

Women and Leadership in Jordanian Rural Settings: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Women in Jordan have spared no efforts in their attempts to acquire leadership positions both in governmental and nongovernmental sectors. Jordanian women are increasingly becoming visible in managerial and senior administrative positions. However, this representation is not always translated into more political representation and more influence on legislation in favor of women. The main aims of the study were to explore the various factors that play a significant role in Jordanian women reaching leadership positions particularly those who reside in rural settings. The study focused on women from the villages of Irbid and Mafraq. A targeted sample of women from these villages were interviewed in addition to women from Amman who represent various governmental and non-governmental institutions. Dominant traditions, social conservatism and tribalism were among the main factors behind women's access to leadership positions within their respective rural communities. However, women managed to overcome these obstacles through networking, considerable negotiations skills and by enhancing their personal skills. The findings in this article are meant to inform policy makers about where women stand in terms of holding decision-making positions in Jordan and in complying with sustainable development goals that target women.

Keywords: Women, Jordan, leadership, rural settings.

INTRODUCTION

Despite Jordan's progressive international outlook and in particular towards gender issues, women remain underrepresented in public and political leadership posts. Although (62.8) percent of formally employed women are professionals, Jordanian women represent only (1.2) percent of legislators, senior officials and managers (Department of Statistics 2018). (24) percent of women are in the Cabinet, (15.3) percent in the Senates, (15.4) percent in Parliament, and (27.8) percent in local councils (Department of Statistics 2018). While emerging studies discuss the lack of a clear relationship between gender and effective leadership, the investigation of the social and cultural contexts behind women's relative absence in leadership positions is thus

a necessity (Vecchio 2002). These factors are further exacerbated for women who reside in rural settings in Jordan were traditional and stereotypical perceptions of gender are more prevalent.

Research objectives:

The main objectives of this paper are the following:

- investigating the role that rural settings play in women's journeys and experiences towards a leadership position
- exploring enabling and disabling factors that obstruct women's access to leadership positions in rural settings

Research questions:

This paper attempts to answer the following questions:

- What are the factors that encourage women residing in rural settings in reaching leadership positions in Jordan?
- What are the debilitating factors/obstacles that hinder women residing in rural settings from reaching

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leadership positions in Jordan?

Research significance:

Much research on Jordanian women and their representation in upper ranks of management tends to focus on women in urban areas, mainly major cities (Abu-Hummour 2019; ARDD 2016). Moreover, most of the studies conducted on Jordanian women and access to leadership positions focus mainly on the political field (Hawamdeh & Al-Qteishat 2020; Al-Adwan 2012; Al-Awamleh 2020; Al-Kafarneh 2013; Al Maaitah et.al 2012; Al Shalabi & Al-Assad 2012; Atiyat 2017; Alsoudi 2006). Additionally, much research on women and leadership in Jordan is done by relying on solely qualitative research methods, conducted primarily using surveys. This study however, focuses on the role that rural settings play in women's journeys and experiences towards a leadership position or role. The collected data for this research was extracted through interviews, whereby women were granted the opportunity to discuss their own challenges and struggles and to reflect on their own experiences in gaining access to a leadership role in a predominately-traditional setting. This is an advocacy-oriented research addressing rural women's leadership in their local communities.

Literature Review:

Patriarchal structures and women's bid for autonomy

Despite its progressive outlook towards women compared with neighbouring Arab countries, Jordanian society is characterised by its patriarchal nature. In its simplest form, patriarchy refers to male domination over women. This male domination could be represented in the father, brother or the husband. Similar to many parts of the world, patriarchy is a major characteristic in the Arab region. It shapes the main aspects of private and public life. Its dimensions can be viewed socially, politically, economically and culturally. Suad Joseph defines patriarchy as, 'the prioritising of the rights of males and elders (including elder women) and the justification of those rights within kinship values which are usually supported by religion' (Joseph 1996, p.14). Peter Krauss defines Arab

