- Emphasize the importance of women's participation in political life and their role in building the nation and the citizen in school curricula.
- Activate laws related to women's political rights, and enact laws that expand the scope of their political participation.
- Protecting women from any societal pressures that hinder them from obtaining their political rights.
- Opening a wide field for the media in spreading political awareness to the community that encourages women to engage in political activities.
- Provide the authorities with all facilities for women to practice political work and establish any political organizations within the framework of what is permitted by law.

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