

## Chapter four: Strategies to overcome obstacles

### 1. Introduction

This chapter attempts to identify the most appropriate strategies that will help overcome the obstacles to the political empowerment of women in Jordan. For these strategies to succeed, they must take into account the context which has been identified in the preceding analysis. To summarize the main conclusions of these chapters: The legal status for Jordanian women has improved over the years, but more needs to be done. Particular aspects of the Personal Status Law, the Citizenship Law and the Penal Law are still to be addressed to ensure that women are accorded the rights laid out in international conventions ratified by Jordan. Women are still disadvantaged in terms of economic empowerment. The political process in Jordan does not provide an enabling environment in which women can exercise their rights to participate fully in political life.

In Jordan, the majority of people hold relatively entrenched views concerning appropriate (and inappropriate) roles for women and for men, based on the 'traditional' gendered division of labour. Politics and positions of high office still tend to be viewed as the domain of men, rather than women. This perception is shared by both men and women. Under these conditions, the opportunity for women to enter the political process of parliamentary elections, to stand as candidates and then gain sufficient votes to be elected are very slim indeed.

To address the issue of women's political empowerment, both short and longer term responses are required. One short-term strategy currently under debate is to address existing prejudice by increasing the quota for women in parliament in order to move towards something approaching parity. This issue is dealt with later in this chapter and in the concluding chapter.

The other response is to perceive women's political empowerment as a continuous process rather than a succession of separate and isolated acts. By definition, the idea of process assumes that achieving empowerment is a long-term objective. This process, by definition will involve society as a whole as well as the sub-groups within society. The areas which need to be addressed as part of this longer term strategy include addressing the issue of society's general attitude towards women, dealing with political apathy which affects all candidates, addressing those laws or regulations which create systemic barriers, and finally, looking closely at the specific skills that women may need in order to overcome the obstacles that currently hinder them from acting effectively as candidates and campaigners.

## 2. How to address society's prejudice towards women?

Any strategy to influence public attitudes towards women will have to recognise that age and educational background are important factors in shaping such attitudes and will have to disaggregate 'society' or 'women' into sub-groups and to adapt approaches to meet different needs and expectations.

Chapter three examined various indicators in order to assess public attitudes towards women. There were variations, but on the whole it was not possible to see the significance of gender, education and age in terms of its influence on general public attitudes. An additional approach is to concentrate on future trends and possibilities, to see how such variables influence the public's attitude concerning women's political empowerment. A key indicator is the degree of resistance to change. Without such an assessment it is difficult to understand how the family, the media and the educational system may influence future outcomes. The advantage of looking at future trends, possibilities and choices is simply that it frees the mind from some of the prevailing constraints, and in so doing may help reveal future possibilities for women's empowerment.

In the survey, the sample were asked to consider possible changes to the existing systems, that might enhance political empowerment for women. They were asked whether it would be reasonable to increase the quota, or to change the electoral law to offer women candidates an increased chance to compete and win without the quota. They were also asked whether it would be appropriate to allocate a certain number of cabinet posts or positions of judge for women.

In terms of the quota, 33% of respondents were not aware that such a system existed. This is one area where education and the media can play a role, by informing the public about political choices and bridging the knowledge gap. [Table 4.1] When asked their view on increasing the quota level, 41% were in favour, 10% were unsure and 49% objected to any increase. [Table 4.2] But a variation between male and female respondents was evident: 51% of females were in favor of the increase, whilst 61% of males were against it.

Two preliminary conclusions are in order: first, that women are more likely to be in favour of affirmative action that might improve their status in terms of political empowerment. Second, that women as a whole represent a 'natural' target group. Whatever role may be played by media or education, it should encourage and strengthen these already existing positive trends.

Level of education had some bearing on attitude to increasing the quota. Only 18% from the category with a lower level of education (high school and below) were in favour of a increase in the quota compared to 37% of those with a higher level of education. However, if one accepts the commonly-held assumption that education should promote equal rights, then it is disturbing that the majority of university-educated people still object to increasing the quota for women. [Table 4.3]

Age also played a role in influencing opinions concerning an increase in the quota. Among the youngest group, 47% were supportive of an increase while 38% objected to such an increase. Across all age groups, the younger group was the only one to have a majority in favor of increase in the quota. [Table 4.4]

Here again targeting the younger age groups makes sense. Not only do they express a willingness to create more equal opportunities for women to have a fair chance in elections, but it is also the young who are the majority of the population. Even a small percentage change in favour of women's empowerment will deliver a large number in terms of actual voters. Media support and a sensitive educational system can also make a great difference by capitalizing on already existing potential. Education is also a key in targeting younger groups through the school system, at an age when they are more open to new ideas. Gender-sensitive education can make a considerable difference.