patriarchy as, 'a hierarchy of authority that is controlled and dominated by 'males', originating in the family' (cited in Joseph 1996, p.14). With a special emphasis on the Arab father figure, Halim Barakat, contended that he 'has authority and responsibility...expects respect and unquestioning compliance, and supports his power by control over land, resources, and income generation' (cited in Joseph 1996, p.14). Barakat also claims that the reason that patriarchy is so evident in the Arab world is because family is considered as the basic unit of society (Barakat 1993). As it promotes the superiority of men over women, patriarchy has a tremendous effect on the lives of Arab women as it legitimizes male control and makes any act that defies it seem impossible. It presupposes unquestioned obedience of the male as head of the family.

Moreover, Abla Amawi, Head of the Higher Council for Population in Jordan, describes a patriarchal society as one that 'for the most part, does not acknowledge a role for women except within socially accepted conditions and within the limits of certain confines that they should not violate. Within this structure, relationships are organized in vertical manner, where the paternal will of the father is absolute and further strengthened by tradition and/or coercion' (Amawi 2001, p.11). Questioning women's perception of the self, Amawi raises the following issues: 'How are women to believe in themselves and in other women, when their membership in a patriarchal society shapes their reality- a reality in which authority, domination and dependency characterize social relations between sexes within the family, clan and tribe? How do women break free from these restrictions when they legally have a lower status as citizens?' (Amawi 2001, p.141).

Patriarchy constitutes a great obstacle for women. It stands in the way of women's social, cultural, economic and political freedom. Catherine Kikoski states that, 'the cultural backdrop of the Middle East is traditional, and much influenced by the conservatism of prevailing religions. Traditional cultures, irrespective of religions, tend to be patriarchal, to mute women's voices, and to

place them into positions submissive to men. Religion also plays a very powerful and pervasive role in the Middle Eastern society' (Kikoski 2000, p.134).

Patriarchy remains a significant obstacle in front of ambitious women who yearn for some form of autonomy in a country like Jordan. In patriarchal societies, such ambitions are perceived as a threat to men's sense of virility and masculinity. A woman in a patriarchal society is commonly referred to as the daughter/sister or wife of a male figure. She is rarely perceived as an independent person; making a woman internalise this notion of dependency. Thus, it is this constant negation of the self in favour of a dominant male figure that poses many challenges to women willing to become independent and active leaders in their communities.

Social conservatism and women's retreat from public sphere

A significant factor that shapes the social roles men and women play are traditional and conservative views that are prevalent in Jordan. These views are cyclically molded by the way family, honor, religion, and societal and governmental structures operate in conservative societies. Everyone's role is closely tied to the family. The family is tied to the tribe. The tribe to the community and the community to the religion, all of which makes up the people executing government policy. Even though there is relative stability in Jordan, society's outlook is trending more conservative. A study conducted by the Information and Research Center King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF) shows that 'the majority of surveyed Jordanian parents believed that it is a girl's destiny to get married and over 15% felt that educating their daughters was not necessary' (2013). In addition, the discrepancy between the rate of women receiving higher education and utilizing it in the economy is widening, which might show that the value of a women's education in Jordan is meant to bolster a woman's marriageability (IRCKHF, 2013). The World Bank dataset about Jordan states that the percentage of women's participation in the workforce was only 17.6% in 2017 despite the fact that more than 50% of those in higher

education are women (World Bank, 2018). This highlights the reality of the workplace and other public-facing organizations as being a place for males and not females. If we look even deeper, we see a sharp withdrawal of women from the workforce around the ages they are typically married (ages 15-24) 8.75% in 2017, after an apogee of 11.6% in 2007 (World Bank, 2018). This is in comparison to the same numbers for males ages 15-24, which is 36.8% participation, although this too is an all-time low because of the economic conditions in Jordan (World Bank, 2018). A (2011) Labor Statistics Report states that 38,038 males between the ages 15-19 are economically active, while only 1,619 females from that same age group are (IRCKHF, 2013). This trend of conservatism tends to keep women out of the workplace and thus out of a plethora of leadership positions. Not only are women increasingly seen as unfit to work on the basis of their social role in society, they are also rendered unable to compete on the basis of a lack of experience. Experience is shown to be a more predictive characteristic of potential leadership and is not inherently gendered, but opportunities to gain experience in most contexts are limited (Appelbaum et al, 2003). When traditional cultures and poor economics are combined, we see an exacerbation of discrimination against women's attempts to work or lead. The prevalent logic goes 'if we have perfectly acceptable men without opportunities to work or lead, why would we have a woman take that position?'

