

Full Length Research

Women's Political Participation in Egypt: the Role of the National Council for Women

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The pivotal role of Egyptian women in recent revolutionary movements, represented in January 25 and June 30 revolutions, has been well documented. Ironically, after January 25 revolution, women's status in Egypt has regressed in the realm of civil rights, freedoms and equal representation. Despite the significant role of the National Council for Women (NCW) in the process of women empowerment in Egypt before the revolutions, its efforts had been somewhat limited. With upcoming parliamentary elections, the NCW is working to empower women to gain their rightful representation. This research endeavours to assess the effectiveness of the role of NCW in promoting women's political participation in the genesis of the revolutions, with special regards to the 2015 parliamentary elections. The research argues that the role of NCW is rather limited due to three factors: shortcomings within the NCW institutional framework; shortcomings within the Egyptian legal/constitutional framework; and shortcomings within the Egyptian societal and cultural heritage.

Key words: Women's Political Participation - National Council for Women - Parliamentary Elections – Egyptian Revolution.

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INTRODUCTION

The Arab Spring has once more revived women's aspirations in claiming their full rights and being an active actor in shaping the policies and the future of their countries. The pivotal role of Egyptian women in recent revolutionary movements, represented in January 25 and June 30 revolutions, has been well documented¹.

Egyptian women's zealous contribution in the revolutions stems from their conviction that it does not only constitute a means of overthrowing the oppressive regime, but will also rid them of the negative conventional image they have been stereotyped with, lacking any significant weight in shaping their country at present or in the future.

¹*Women and the Arab Spring: Taking their place?* (France: Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme, 2012), 16-25; and

مساهمة المرأة في الثورات العربية و مستقبلها (The Contribution of Women in the Arab Revolutions) (Egyptian Centre for women's Rights, 2013).

However, the new Egyptian political environment after January 25, has witnessed a lot of disturbances, which in return had its implications on women's rights¹. Ironically, women's status in Egypt has regressed in the realm of civil rights, freedoms and equal representation. Women have been denied their fair share of representation clinching only 2% of the 2012 parliament seats², in addition to the revocation of women's quota in the parliament by the 2012 and 2014 constitutions, while the 2014 constitution provided a quota for women only in the local councils³.

The empowerment of women is a comprehensive process that requires the cooperation of all state and civil society institutions. Thus, women empowerment policies

¹SallyIsaac, "In Egypt it is Not a Coup: Egyptians Restore Their Destiny", Milano: *Instituto Per Gli Studi Di Politica Internazionale* (2013); and Fatma El-Issawi, "The Arab Spring and the challenge of minority rights: will the Arab revolutions overcome the legacy of the past?", *European View* 10/2 (2011): 253, 257, accessed February 24, 2015, http://download.springer.com/static/pdf/651/art%253A10.1007%252Fs12290-011-0183-1.pdf?auth66=1415784915_acdb65c377db236c2c0be4684be1501b&ext=.pdf; and Mai M. Abdel Moneim, "علاقة الأقباط بالحياة السياسية المصرية" (Outside the Church: Coptic Relations with the Egyptian Political Life after January Revolution), Cairo: *International Politics (السياسة الدولية)* (2009), accessed June 30, 2014, <http://www.siyassa.org/NewsQ/2208.aspx>; and Mohamed A. Youness, "قراءة في نتائج الجولة الأولى للانتخابات البرلمانية المصرية" (Islamic Progression and Civic Regression: A Reading in the first round of the Egyptian parliamentary election results), Cairo: *International Politic (السياسة الدولية)* (2011a), accessed June 30, 2014, <http://www.siyassa.org/NewsContent/2/107/1918-تحليلات/مصر/تقدم-إسلامي-وتراجع-مدني.aspx>; and Emily Dyer, "Marginalizing Egyptian Women: The Restriction of Women's Rights Under the Muslim Brotherhood", London: *The Henry Jackson society* (2013), accessed October 12, 2014, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Marginalising-Egyptian-Women.pdf>; and Mariz Tadros, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt: Democracy Refined or Confined?* (Oxford: Routledge, 2012).