A similar trend among youth was also evident in response to a question concerning attitudes to changes in the electoral law that would remove some of the barriers to the election of female candidates. 50% objected to any change, while 40% were in favor. Again, a gender division was evident. 49% of female respondents were in favor of change compared to only 33% of males. 36% of female respondents objected to changing the law and 14% were undecided. [Table 4.5] In theory, the group of 'undecided' can be persuaded through education and media to make up their mind in favor of a positive change.

There was also a positive correlation between level of education and support for changing the electoral law. Only 18% of the category with school certificate or less supported that change compared with 37% of diploma holders and 44% of those with university education or higher. [Table 4.6]

Age was also a factor influencing opinions on this issue. The youngest group tended to be in favor of changes to the system with 49% support compared with 41% overall average. This was also the only age group with a greater number of respondents in favor of change than those who objected to change (49% :44%) [Table 4.7]

These findings have implications in terms of assessing the potential role of the media, the family and education in terms of changing negative attitudes towards women, and increasing women's political empowerment.

- There are sub-groups who can be considered as "natural" supporters of women's political empowerment. These groups include women themselves and younger people.
- On most issues, there is a group of 'undecided' who are a natural target. It can be assumed that they will be easier to sway in favour of women's empowerment than those who take positions against it. If they can be drawn into the ranks of the 'decided and in favour', then this will help create a significant and sustainable majority for change. Perhaps this is the most significant target group where sensitive education and media can make great deal of difference.

- Young people can be true catalysts for change. At the same time, it was also this age group that was the most likely to consider the 'family' as a main influence on their voting behavior. Here perhaps lies the paradox. The young group is the most eager and willing for change, yet equally, the most vulnerable to the influence of older generation who may encourage them to adopt views that are detrimental to women's empowerment.

- The process of changing attitudes is not likely to take place through imposition, but has to involve people so they feel they 'own' their opinions. The most central function of a meaningful educational system and media is to engage with specific target groups as well as society at large. This is an area where education and the media can play a major role in directing that change and guarding against inappropriate influence from those segments among the older groups in society who are less sympathetic to women's empowerment.

### **3. Addressing political apathy.**

Addressing political apathy is a necessary component of any strategy to promote women's political empowerment. Without active political participation (other than merely voting in elections), there can be no chance of forming party politics. Party politics is the most likely forum through which women candidates will be judged on merit and for their contribution in formulating party programs and agendas.

Meaningful political participation is more likely to make voters aware of their own contribution to the political process and the value of their votes. Such awareness is likely to influence voting in the direction of the quality of candidates and their programs. The latter two considerations are likely to serve qualified women candidates more than any other considerations (family / tribal basis).

The findings of this survey reveal that there is a degree of political apathy which can not be ignored. Only 11% of respondents stated that they considered politics to be the business of 'ordinary people'. In fact, 82.6% of respondents considered politics to be the business of a 'small group' and 'government'. It is of note that only 6% of respondents associated politics with parliament. [Table 4.8]

Apathy can be a product of an attitude that "it is not my business or concern". But apathy can also result from a perception of insignificance in terms of the ability to influence the decision-making process. Asked to what degree they considered their own behavior to have any influence on political life, only 3.5% of respondents perceived they had a "great deal of impact". 69% thought they had "little or no influence at all". Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to consider their own influence as limited. [Table 4.9]

If these findings are correct, this leads to the disturbing possibility that “don’t bother” and “who cares?” are inevitable consequences of the perception of lack of inclusion in political processes. These attitudes are not likely to be conducive to the political empowerment of women. In this context it has to be acknowledged that the role of the media, the family and education is rather limited. The mere act of repeating slogans concerning self-worth without translating that worth into meaningful influence is unlikely to make a difference. Creating meaningful party politics is a necessary albeit insufficient condition to create a change. The question of when and how the creation of party politics will be achieved is still open for debate.<sup>(1)</sup>

#### **4. Changing electoral law:**

The major recognized weakness of Jordan’s electoral law is that it tends to increase the influence of tribalism and family considerations, thus undermining the process of choosing candidates on the basis of merit or a meaningful program.<sup>(2)</sup> It is clear that when tribalism and family are the main criteria for choosing candidates, this will tend to be disadvantageous for female candidates. For these social barriers to women’s political empowerment to be reduced will require changes in the electoral law. The particular form of that change is a matter for public debate; the process of debate itself will play a meaningful role since it raises issues concerning the rights of all people to representation in democratic processes, and the most effective and the negotiation of acceptable mechanisms to achieve this desired aim.