Theoretical Background:

The lack of visibility of women in senior positions in both public and private institutions has always been a significant issue on a global scale (Hoyt 2017; Ngunjiri et.al 2015; Goryunova et.al 2017; Appelbaum et.al 2005; De La Rey 2005; Goethals and Hoyt 2017). Josephine Kiamba notes that 'historically, leadership has carried the notion of masculinity, and the belief that men make better leaders than women is still common today' (2008, p.8). According to Lis Hojgaard (2002), 'the societal conventions regarding gender and leadership traditionally exclude women, and top leadership is

viewed as a masculine domain' (Hojgaard in Kiamba 2008, p.8). Moreover, she argues that 'the cultural construction of leadership in itself instigates differences, and this construction is being transformed or contested now that women start to gain access to leadership positions' (Hojgaard in Kiamba 2008, p.8). Grow and Montgomery (2000) define leaders as those who 'provide vision and meaning for an institution and embody the ideals towards which the organization strives' (p.1). Based on their definition, Kiamba argues that 'leaders are alike and genderless. However, there is still skepticism when women lead and in many situations, gender, more than age, experience, or competence determines the role (or position) one is assigned' (Kiamba 2008, p. 8).

One approach to analyze theories of gender and leadership is through the lens of social psychology. In their article, *Social Psychological Approaches to Women and Leadership Theory* Crystal L. Hoyt and Stefanie Simon (2017) explains that this view focuses on two main questions: '1) are there gender differences in leadership style and effectiveness? and 2) what barriers do women face in the leadership domain?' (Hoyt and Simon, 3). The first of these questions, the existence, or non-existence, of gender differences in both leadership style and leadership effectiveness is an important and widespread discussion. The general consensus in the social-psychological community, as Hoyt and Simon explain, is that there is a 'small, but reliable difference between the leadership styles of men and women, and these nuances can translate into differences in behavior, for example in what values a leader tends to emphasize' (Hoyt and Simon, 3-4). Addressing the second question from a social-psychological perspective generally involves looking at the social context and how it influences behavior. In the study of gender and leadership, this usually means looking at stereotypes and the "stereotype threat". Hoyt and Simon turn to Steele et al. (2002) to define "stereotype threat" as 'the concrete, real-time threat of being judged and treated poorly in settings

where a negative stereotype about one's group applies' (p.385). They explain that women can respond to this threat by exhibiting 'vulnerability responses, reactance responses, or an impervious resiliency', based on a variety of individual differences (Hoyt and Simon, 18). Although this relationship is complex and convoluted, Hoyt and Simon conclude that regardless, gender absolutely affects how leaders lead, and how others respond to them.

Another approach to gender and leadership is to explore the concept through a feminist lens. In her article, *Women's Leadership and Third-Wave Feminism*, Kathleen P. Iannello (2010) refers to leadership as a "gendered concept", as 'there is something about being female or socialized to 'female values' that can be identified in women's organizational behavior' (Iannello, 70). By tracing the three "waves" of feminism in its history, she concludes that feminist interpretations of leadership have begun to focus less on collaborative and consensual leadership, and more on individual initiative, including expanding the concept of leadership to the private sphere (Iannello, 73).