²Emily Dyer, Op.Cit., 61f; and Laila El Baradei, and Dina Wafa, "Women in the Second Egyptian Parliament Post the Arab Spring: Do They Think They Stand a Chance?". *Journal of International Women's Studies* 14/3 (2013): 43, accessed February 24, 2015, <http://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1713&context=jiws>; and Nihad Abol-Qomsan, *Egyptian Women's Status Report in 2013* (The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights, 2014), accessed February 24, 2015. <http://ecwronline.org/?p=4578>.

³*Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt 2014*, Article 11& 180, accessed February 24, 2015, <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Newvr/Dustor-en001.pdf>; and *Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt 2012*, accessed February 24, 2015, <http://www.icnl.org/research/library/files/Egypt/Const-2012-en.pdf>.

put emphasis on the principle of partnership and cooperation between the government and civil society, with regard to the formulation, implementation and evaluation of such policies. From this context, came the establishment of the National Council for Women (NCW) in 2000, as a government institution -to work hand-in-hand with other civil society organisations- through which decision makers pay attention to the issues of gender gaps and the empowerment of women socially, economically and politically⁴. Before the revolution of January 25, the National Council for Women (NCW) has been recognised as one of the major political actors in the process of women empowerment in Egypt. However, the efforts of the council had been somewhat limited, due to the fact that the Council took a neutral position from all candidates, and thus, they were not able to win on their own⁵ in addition to the cultural and social heritage of discrimination against women⁶. Consequently, the percentage of the representation of women in the Parliament was very disappointing⁷.

With the upcoming 2015 parliamentary elections, women organisations in Egypt, led by the NCW, are working to gain their rightful representation. The upcoming elections as the first parliamentary election to take place after the revolution of June 30, represents a watershed in women's political participation as a decision maker. With this regard, the NCW is placing a greater emphasis and an increasing role, as compared to the previous elections⁸, for example, facilitating women's acquisition of voting cards -which was a prerequisite for voting in elections- and national ID cards⁹.

This research endeavours to assess the effectiveness

⁴*Decree of the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt Number 90 of year 2000*, accessed February 24, 2015, <http://ncwegypt.com/index.php/en/about-ncw/presidential-decree>.

⁵An observation made by Amany A. Khodair, as a former member in the NCW from 2005 to 2010.

⁶Bassant Hassib, *The EU's Role in Promoting Women's Rights in Egypt: Assessing the Effectiveness of the EIDHR Campaign for Women Judges in Egypt* (Saarbrücken: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2014), 4.

⁷Wafaa Dawood, 'المرأة المصرية في ضوء الانتخابات البرلمانية' (Egyptian Women in Light of Parliamentary Elections), *Al Ahram Digital*, October 1, 2010, accessed February 24, 2015, <http://digital.ahram.org/articles.aspx?Serial=341298&eid=5608>; and Nihad Abol-Qomsan, Op.Cit.

⁸Isis Hafez, *صباح الخير يا مصر* (Good Morning Egypt), Channel One., TV Interview, February 5, 2015; and Mona Omar, former Secretary General of the NCW, personal communication, February 18, 2015.

⁹*National Report for the Arab Republic of Egypt: Beijing +20* (National Council for Women, 2014), 7, accessed February 24, 2015, <http://www.escwa.un.org/sites/BeijingPlus20/docs/EgyptAR.pdf>.

of the role of NCW in promoting women's political participation in the genesis of the revolutions, with special regards to the 2015 parliamentary elections. The study focuses on the evaluation of the objectives, instruments, and the implementation of activities and initiatives of the NCW in enabling and empowering women to run for the 2015 parliamentary elections. In addition, the study highlights the futility of interaction between the NCW and governmental institutions as well as other civil society institutions concerned with the empowerment of women and gender equality. This research sheds the light on the main factors influencing the effectiveness and the degree of impact of the NCW in promoting women's political participation, providing a set of recommendations through which the NCW, state institutions, and civil society organisations can enhance women's participation, reduce gender gaps, and eliminate discrimination against women. The research argues that the role of NCW is rather limited due to three factors: shortcomings within the NCW institutional framework; shortcomings within the Egyptian legal/constitutional framework and shortcomings within the Egyptian societal and cultural heritage.