#### **5. Acquiring Skills:**

Women who wish to engage actively in political processes and to stand for election need a variety of skills that they can deploy in the current conditions, and also new skills that will equip them to deal with future circumstances when conditions may be more conducive to women’s political empowerment. This section examines the kind of skills women need to acquire and how such skills can be used to limit, mitigate and hopefully to eliminate the conditions which prevent them from achieving their potential. This will include addressing negative attitudes and changing the electoral law to remove the barriers to women’s empowerment. At the same time, these skills should be used to strengthen existing positive trends and to encourage the ‘undecided’ groups to be part of that positive direction. The ultimate goal of acquiring skills is to make women more effective as campaigners and as politicians.

### **5.1 Campaign and Resources:**

Skills are tools to achieve specific objectives or goals. Thus, whatever skills women might have, they should be directed towards specific issues and clearly defined target groups. Some of these issues can be of a general nature and therefore relevant to a whole group. For example, changing negative attitudes towards women is an issue of general concern where the target group can be society at large. Campaigns to bring about a change in the electoral law may require a different target group for example parliament as an institution and also the individual members within it. If the aim is to increase the quota ceiling, then appropriate target groups might be the young electorate, the “undecided” group and parliament itself. It will also require lobbying of government as the institution with the legal authority to introduce any change in the quota system.

Identifying issues and target groups helps avoid wasting resources on the wrong target. It also allows campaigners to recognise that a specific strategy or appeal may suit a given target group but not another. In other words, it is an agenda-sensitive strategy. Each target group can be more influenced by a certain agenda than the other. A campaigner with limited resources might decide to ignore a particular target group when the possibility of changing their mind is very slim, and to concentrate on those sub-groups that appear more open to change.

A relevant consideration in terms of identifying issues and target groups is that of the focus of ‘gender’. An important aspect of campaigning includes a review of the potential opportunity of creating a coalition of interested parties, and if so, the challenge of selection of the most likely members of such a coalition. A key question arises as to whether is more effective to address the issues of direct relevance to women as ‘gender issues’ or whether to promote it differently, for example as an issue of social exclusion on the basis of poverty / social class rather than as a gender issue. The choice of focus will have implications on the strategy of campaigning, target groups, tools to advocate and ultimately the likelihood of success or failure.

### **5.2 Campaigning, Advocacy and Lobbying:**

A clearer understanding of issues and target groups helps determine the nature of campaigning, advocacy and lobbying. A key choice is the identification of the most appropriate methods to communicate effectively with certain target groups. Leaving aside individual merits and “natural” communication skills, it is assumed here that most of the skills relevant to the above activities can be acquired, and certain skills can be sharpened, providing the individual has the desire and an aptitude to learn.

Campaigning, lobbying and advocacy have certain characteristics in common. First, they involve communicating an issue to a certain group. Second, they represent an attempt to influence or initiate a particular response to an issue on behalf of certain group. Campaigners, lobbyists and advocates tend to stand on a dividing line, either for or against a certain issue or cause.

Effective articulation of issues is central to advocacy, and requires consideration not only of the language to be used but also of the images that will convey the message and bring about the desired response. Consideration of such issues also helps the advocate (and potential candidate) decide where they stand on particular issues.

Various tools are available to help advance a certain position. Their effectiveness can not also be judged in abstract but only with reference to specific issues and distinct target groups. Typical tools adopted in advocacy campaigns include direct personal and face-to-face communication. Others include media outlets such as press, TV, radio and, increasingly, the use of internet and mobile phones for sending messages and e-mails.

### **5.3 Fund-Raising:**

Whatever one does in politics, financial resources are always needed. There is currently a suggestion to draft a new Law of Political Parties that will include a clause making it possible to allocate state funds for political parties meeting certain criteria. This is a welcome trend, but it is as yet unclear when and how such law can be implemented.

