



**Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-ninth session**

**National mechanisms for gender equality: advocates for action and
accountability, catalysts for change**

PANEL DISCUSSION

**ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS RAISING AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND
LEADERSHIP**

by

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*The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

1. Introduction

The Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) was established by a cabinet decision in 1992, chaired by Her Royal Highness Princess Basma Bint Talal, as the main women national machinery (NWM) responsible for advancing women rights and gender equality. In 1996, and following the participation of Jordan in the Fourth World Conference on Women, with a delegation of 165 people representing the government and the civil society, the mandate of JNCW was elaborated to give it the authority articulated by the Beijing Platform for Action regarding NWMs and directly linked it to the Prime Minister. It was a reflection of Jordan's commitment to its regional and international obligations to create a national mechanism for the advancement of women and enhancing their economic, social and political participation, protecting them and advancing their rights as citizens, to ensure the achievement of sustainable and equitable development.

JNCW's mandate includes: the formulation of relevant government policies and participating in the drafting of national and sectoral development plans and following up on their implementation, assessing legislative frameworks and providing avenue for building national consensus and advocating for proposed amendments towards eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, forming national networks and teams for cooperation and implementation, promoting exchange of information and experiences; participating in relevant committees and advisory bodies; and formally representing Jordan at regional and international forums on women's affairs, and preparing, updating, and evaluating the Jordanian National Strategy for Women, and following up on its implementation.

2. Advocacy efforts and mechanisms

Since its establishment, the JNCW has focused on fulfilling its mandate through building partnerships and coalitions in support of its advocacy efforts for change and in support of increasing women's representation in all areas of decision-making. Those include: legislative, policy and strategy reviews, the creation of networks and coalitions, media campaigns, lobbying at different decision-making levels, and research, studies and reporting on achievements and challenges on progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Among those committees and coalitions are: 1) The Civil Society Coordinating Committee, which JNCW coordinates with regularly in all areas relating to its mandate; 2) the Legal Experts Team, which includes legal consultants from the judicial authority, private practitioners and the civil society, and which worked on reviewing all legislation and producing a legal statement on all needed amendments to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women; 3) Media and Communication team to coordinate efforts and raise awareness and employ all forms of media tools to advocate for women rights and gender equality issues; 4) The Governmental Gender Focal Points; 5) Political Parties and Women in Politics Committee; 6) the National Coalition to Support Women in Elections; and 7) Network for Women in Municipal Councils.

The JNCW played a pivotal role in advocating for increased women's participation in the Parliament and in local councils. In 2005, and in response for the demands of JNCW royal leadership, 99 women were appointed as members of local councils. The success of that experience together with the lobbying of the demands' list submitted by the JNCW and the women's movement to the Parliament since 2003, led to the allocation of 20% of the local councils seats to women in the Municipalities Law of 2007, which increased to 25% in 2011. Today, women constitute 36% of local councils representatives.

The allocated number of seats for women in the Parliament has also increased in the past decade due to advocacy and lobbying efforts of JNCW and its committees and partners. The number of seats allocated increased from 6 seats out of 110 in 2003, to 12 out of 120 seats in 2010 and to 15 out of 150 in 2012. Today, there are 18 female members in the parliament constituting 12% of total representatives. Additionally, the Political Parties Law of 2012 requires that women represent 10% of all Party's founding members. This has resulted in the increase of women participation in political parties, which reached 32% in 2013. However, women access to senior positions in political parties remains limited.

The participation of women in both local councils and the parliament has exceeded the allocated quota and seats, in the elections of 2013 (36% and 12% consecutively). This is largely due to the continued efforts of JNCW in collaboration with the government and civil society to increase women participation in political life. In 2012, a National Coalition was formed through a UNWOMEN-funded project on "Enhancing Women's leadership Role and Political Participation". The project involved the development and adoption of a strategy for the years 2013-2017 with a focus on providing support and capacity building to women candidates in all areas relating to campaigning and decision-making processes during elections. JNCW also carried out a wide national campaign in all media outlets as well as street advertisements in support of the election of women in both the Parliamentary elections and local council elections which took place in 2013.