METHODOLOGY

The study uses the "institutional approach"¹ as the main theoretical approach to the research. Approaching the study from an institutional perspective implies investigating the way how institutions affect policy outcomes by the way of their functioning, their way of interaction and the effects of institutions on the society². Thus, this study looks into how the NCW as an institution interacts with other governmental and non-governmental institutions, in shaping the perception of the society on the importance of women's rights in general and women's political participation in particular, in reducing gender gaps and discrimination against women, and in empowering women to take up decision making positions. This is going to be analysed in terms of the policies and objectives; the instruments; the implementation; and the impact.

Regarding data collection, the study encompasses qualitative and quantitative analysis, depending on primary data-collection, through interviewing the key decision makers in the NCW, and surveying NCW members and executives, as well as the target

beneficiaries; in addition to the use of academic literature, articles, and reports as secondary sources for the research.

The Status of Women's Political Participation in Egypt

Before the 2011 revolution, the Egyptian government took some steps to enhance women's participation in political, economic and social life. However, achievements with regard to eliminating discrimination and women's political participation were rather modest³. According to the report of the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights, the number of women candidates nominated by political parties for the 2008 local council elections, were shamefully very low; accordingly only 2335 women were elected, totalling 4.4% of the total local council members⁴. Similarly, the 2008 report of the International Parliamentary Union on Women's Status ranks Egypt 134 in women's participation in parliament out of 188 countries⁵.

The law on the people's assembly was amended in June 2009, so that women were entitled to an additional reserved 64 seats. The total number of seats in the Parliament increased from 454 to 518, which means women were allocated 12% of the seats⁶. However, the number of female candidates remained very low. In the 2010 parliamentary elections, from the 4,000 registered candidates, 378 were women, most of them running for the 64 women's quota seats⁷.

Women's vivid role in the 2011 Egyptian revolution, gave them a new hope in claiming their full rights and being an active participators in the political life. Nevertheless, women's status in Egypt has regressed in the realm of civil rights, freedoms and equal representation, especially after the Muslim Brotherhood

³Bassant Hassib (2014) Op.Cit., 24.

⁴Nehad Aboul Komsan, *Egyptian Women's Status Report 2008* (The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights, 2009), accessed February 24, 2015, <http://ecwronline.org/?p=4565>.

⁵Ibid.

⁶European Commission, *Implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy in 2009: Progress Report Egypt*, Brussels, SEC (2010), 9, accessed February 24, 2015, http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/progress2010/sec10_517_en.pdf.

⁷Amr Hamzay and Michele Dunne, "The Egyptian Parliamentary Elections: Facts and Figures", Washington, DC: *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (2010), accessed December 1, 2010, <http://egyptelections.carnegieendowment.org/2010/11/28/the-egyptian-parliamentary-elections-facts-and-figures>.

¹Philip Selznick, "Foundations of the Theory of Organizations", *American Sociological Review* 13 (1948): 25-35; and B. Guy Peters, *Institutional Theory in Political Science: the New Institutionalism* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

²Kamal El Monoufy, *Introduction to Research Methods in Political Science* (Cairo: Alam-El Kotob, 2006).

(MB) won the majority of Parliamentary seats¹ and assumed most of the major offices in the Cabinet, following the holding of Morsi (the MB's candidate) the Egyptian Presidency². One indicator for the undermined inclusion of women was the MB's 2012 constitution that did not safeguard the rights of women; for example the revocation of women's quota in the parliament, also by the 2014 constitution³. In addition, women have been denied their fair share of representation clinching only 2% (only 6 women) of the 2012 parliament seats⁴; while 12% of seats were preserved solely for women in the 2010 parliamentary elections during Mubarak era⁵. Moreover, the parliamentarian Azza El Garf from the MB's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) further stated "women had not yet proven themselves competent enough to be appointed"⁶. This issue has provoked furious responses as Mervat El Talawy, the President of the NCW, for example stated "How come after a revolution a constitution is formed with no justice for women?"⁷. Similarly, during the MB rule women were not given leadership positions, neither in Shura Council nor the Supreme Guide of the MB, with the exception of few older women to run for parliamentary seats such as Azza

Al Garf⁸. Moreover, even political parties –including progressive leftist parties like Al Tagamma- did not provide support for women to be involved in and run for the parliamentary elections. This also goes back to the culture of male-domination, as some female candidates were not allowed by their husbands to participate in the elections⁹. This issue was very obvious during a conference on "Women from the Revolution to Renaissance" on July 2, 2011, where Camillia Helmy, a member of the executive office of FJP and also the director of International Islamic Committee for Women and Child (IIC)¹⁰, were advising fellow Muslim Sisters (female members of the MB) to focus on their role as homemakers and wives and not to engage in the political life- at a time where Egyptian women were striving for gender equality and involvement in public life¹¹. "This demonstrates the gap that exists between the realities and needs of Egyptian women after the revolution and political leadership of the MB, political parties, and the Muslim Sisters as well"¹².