Women are clearly at a particular disadvantage in terms of their access to resources for political activities. As noted in the introductory chapters, women are significantly disadvantaged in terms of economic empowerment. They have less access to income from employment or access to capital or property from which to derive revenue. Barriers to social and economic empowerment mean that few women have money in their own right, and most are therefore dependent on obtaining agreement from males in their family if they are to mobilise funds.

Various approaches to address this gender gap in terms of access to funds have been suggested. There have been advocates for a special fund with the specific aim of providing funds for women candidates. However, it is recognized that it would be complex and challenging to gain agreement concerning the status of such a body and to identify reliable sources of funding. Others have considered a potential role for the private sector in providing sufficient fund for women candidates possible through offering tax incentives.

Whatever new mechanisms emerge, there will still be an essential need for women to acquire the core skills of advocacy and lobbying to address issues of funding.

#### **Concluding Remarks:**

This chapter considered some of the key issues that will have to be addressed by women to overcome obstacles that constrain their attempt to increase their political empowerment. These issues included society's prejudice against women, political apathy and the current electoral law. The analysis was based on the assumption that the roles of the family, education and the media are considered as part of that process and not as separate issues.

The section on acquiring skills should be read partly as background material for this section, where identifying relevant target groups was an essential part of that process.



## Chapter five: The journey ahead

This rather brief chapter addresses the issue of the future, and the path towards gender equity in terms of women's political empowerment. It provides a number of possible indicators that can be used to assess the extent to which this process is on track. These indicators reflect the key issues raised earlier: the analysis of the status of women in Jordan, the constraining factors women encounter in pursuit of their potential and the factors and tools which can be used to overcome such limitations. Both short-term and long term success indicators are identified, using an arbitrary distinction in which short-term refers to five years or under. It also has to be stated that there will inevitably be some overlap between objectives and therefore of indicators. For example, encouraging more young people and in particular young women to be actively involved in politics is both a short term and long term objective.

### 5.1.1 Short term objectives:

**Repeal** those laws and practices which are in contradiction with Jordan's adherence to international conventions related to women rights and equality between men and women including penal law, citizenship law and personal status law.

**Increase** the number of women in parliament by increasing the level of the quota. The appropriate percentage of this increase is debatable but it can realistically be expected that an increase in women seats in parliament is both feasible and recommendable as a short-term measure.

**Encourage** political parties to introduce a quota system when selecting women candidates to run for election. Despite their limited impact, political parties can be useful in setting up the principle that the role of women has to be integral to any party politics. It also helps create the image of women as party candidates rather than individual candidates.

**Increase** political participation in terms of involvement in party politics as well as various civil society organizations. Less than 2% of respondents chose their candidates on party political grounds. Yet 23% respondents were members of civil society organizations including labour associations and non-profit organizations and therefore may be more aware of the importance of the role of policy in decision-making bodies that play a representative role. This is a very useful target group to reduce political apathy.

**Change** the electoral law and related regulations, particularly in terms of delineation of constituencies and rules related to campaigning.

**Change** the political parties law to encourage movement towards policy-based party politics.

**Set up** a special fund for the purpose of supporting women candidates. The initiative can be taken by UNIFEM.



**Strengthen** special programs to provide interested women with the necessary skills needed for advocacy and campaigning. UNIFEM can take such initiative.

**Increase** the utilization of modern media channels, most notably the internet, to reach out to women and other potential partners.

**Encourage** women with potential, qualifications and credibility to run for election.

### **5.1.2 Long term objectives:**

- Change public attitudes towards women so that their equal rights are respected. The indicators used in chapter three provide points of reference against which to evaluate progress towards equality of opportunity in the political processes.

- Achieve a significant increase in the number of women active in formal political processes. Appropriate indicators could include the number of seats in parliament, the presence of political parties with active involvement of women and the number of female cabinet ministers.

- Develop gender-sensitive education that demonstrably leads to a change in attitudes and the promotion of equal rights for women and men.

- Promote the selection of candidates based on 'objective' criteria such as the program and the qualifications and experience of candidates rather than any other personalistic considerations.

- Create a stronger role for the media to become a central tool in communicating the political agenda based on interaction and feedback among the major political players.

Obviously, many of these longer-term objectives may appear unlikely in the current conditions, but the pursuit of gender equity is a long term process if Jordan is to achieve its aspirations for development.