

Women Empowerment in the Arab Region: Between the Anvil of Illiteracy and the Hammer of Passive Representative Bureaucracy

Salwa Thabet

Associate Professor

Abstract

This paper emphasizes on enacting comprehensive mainstreaming institutional mechanisms to promote the role of women in socio-economic development in the Arab region. Sustainable development could never take place unless both the government and civil society are committed towards women empowerment and gender parity to achieve gender mainstreaming. However, cultural legacy, with its socioeconomic and political dimensions, is envisaged as the most challenging impediment. There are three critical areas of concern of substantive nature, which are high rates of women illiteracy, passive representative bureaucracy, as a result of under-representation at decision-making levels, as well as gender disparity. To investigate women empowerment challenges in the region, the study first presents the multifaceted hurdle of cultural legacy and identifies the relevant social, economic and political challenges from a multidisciplinary perspective. Thereafter, it looks at two inseparable issues facing women in the Arab region, illiteracy and under-representation at decision-making levels. The study, then, indicates the pressing need for policy changes to fill up the massive gender gap existing in the majority of Arab States, where not only a description of gender disparity profile of the Arab region is presented but also a comparative outlook vis-à-vis global trends is highlighted. Finally, the research identifies the indispensable roles of both the government and civil society to address key challenges in synchrony. It does not only call for placing women empowerment among the top priorities on the agenda of policy-makers in setting development plans, but also reiterates the significant role of civil society institutions in the areas of illiteracy eradication, civic education, and women rights advocacy. In this context, a framework of recommended policy actions is presented in an attempt to set effective women empowerment mechanisms to achieve gender mainstreaming and hence contribute to sustainable development.

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