After June 30 revolution and the ousting of the MB rule, a new Constitution was written in 2014¹³ after Field Marshal Abdel Fattah El Sisi became president. The Egyptian woman has made some gains after the June 30 revolution; she is represented in the Committee of 50 (Ambassador Mervat El Telawy, Dr. Azza Al Ashmawi and others), which drafted the Constitution¹⁴. In addition, women's awareness has increased with regard to whom to elect, after witnessing a great regression on their rights and the terrorist acts done by the MB¹⁵.

The new constitution has paid a special attention to women, in both the preamble and the articles, stressing that women are not only part of the society, but they are half the society and the basis of the family, pointing at its active role and strong participation in the January 25 and June 30 revolutions. From this standpoint, the constitution has provided protection to women's rights, through specifying more than one article tackling women's issues. This step is considered as an important development to highlight and stress on the importance of

¹Mohamed A Youness, "الدلالات السياسية لنتائج الجولة الثانية للانتخابات البرلمانية" (Islamic Superiority: Political Implications of the Results of the Second Round of the Parliamentary Elections in Egypt), Cairo: *International Politics (السياسة الدولية)* (2011b), accessed June 30, 2014, <http://www.siyassa.org.eg/NewsQ/2003.aspx>.

²Mohamed A Youness, "استحقاقات أول رئيس مدني للجمهورية الثانية في مصر" (Tough Tests: Benefits of the First Civil President of the Second Republic in Egypt), Cairo: *International Politics (السياسة الدولية)* (2012), accessed June 30, 2014, <http://www.siyassa.org.eg/NewsContent/2/107/2525/-/تحليلات/مصر-اختبارات-صعبة.aspx>; and "Muslim Brotherhood's Mursi declared Egypt president", *BBC News Middle East*, June 24, 2012, accessed November 8, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-18571580>.

³*Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt 2012*, Op.Cit.

⁴Rana Allam, "On women in Egypt: Equality doesn't mean justice", *Daily News Egypt*, February 24, 2014, Accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.dailynewsegyp.com/2014/02/24/women-egypt-equality-doesnt-mean-justice/>.

⁵Emily Dyer, Op.Cit., 61f.; and Laila El Baradei, and Dina Wafa, Op.Cit., 43; and Nihad Abol-Qomsan, Op.Cit.

⁶Emily Dyer, Op.Cit., 61f.

⁷Ghada Maher, "التلاوي تحث على إلغاء الكوتة من الدستور الجديد" (El Talawy Objects the Abolition of the Quota in the New Constitution), *Al Wafd*, November 5, 2013, accessed August 4, 2014, <http://www.alwafd.org/-إلغاء-الكوتة-من-الدستور-الجديد-عاجلة-567440-التلاوي-تحث-على-إلغاء-الكوتة-من-الدستور-الجديد>.

⁸Bassant Hassib, "The Role of the European Union in Promoting Democracy and Human Rights in Egypt Post 2011: Case Study: Assessing the Effectiveness of the Civil Society Facility Initiative in Egypt" (work in progress).

⁹Mariz Tadros, Op.Cit.

¹⁰Mariz Tadros, Op.Cit., 124; and Amany Maged, "مجلس الهانم يثير غضب" (The Lady's Council Enrages the Party of the Muslim Brotherhood), *Al Ahram*, February 14, 2012, accessed November 8, 2014, <http://www.ahram.org.eg/archive/Al-Mashhad-Al-Siyassy/News/131037.aspx>

¹¹Mariz Tadros, Op.Cit., 130ff.

¹²Bassant Hassib (work in progress), Op.Cit.

¹³*Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt 2014*, Op.Cit

¹⁴Mona Omar, Op.Cit.

¹⁵Isis Hafez, Op.Cit.

the role of women in the state and society without discrimination or exclusion.