Since 1996, JNCW has been preparing and updating the Jordanian National Strategy for Women in a participatory approach. The strategy has consistently included themes relating to legislative amendments, increasing women economic and political participation and mainstreaming gender in policies, strategies and plans. In January 2013, the Cabinet endorsed the Jordanian National Strategy for Women for 2013-2017, which included among its main pillars a pillar on Women Political Empowerment and Participation in Public Life, including women in leadership and decision-making positions, with a main objective to gradually increase women participation to reach at least 30% in all decision-making positions both elected and appointed. This objective has also been adopted in the draft Action Plan for the implementation of resolution 1325, which was prepared through a coalition that was built and led by JNCW and included the government, the security forces and the civil society. The National Coalition strategy for supporting women in Elections (2013 – 2017), aims at contributing to meeting the targets of the National Women Strategy regarding women participation in leadership and decision-making positions through seven strategic objectives: 1) Creating a supportive legislative and policy-making context; 2) increasing women participation in senior position in the public sector; 3) increasing women representation in elected positions (including professional associations, political parties, etc.); 4) building women capacities and knowledge; 5) Nurturing supportive social context; 6) reinforcing networking and partnerships and supporting women in parliamentary and local councils elections.

Through its mandate, the JNCW has employed different channels to influence decisions regarding increasing women participation and leadership. The legal demands list submitted in the name of the women's movement every parliamentary election is being lobbied and advocated through the media, and with the legislators through regular meetings with different standing committees within the lower and upper houses of parliament, such as the legal committees and the women's committees. JNCW holds regular meetings with the Women's Caucuses in the parliament and coordinates closely through its advocacy unit with the secretariat of the Parliament to carry the demands of the JNCW and the women's movement to the parliament. The Women's Committees in both houses of parliament are responsive and tend to adopt those demands based on coordination and consensus building efforts.

JNCW also works closely with the governmental network of gender focal points to follow up on gender mainstreaming efforts with governmental institutions and coordinate efforts towards the implementation of the Jordanian National Strategy for Women. Several training programs have been provided to the network and several national organizations and ministries have adopted gender mainstreaming strategies in policies, programs and projects. However, while gender focal points and departments are in place in the vast majority of public institutions in Jordan, their capacity to effectively mainstream gender within national strategies, plans and policies are undermined by lack of political will, the limitations of the provided training opportunities and weak interconnectivity among departments. To confront some of those challenges, JNCW has recently provided the gender focal points within the 18 gender/women units with specialized gender-mainstreaming training as well as Training of Trainers in order to support the development of gender mainstreaming teams within governmental organizations and at the governorates level.

Due to the lack of adequate financial and human resources, JNCW is utilizing the skills of those focal points in supporting JNCW contribution to the mainstreaming of gender at the task force level in national plans; namely the Jordanian Resilience Plan in response to the Refugee crisis and the National Socio-Economic Vision 2025, which the government prepared during 2014. As a member of the steering committee and coordinating committee of those plans, JNCW recommended the appointment of gender focal points on task forces relevant to their specialty and provided them with mentor/coaching throughout the process, in addition to gender expertise provided by JNCW in reviewing the plans. However, JNCW's ability to influence the development agenda remains limited as it still faces institutional resistance to such approach in a development planning expert environment that is dominated with traditional economic-centered trends, which still regard women as add-on to the process rather than vehicles of development. This is aggravated by the impact of the regional turmoil which is casting its shadow on Jordan as it faces many challenges to respond to increasing population and security needs and maintain the social, economic and political progress achieved over the past decades, and resulting with women issues and gender equality losing priority over issues of economic stability and security.