A theoretical perspective that could best illustrate the dynamics of gender and leadership in a country like Jordan is Role Congruity Theory (RCT). Role Congruity Theory posits that a group would be judged more positively if its characteristics are recognized as aligning with that group's typical social and gender role. Women in areas with higher levels of traditional gender roles tend to have less positive feedback and more negative feedback regarding any position outside of their socially defined roles or duties. RCT focuses more on the perception of leadership much more than the effectiveness of leadership. An example of this would be that a demanding male boss is more likely to be associated with positive characteristics like challenging, inspiring, and precise while a similarly demanding woman boss is more likely to be seen as bossy, and hyper-aggressive, even if all else is equal. It must be noted that the opposite applies as well. If a man is in a female dominated or female engendered position, like caretaker, they are also viewed in a more

negative way (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). It is not so much that these are beliefs about the genders as much as these are beliefs about what characteristics are desirable for each gender (Eagley and Karau, 2002).

Role congruity theory does not only affect society's opinion of gendered roles, it also affects individuals' idea of what is desirable. According to the literature from the role congruity theory predecessor, sex role theory, children growing up in a highly gendered culture will 'acquire a great deal of sex role learning early in their lives, and this can lead to an attitude of mind that creates difficulties later, during their working lives. It is a form of 'culture trap' (Applebaum et al, 2003). Thus, the inclusion of women into public-facing social roles like leadership must be dealt with from two fronts. One is change at the individual level. Because of the culture trap that happens in these contexts, women may systematically relate those roles as being masculine and thus as not either being suitable or not desirable for women. Second, the perception of society at large must be shifted. This is because even if a woman were to desire these positions (as some do despite their cultural contexts), society would either block them or penalize them in some way for stepping outside of their gender role, whether that is not promoting them to a suitable level for their skills, shaming them for neglecting other responsibilities, or outright gender discrimination.

Within Jordan, social roles are strongly molded by many factors. The first of which is the strong presence of traditional gender roles in Jordan. Examples around the world show the consequences of these roles in effect. Elen Judd detailed the give and take of women's agency in three Shandong villages in China by asking them to express how much autonomy they felt like they had. After answering, they believed that had quite a lot of autonomy, Howell then challenged them to consider that autonomy over the autonomy of a man. The Shandong villagers' tone would then shift to uncertainty (Judd, 1990). This is directly tied to any woman looking towards a leadership position. Women

in these contexts have to consider their local logic, which of course indicates that women not only do not make good leaders but that they do not make leaders in general (at least leaders of men). Role congruity theory as described by Eagley and Karau (2002) states that 'compared with equivalent men, [women] possess less agency and more communion and therefore are less qualified for leadership, especially for executive roles'. Perceived gender characteristics between women and men are a factor used to explain the difference of leadership potential and as a mental metric for who is a good leader. Women are seen as communal, which might include descriptors like affectionate, kind, sympathetic, and gentle. This is put into contrast with men's perceived agentic characteristics, which might include being assertive, controlling, dominant, and self-confident (Eagley and Karau, 2002).

Methodology:

In order to address the main questions of this research, qualitative research methods were used through semi-structured interviews. The findings rely mainly on qualitative data analysis in order to best interpret the responses and insights of the participants on the issue of leadership.

The study was composed of 30 semi-structured 'one to one' interviews with women, which lasted from 60 to 90 minutes. Interviews were transcribed and then thematically divided. Based on the objectives of the research, the sample comprises of (20) female participants from the villages of Irbid and Mafraq that were purposely chosen. Located in the north of Jordan, these cities offer good grounds for studying the impact of the refugee crisis on available resources and on rural women's leadership opportunities. Ten female participants from Amman were also chosen to reflect women's perceptions on leadership at the national level as they all work in senior public positions.

The interviews were divided as follows:

- (10) Interviews were conducted with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) lead by women in Mafraq

- (10) Interviews were conducted with CBOs lead by women in Irbid

- (10) Interviews were conducted with female representatives of governmental and nongovernmental institutions in Amman

The questions used in the semi-structured interviews were open-ended in order to gather as much information as possible from women at the local level (in the villages of Irbid and Mafraq) and from women employed in Amman in both governmental and nongovernmental sectors, (some) who have a role in decision-making processes at the national level.