Women shall benefit from all the articles of the constitution, where it placed a great emphasis on the principle of "citizenship", and on ending and criminalising all forms of discrimination- a matter that women used to suffer from. According to Article 9, "the State shall ensure equal opportunities for all citizens without discrimination". Also, Article 11 states, "the State shall ensure the achievement of equality between women and men in all civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution". In addition, Article 53 states, "all citizens are equal before the Law. They are equal in rights, freedoms and general duties, without discrimination based on religion, belief, sex, origin, race, colour, language, disability, social class, political or geographic affiliation or any other reason. Discrimination and incitement of hatred is a crime punished by Law. The State shall take necessary measures for eliminating all forms of discrimination, and the Law shall regulate creating an independent commission for this purpose".

Regarding political participation, the constitution was keen that the state protects the right of women in the political participation and in holding public positions, as Article 11 states, "the State shall take the necessary measures to ensure the appropriate representation of women in the houses of representatives, as specified by Law. The State shall also guarantee women's right of holding public and senior management offices in the State and their appointment in judicial bodies and authorities without discrimination". In addition, according to Article 180, the constitution has also allocated quarter of the number of seats in local councils solely for women, which is equivalent to 13,000 seats.

However, women right's defender criticized this article by not specifying a quota for women in the Parliament, which they considered a setback in the realm of women's political representation¹. Similarly, Ambassador Mona Omar, former Secretary General of the NCW is completely unsatisfied with the situation of women in the Constitution. Despite that she is against the quota, as she believes that having specific provisions for women are considered a kind of discrimination against them, as we do not find, for example, provisions specifying the rights of men to have leadership position she stressed that "the

¹Mona Omar, Op.Cit.; and Sarah El-Rashidi, "Egyptian Women Campaign for Larger Role in Parliament", *Al-Monitor*, April 24, 2014, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/04/egypt-women-dostour-parliament-rights.html#>; and Horeya T Megahed, "Egyptian Women and the New Constitution", *International Alliance of Women*, May 2, 2014, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://womenalliance.org/egyptian-women-and-the-new-constitution>.

current situation of women in our society dictates an implementation of a quota system" also she stressed on the need of a quota for women in the municipalities because she believes that the role of women in the community is more important. "My hope is to have a provision for equality between men and women with no discrimination"².

The National Council for Women: An Overview

The NCW was established by a Presidential Decree No. 90 of the year 2000, which set the council's headquarters in Cairo, consisting of thirty members from the public figures and experts in women affairs and social work, with a three years term of membership and renewable³.

The NCW has set a number of objectives in empowering women in the political domain. To implement such objectives in the genesis of the 25th of January revolution, the NCW has set a number of activities to be carried out in different scopes. Regarding Media and Culture, the NCW shall work on improving women's image in media (TV drama, programmes and the press) in order to enhance the culture of equality and to jointly work with media institutions to eliminate the negative stereotypes in the society regarding the image of women. This is to be done by portraying the real image of women and their existence as political and legal actors in the society⁴. In this regard the NCW created a 'Media Watch Unit' to monitor media messages related to women and to recommend corrective measures to further enhance the status of Egyptian women. In addition the NCW has been sponsoring short films, snapshots and messages to create awareness and to target special groups such as the Bedouin or rural communities or those living in Upper Egypt⁵.

"To this effect, the Radio and Television administration allocated LE 3 million to raise awareness of women's issues, gender equality and the importance of changing the negative portrayal of women. The Radio and Television Union established a specialized Women's

²Mona Omar, Op.Cit.

³Decree of the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt Number 90 of year 2000, Op.Cit.

⁴"The E-network Information Portal for National Gender Equality Machineries in Africa: Profile of National Gender Machineries – Egypt", *United Nations Economic Commission for Africa*, last modified 2012, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www1.uneca.org/ngm/ProfilesofNationalGenderMachineriesEgyp.aspx>.

⁵*Egypt* (United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 2004), 15, accessed February 24, 2015, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/responses/EGYPT-English.pdf>.

Committee responsible for setting national strategies, plans and programmes plans to enhance women's status and their empowerment"¹

Moreover, The NCW in cooperation with Radio and Television Broadcasting Services launched a media campaign in 2003 called 'Women Development Enhancement via Awareness Campaigns'. The campaign aimed at raising women's awareness about their rights and the available services provided by institutions working on the advancement of women. Similarly, the NCW in collaboration with The Ministry of Culture held several awareness raising seminars and workshops on issue at hand, in addition to the training programmes provided by the NCW to influential media personnel to increase their awareness of the role of women in society and of women's issues².