In Jordan, we realize that increasing the percentage of women in decision making positions and the economic empowerment of women are still our main challenges. Despite the fact that women make 44% of public sector employees, they only constitute 10% of those in leadership positions. JNCW continues to work closely with the different ministries in order to promote women in leadership positions and strengthen the mainstreaming of women's issues in the public sector. The Ministry of Public Sector Development launched a project on "Women's Empowerment in the Public Sector" aiming at equipping mid-level female employees with capacity and leadership skills to increase their opportunities in accessing high-level positions in the public sector. The project will be implemented in partnership with JNCW with the support of USAID funded Gender project-TAKAMOL. Within this project, JNCW will be providing technical and legal expertise to review all relevant legislation and propose needed amendments; assess the informal and formal impediments to women assuming leadership positions in the public sector and provide gender mainstreaming training to government employees at different decision-making levels. Also, towards that end, the JNCW in coordination with the General Budget Department and with the support of UNWOMEN has launched, in 2010, a two phase project on gender responsive budgeting (GRB), which included the establishment of the national network supporting gender responsive budgeting, with an action plan for (2015 – 2017) expected to be launched soon.

JNCW also utilizes studies and reporting to gauge government commitment to gender equality at the strategic level, as well as its day to day practice. Since 2010, JNCW has been preparing the Women Progress Report, highlighting achievements and citing challenges and proposing recommendations for moving forward. JNCW also carries out specialized studies focusing on different areas related to women empowerment, such: gender-mainstreaming in the public sector, the informal economy, “honor” Killing, women participation in the political sphere, etc. all aiming at calling for action in the different areas of focus of the National Women Strategy. JNCW also monitors international reports and provide insights and conclusions regarding their findings to the Prime Minister and relevant government organizations as part of its efforts to raise flags and advocate for change. JNCW also acts as a watchdog in confronting practices that impede gender equality on a day to day basis, through corresponding directly with relevant organizations and acting collectively through its networks.

3. Challenges and Conclusions

Despite multi-leveled advocacy efforts, JNCW is still facing institutional and cultural challenges that limit its ability to influence decisions at the institutional level. Lack of institutional power within the government limits JNCW’s ability to carry out its mandate. There is a general disconnect between the discourse of the state in terms of women rights and gender equality and implementation at strategic and practical level. This is reflected by the limited human and financial resources that are provided to JNCW and the reluctance to transform the development agenda in a manner that positions women at the center of the process through a human-right based approach. This calls for the restructuring of the public sector to include gender divisions within all governmental organizations at a sufficient decision-making level and the adoption of gender mainstreaming state policy giving JNCW the mandate and resources to follow up on implementation through an effective monitoring framework.

Attempts to advance gender equality and women leadership and political participation in Jordan face legislative, institutional and social impediments. Despite efforts, gender equality focused amendments to legislation encounter backlash from more conservative elements of society, which the Government and the legislators are reluctant to confront. The demands of the women’s movement are perceived as elitist and “feminist” rather than the reflection of a cultural consensus. The roots of such resistance need to be tackled through and confronted within the education system, the media and different channels of social culturalisation such as the religious sphere. There is a need to harness the potential and energy of youth groups within all governorates to strengthen and energise the gender equality movement in Jordan. This can be achieved through support to civil society organisations at the local level to equip young people with the capacity to advocate for change, which would support advocacy efforts carried out by JNCW and the women civil society at the national level to amend legislation to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

The women caucuses in the Senate and House of Representatives as well as the women’s committees within them provide an opportunity for influencing the Parliament to push for advancing the gender equality agenda at the legislative level. However, without being a critical mass of women *and* male gender equality champions within the Parliament it is unlikely that they will be able to achieve change. This is reflective of the reality of women in decision making circles at large, such as the executive authority, senior positions in the public and private sector, political parties, boards of professional associations, etc. Strategies in support of the participation of women in decision-making spheres at all levels are yet to be fully adopted and implemented, partly due to a lack of dedicated financial and human resources. Meanwhile, women caucuses need to work on building alliances with other committees and coalitions to broaden their influence within the parliament in order to achieve needed changes.