The main components of the interviews in Irbid and Mafraq focused on the following:

- Determining the factors that support women in reaching leadership positions
- The various obstacles and debilitating factors that women face in reaching leadership positions
- The corpus of supportive or discouraging laws and policies towards women reaching leadership positions

The interviews were conducted throughout the month of November 2016. The women selected from Irbid and Mafraq were generally active in their local communities, representing a diverse range of age groups and socio-economic backgrounds. The study targeted women who hold a leadership position in rural areas of Irbid and Mafraq and who are visible in public space.

- The women interviewed from Irbid came from the following areas: Bani Kenanah District, Bani Obaid, Mughayyir, and Irbid city.

- Those interviewed from Mafraq came from the following areas: Mughayyir As Sarhan Village, Um Al-Jmal, Al-Ba'ej, and Mafraq city.

As for female participants from Amman, they came from the following organizations, governmental entities and institutions:

- Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
- Ministry of Labor
- Ministry of Agriculture
- Ministry of Environment

- Union of Jordanian Farmers
- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- The Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW)
- The National Center for Agricultural Research and Extension (NCARE)
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
- Ministry of Water and Irrigation

Findings and Discussion

Among the major findings were that the surrounding environment is discouraging towards women who aspire to become leaders in rural communities. The discouraging elements include the following: dominance of tribalism, patriarchy, traditional and stereotypical perceptions of womanhood and the sweeping wave of conservatism that predominates in rural settings. Each finding will further be elaborated below.

The strong grip of patriarchy

A very significant factor that most of the participants discussed as an obstacle to their opportunities to lead and to become active members in their local communities was the patriarchal nature of Jordanian society. They talked extensively about the male-oriented culture that prevails in rural communities and the numerous challenges that women face if they choose to step out of the control of men in the family. Eighteen out of twenty women in Irbid and Mafraq perceive men as the 'gate-keepers' whom they cannot avoid in their bid for autonomy. Women's status (high or low) is seen to be defined by men. When women succeed, they attribute their success to a male figure in their lives, mostly their fathers, sometimes their husbands or a male "father figure" in the workplace. There was only one exception: a woman in Irbid who attributed her success to the support of her female relatives and friends. Men were supportive of women's empowerment and leadership as far as they see a benefit for themselves (economic for instance). The participants (in Irbid and Mafraq) have demonstrated strong awareness of their social positioning in

relation to men in their families. They discussed the power dynamics within their relationships with men and the social control that fathers, husbands, or older brothers can exert on the choices that women make. This is why the vast majority talked about diplomacy as the safest approach to gaining access to public sphere and achieving their goals in life. They talked about their abilities to negotiate with men in a manner that best suits their own interests and ambitions. In the employment of these tactics, the participants in Mafraq and Irbid were carefully bushing boundaries and normalizing their presence in public without posing a challenge to male authority.

Fourteen of the twenty participants (in Mafraq and Irbid) talked about the “unfair” competition they had encountered in their bid to assume a leadership role. Competition with men according to their narratives was based on manipulation, dishonesty, and blackmailing from the men’s side. Their qualifications and potential were further undermined. However, upon acquiring leadership positions, research participants were confronted with bullying, discrimination, and were in some cases subject to demotion. Nonetheless, the participants discussed how they manage these challenges diplomatically such as through negotiation and bargaining, rather than with confrontation, which they perceive as their survival mechanism. Realizing the serious consequences of defiance in what these women perceive as a man’s world, these mechanisms provide the safest options for progress. However, they discussed how these challenges in many cases deter women from pursuing a leadership role all together.

These acts of transgressions that these women face can be read in light of role congruity theory (2002) that refers to women’s and men’s to roles based on social expectations around gender. As leadership is associated with a particular set of traits that are socially perceived as masculine, women who aspire to become leaders are thus perceived negatively. This is mainly due to trespassing to what is socially and culturally attributed to

men. This “miss-match” between women’s social roles as caregivers and the social characteristics of leadership as masculine is responsible for the resistance that women face not only from men, but also from fellow women who have been socialized into these roles.