Despite the huge emphasis of the NCW on using the Media mechanism in portraying the prominent figures of women³, and despite the fact that "The number of women occupying high-managerial posts in media, heads of television channels is larger than the number of men"⁴; there were inconsistencies in portraying women in TV programmes, in addition to the non-awareness of those working in media (including women) on gender aspects of development⁵. Moreover, the social and cultural inherited traditions, particularly in rural areas, still perceive women from a negative perspective.

After the 25th of January revolution, the NCW continued to exert efforts in the media to raise the awareness of the society of the role of women and the problems they face⁶.

Regarding Religious and Legal Institutions, the NCW shall present the real image of women as portrayed in the Islamic religion, by cooperating with Al-Azhar, Dar El Ifta and civil society organizations to emphasis on the correct religious perceptions on women and present them to the society through authorised religious discourses⁷. In this

regard, the NCW during drafting the 2012 Constitution sent to the Constituent Assembly, which was responsible for the drafting, all the points addressing the religious and constitutional perceptions of women that should be included in the new constitution. After the issuance of the draft constitution, the NCW held a press conference under the name of 'Egyptian women reject the content of the draft constitution' in which the comments and opinions of the NCW, political forces and civil society organisations were highlighted. Moreover, the NCW and Al Azhar agreed to issue a document defining the status of women in Islam and their rights and duties as prescribed by the Islamic Sharia⁸

Regarding political awareness and participation, the Council has stipulated specific objectives. First, Supporting women's participation in the formulation of all forms of legislations-constitutional, legislations or regulations. Second, NCW should work to introduce new legislations to the elections of the People's Assembly, The Shura Council, local councils, student unions, labour syndicates, sports clubs and associations to apply the proportional lists system in these elections (not less than 30%). Third, raising awareness of the importance of participation, volunteer work and the culture of equality; through a civic and educational program to be offered to women. Fourth, enhancing women's role in leadership and decision-making circles; through highlighting the success stories of women in different fields and helping women overcome the administrative problems they face in their way to assume leadership positions⁹. In this regard, the NCW has established the Centre for the Political Empowerment of Women, which aimed at preparing a cadre of trained women to run for parliamentary elections in 2005 and local council elections in 2006 by providing them with specialized technical and managerial skills. A special awareness-raising programme on the importance of the role of women in society was jointly carried with the Ministry of Culture, in the form of Political Forums throughout the country¹⁰. However, the percentage of the representation of women in the Parliament was very disappointing, only 1.5% of the 2005 Parliament were women. This was due to several factors: First, the NCW took a neutral position from all candidates, and did not support specific qualified candidates thus; they were not able to win on their own¹¹. Second, the cost of running campaigns is very high. Women candidates cannot in the majority of cases meet

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Amany A Khodair and Salwa Farrag, "صورة المرأة كما تعكسها وسائل الإعلام المحلية و أثرها على إدراك الجمهور للواقع الاجتماعي لها: دراسة تحليلية ميدانية مقارنة" (Women's Image Reflection by Local Media and Its Impact on the Audience's perception of the Social Reality: A Comparative Analytical Field Study), Ismailia: *The National Council for Women* (2006).

⁴*Egypt*, Op.Cit., 15.

⁵Ibid., 15f.

⁶*Brief Report on the Activities of the NCW until the Mid of December 2012* (National Council for Women, 2013), accessed February 24, 2015, http://www.ncwegypt.com/index.php/en/download/doc_download/19-brief-report-on-the-activities-of-ncw-until-mid-december-2012.

⁷"The E-network Information Portal for National Gender Equality Machineries in Africa: Profile of National Gender Machineries – Egypt", Op.Cit.

⁸*Brief Report on the Activities of the NCW until the Mid of December 2013*, Op.Cit.

⁹"The E-network Information Portal for National Gender Equality Machineries in Africa: Profile of National Gender Machineries – Egypt", Op.Cit.

¹⁰*Egypt*, Op.Cit., 12.

