

INSTITUTIONALIZING GENDER: WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN JORDAN

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The Beijing Platform for Action was approved during the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995). This document placed gender equality and the advancement of women on the global policy-making agenda and was approved by nearly two hundred countries, including Jordan. At the national level, Jordan introduced a quota system that allocates seats to women in Parliament and in Municipal Councils (2003, 2007 and 2010) and it incorporated a gender perspective into a five-year national development plan (1999–2003). However, the number of women in political leadership positions is still low. Clearly, there is a need for more attention from the international community, national institutions and grassroots movements to this issue in Jordan; the challenge is not only to include women within political structures, but also to provide gender sensitive education.

This paper will present preliminary results from my current research, through which I aim to understand the relationship between the official rhetoric of the empowerment of women's political participation in the context of International Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations that operate in Jordan and their policies. I am specifically looking at the risk of offering only superficial solutions to the problem of gender inequality, losing the transformative approach of the organizations' agendas. I argue that the formal designation of resources to women's education and development hide the deeper imbalances of power, structural inequalities and practices of subordination inherent to gender relations in most societies. My work particularly addresses how women receive and perceive the policies of such organizations, what women expect from the organizations' agendas, and what they gain from them. My data, collected through ethnographic, qualitative fieldwork in Jordan, includes the analysis and evaluation of the activities of selected organizations and formal/informal in-depth interviews with organizations' staff, women in politics and women who ran for candidacy for the 2010 parliamentary elections in Jordan.

Women's experiences and knowledge are central to my research, and my theoretical and methodological framework takes an actively feminist approach. Using primarily transnational feminist politics and an intersectional perspective I am analyzing how gender interacts with class, ethnicity, and race issues. My work aims first to contribute to social change, women's empowerment, and inequalities. The results presented will also contribute to theoretical debates around gender mainstreaming at an international level, proposing a new focus through the empirical case study of Jordan and its vibrant, growing community of IOs and NGOs focusing on women's political participation.