Despite all the challenges that women in the rural villages of Mafraq and Irbid face in becoming leaders, they see themselves as stronger networkers than men. They attribute their efficiency to their access to the private sphere of other families, a privilege that is not available to men. They discussed how they were able to build stronger connections and trust with their respective communities. The networking skills that they possess due to their gender and their access to other women can be regarded as new forms of negotiating power.

The prevalence of traditional perceptions of womanhood

The vast majority of the women interviewed in Irbid, Mafraq and Amman discussed what society expects of them as women. Although they varied in how they perceived these roles as ‘necessary’, they actively discussed their daily routine and explained how any activity that would involve them would have to be done after completing their responsibilities towards others. This includes all domestic chores (cooking, cleaning ...etc.) and childcare. It is interesting to note that despite being active participants in their local communities, the majority of the women interviewed were not able to break away from social and cultural expectations associated with their gender. The overwhelming majority of women perform their traditional roles of cooking, cleaning, washing, caring for the children on their own with very little contribution from the male figures in the family. More importantly, most of them were aware and are critical of how they are perceived socially and culturally. They were critical of traditional social and cultural views that cannot see them past their domestic roles.

Female participants did not see themselves as breaking away of their traditional gender roles as mothers, wives or daughters, but rather creating opportunities for themselves

within these constraints. Breaking down family structures and challenging traditional gender roles in conservative social contexts would have harmful repercussions; it would create dysfunction within families and make husbands reject any change according to their accounts. As such, participants talked about the necessity of building trust and confidence with male members in the family in order to diffuse the sense of threat towards their authority, so men could be supportive of their wives/mothers/sisters and daughters. The women therefore discussed how they would try to create opportunities for themselves, and become leaders within the constraints of their gender roles, often adopting double roles of homemakers as well as community leaders.

Despite the prevalence of numerous obstacles that hinders women's access to leadership on a macro-level, the majority of participants talked about women as their own enemies. "Women hold themselves back through a lack of pursuit of education, a lack of will power, a lack of understanding of their own rights. They lack self-confidence and a strong sense of belief in themselves. Some women perceived themselves to be less successful leaders than men", a woman in Mafraq complained. They also discussed how leadership begins with the self and the will to become an active member of society. Moreover, some participants talked about how women sometimes tend to restrict other women's empowerment and leadership opportunities, because of the challenge that such success poses to the way of life of other more traditional women with less freedom. According to role congruity theory, leadership qualities have been socially constructed as masculine and women who aspire to become leaders in a predominately traditional society, face great challenges. (Applebaum et al, 2003) refer to the paradox that women face due to gender socialization and their desire to assume a role that is perceived as masculine as a form of "cultural trap". This cultural trap is what a number of the participants struggle from. In their attempts to challenge existing norms and their ambitions to lead, some women internalize the

social perceptions around leadership and view such pursuits as undesirable or unsuitable for them.

Jordanian society has progressively become more conservative. However, this conservatism is more visible in rural settings. Many women find this 'modern'¹ trend as a debilitating factor to their ambitions to lead, as this new religious discourse is one that seeks to pull women out of the public sphere and back to the private one. Dominant religious views in Jordanian society and progressive perceptions of gender issues are often polarized and positioned as mutually exclusive. Because religion forms a fundamental aspect of Jordanian society, many women are finding it difficult to push forward a more liberal view of womanhood particularly in rural settings.

Based on the responses of the participants, this conservatism is restricting women's freedom and opportunities in participating in public life. It is striking that although many of the women interviewed talked about the negative atmosphere that this had on their ambitions and opportunities, the majority of these women internalized these restrictions. They would criticize the constraints that they are subjected to while actively engaging in re-solidifying those same constraints. There are women for instance, who passionately believe in active participation in public life, yet they restrict their interaction to females only (on religious grounds). This is taken a step further, where some women would even feel guilty about the freedoms they have previously enjoyed, perceiving these as going against their religion. A woman from Amman, returned to Jordan after performing pilgrimage in Mecca, felt guilty for previous freedoms she had enjoyed and decided that she would no longer travel to other countries without permission or unaccompanied by her husband or father. A similar case was with another woman from Mafraq who only travels abroad with her husband and finds women who travel on their own as going against tradition and religion. Others talk about the

¹ 'Modern' in the sense that it represents a recent phenomenon as opposed to a more liberal Jordanian society back in the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s.

restricted local mobility that they suffer from because of certain conservative beliefs. A woman in Mafraq talked about how her brother would accompany her to all her training workshops and perform his role as a guardian and a chaperon. One participant from Irbid, who is not veiled talked about the challenges and the series of compensations that she had to make simply because she was unveiled and working in a predominately-conservative rural society.

The pressure to conform to religious practices also comes from those around women, not just religious leaders or men, it can also be female relatives, and members of the community. This perhaps explains why the majority of the participants are comfortable leading when amongst other women. Women find it easier to participate and lead when in all-female or female-dominated contexts in order to avoid false accusations or to be perceived as rebellious. Women may also restrict others by instrumenting religion and tradition, claiming that women's empowerment opportunities are not good for society according to religion and customs. They may also remove moral support from other women who aspire to become leaders in their communities.

The majority of the participants view dominant culture and tradition as not supportive of women's leadership. Increasing religious conservatism, tribal identity and traditional roles are restricting women's opportunities, pulling them backward away from progress and participation in the public sphere. Women's leadership is most often perceived as going against tradition. This is why some women expressed their intentions to leave rural areas and governorates for Amman to escape the traditional pressures and restrictions on their freedom that they experience in these rural settings.

Tribalism and its impact on rural women's leadership opportunities

Tribalism is a defining feature of Jordanian society. Yet, its dynamics are highly visible in rural settings. It is often used as a discouraging factor disabling women from acquiring a leadership role. In this study, the majority of

women mentioned how tribalism restricts their chances to become effective members in their local communities.

Women face challenges in being accepted into leadership positions if they are not from the same community/ region/ or governorate (for instance they married into a different community). A head of a CBO in Mafraq, was told that she should not stand for member of Parliament because she was originally from Irbid, not Mafraq. This woman talked about the insider/outside paradigm that she had to face. Although she has been married into a tribe in Mafraq for more than 25 years, when she declared her intentions to run for Parliament, she was rejected and did not receive support from her local community on the basis that she was an outsider and thus could not represent their local community. Although this woman stated that her rejection was due to both gender and tribalism, she stressed the negative effects of the latter one. A similar case was experienced by another female leader in Mafraq, who talked about how she was neglected, marginalized and deprived from holding a leadership position at a higher level in her institution because of tribalism. With the exception of a very few, some discussed how tribalism can facilitate women's access to leadership positions in their communities, through connections and trust that they have established. Tribal identity can promote or restrict women's leadership; it can encourage women from the same tribe and discourage others who have married into it. Nonetheless, when women are restricted by tribal identity, it can motivate them to prove themselves to their new communities and succeed. Because of the dominant traditional and patriarchal nature of rural areas in Jordan, men who support women are often criticized. Men who support women's leadership are sometimes perceived negatively, as feminine for instance.

The lack of a genuine plan towards more female inclusion in public office.

Participants from Amman talked about how "Gender" has become a buzzword that is used strategically, rather than for the benefit of women. A gender component

according to their narratives is generally included in project proposals because organizations understand that it is what attracts international donors. However, when implementing their projects, local organizations, in most cases, do not comply with their research proposals and the donor does not always monitor whether implementing partners are complying with all the components of their proposal, particularly those related to enhanced female inclusion. The Gender Unit at the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, for instance, does not have the ability to systematically monitor gender mainstreaming in exiting emergency and developmental programs in Jordan. Despite organizing conferences, events and workshops organized for women's rights, leadership and empowerment, they fall short of institutionalizing "gender" in governmental entities. Research participants from Amman attributed this to the lack of a genuine and a consistent agenda to incorporate gender into their institutions' existing projects and policies.

Conclusion:

The nature of patriarchal societies and the traditional views that it harbors in terms of gender greatly affects women's lives. Women find themselves confronted with numerous obstacles on both a structural and social level. The predominance of patriarchal attitudes in rural societies restricts women's access to resources and poses a serious challenge to their ambitions to become leaders. Moreover, in rural areas, women leaders constantly have to renegotiate their roles in order to establish a balance between personal ambition, and social and cultural expectations.

This study aimed to investigate the major factors behind the considerably low representation of rural women in leadership position. The role of Jordanian women has always been instrumental in pushing forward developmental agendas on a local and a national level. Possessing the will and the capacity to trigger positive change in society, many Jordanian women strive to become active leaders in their local communities. While a few were able to overcome the social and cultural challenges of becoming a leader, many women remain

fearful and skeptical of stepping out into the public space.

The major obstacles that were extensively discussed by the participants was the presence of an overall environment that is not conducive to women's ambitions to become leaders. Patriarchy, tribalism and the prevalence of traditional and reductionist perceptions of womanhood were among the major factors behind the low visibility of women in leadership positions. Despite considerable variations in women's personalities and their attitudes to participation in public life, in the presence of these overall structural, social and cultural obstacles, their opportunities to lead will remain low.

In attempting to introduce solutions to this issue, governmental intervention becomes a necessity, with civil society support. The intervention could take the form of the following: rhetorical strategies², affirmative action programs³, and positive discrimination (Norris 2000). While some of these strategies have been implemented by the Jordanian government, more work is needed to include rural women in decision-making roles. As rural women are fundamental partners of the development of rural communities, they need to be represented and their decisions need to be heard.

² Rhetorical strategies are 'informal means of getting women to participate in decision-making structures articulated through political and other public speeches' (Kiamba 2008, p.17)

³ Affirmative action programs and meritocratic policies that aim to achieve fairness in recruitment by removing practical barriers that disadvantage women. Affirmative action programs provide training, advisory group goals, financial assistance, and monitoring of outcomes. Gender quotas may fall into this category if they are advisory in nature (Norris in Kiamba 2008, p.17).

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المراة والقيادة في المناطق الريفية الأردنية: (التحديات والفرص)

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الملخص

لم تدخر المراة الأردنية جهداً في محاولاتها لتولي مناصب قيادية في القطاعين الحكومي والخاص، ومع ازدياد تواجد المراة الأردنية في المناصب الإدارية العليا، لم يترجم هذا التمثيل دائماً إلى مزيد من التمثيل السياسي والمزيد من التأثير على التشريع لصالح المراة، وتمثلت الأهداف الرئيسية للدراسة في استكشاف العوامل المتنوعة التي تلعب دوراً مهماً في وصول المراة الأردنية إلى مناصب قيادية، ولاسيما تلك التي تقيم في المناطق الريفية، وركزت الدراسة على النساء في قرى إربد والمفرق. وتمت مقابلة عينة مستهدفة من سيدات هذه القرى إضافة إلى سيدات من عمان يمثلن مختلف المؤسسات الحكومية وغير الحكومية، وكانت التقاليد الاجتماعية المهيمنة والقبلية من بين العوامل الرئيسية وراء وصول المراة إلى المناصب القيادية داخل المجتمعات الريفية. ومع ذلك، تمكنت بعض النساء من التغلب على هذه العقبات من خلال تعزيز مهارات التواصل والتفاوض وتعزيز مهارتهن الشخصية. تهدف النتائج الواردة في هذه الدراسة إلى إطلاع صانعي السياسات على مكانة المراة من حيث شغل مناصب صنع القرار في الأردن والامتثال لأهداف التنمية المستدامة التي تستهدف المراة.

الكلمات الدالة: المراة، الأردن، القيادة، المناطق الريفية.

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