¹¹An observation made by Amany A. Khodair, as a former member in the NCW from 2005 to 2010.

such cost¹. Third, the prevalence of cultural and social heritage of discrimination against women, where there is a societal perceptions regarding the traditional division of labour, where women are seen as bound to certain functions only, are major barriers hindering women's political participation. In addition to the problem of "glass ceiling" that hampers women's access to high-level positions².

After the 25th of January revolution, the Council's efforts were complemented by the efforts of other civil society and non-governmental organisations working in the field of women, in facilitating women's acquisition of national digital ID, to enable them to be eligible to vote in elections. This is one of the on-going projects through which 2,700,000 IDs have been issued. More IDs are to be issued in cooperation with some institutions, ministries and civil society organizations³. In addition, training programmes were given to prepare women cadres to hold decision-making posts especially in the local council elections. "The number of courses over the period covered by the report is 16 conducted in 9 governorates and benefiting 406 trainees"⁴.

Once more, despite such efforts and for the same reasons mentioned above, women's political status in Egypt has regressed, especially after the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) won the majority of Parliamentary seats; with a representation of only 6 women in the 2012 Parliament.

The Role of the National Council for Women in the Upcoming 2015 Parliamentary Elections

With the upcoming 2015 parliamentary elections, the NCW in collaboration with state institutions and women organisations, are working to gain their rightful representation by enabling women to participate in the upcoming parliament, as candidates and voters. Such role varies from holding awareness campaigns in collaboration with media and religious institutions, with special focus on remote governorates and villages; and providing qualifying training courses for the selected women candidates to empower them with the tools needed to run for parliamentary elections.

The main activities of the NCW are divided into two stages, a stage before the conduct of elections and a stage after the elections. The first stage is divided into two parts; first, the NCW through media institutions, universities and political parties, made announcements and calls for women who wish to run for parliamentary

elections. In addition, the council investigated through the 27 council branches in different governorates for women cadres who wish to become parliamentary candidates. Then, a specialised committee was formed, chaired by Ambassador Mervat El Talawy, to choose the most eligible candidates, based on specific benchmarks, such as the societal activities, the ability for services providence, the political awareness and background, and constitutional awareness and familiarity with the laws. The committee held interviews with all applicants and shortlisted 200 candidates. The NCW presented the 200 shortlisted candidates to all the political parties and coalitions wishing to nominate women cadres for the next parliament. Moreover, after the assertion of President Abdel Fattah El Sisi to allocate 14 seats for women from the seats to be chosen by him⁵, the NCW has sent another list chosen from the 200 candidates to the President to refer to it when choosing the appointed seats. The Council's target is to have at least 100 female parliamentarians in the next parliament. The second part encompasses the qualifying activities for the candidates and the voters. First, the Council held several training programmes for the candidates, to train them on the preparations to compete in the elections, including the skills to manage election campaigns, communication skills with voters, familiarity and awareness with the role of the High Elections Committee and the constitutional articles and the different laws. Second, the Council held several awareness campaigns and conferences targeting the voters from the different governorates and villages especially in Upper Egypt, to highlight the importance of women empowerment by voting for them. Isis Hafez, the Training Manager at the NCW, highlighted that those target beneficiaries were used by the MB in the previous 2012 Parliament to gain their support in matters that are against women's issues such as legalizing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and decriminalizing sexual harassment. What is new about awareness campaigns this year is that the NCW paid more attention on villages and Upper Egypt, for example El Baroud Village in Qena Governorate⁶. Such awareness campaigns included the participation of prominent religious men from Al Azhar and prominent law and political science professors. Third, the NCW held several training campaigns targeting youth (300) on how to monitor the election process, women election committees, and the role of women in participating in the coming elections. The second stage of the activities includes establishing a unit to support women candidates after winning the elections called 'Unit for Supporting Members of Parliament'. The Unit aims to support women's performance in Parliament, by training them on preparing/drafting questions and inquiries,

¹Egypt, Op.Cit., 13.

²Bassant Hassib (2014) Op.Cit., 4; and Egypt, Op.Cit., 13.

³Brief Report on the Activities of the NCW until the Mid of December 2013, Op.Cit.

⁴Ibid.

⁵ Article 102 of the Constitution guarantees the President's right to appoint 5% of the members of the parliament.

⁶Isis Hafez, Op.Cit.

presenting their opinions and expressing different points of view¹.

Despite the promising efforts and activities of the NCW in empowering women in the political participation, a lot of drawbacks and obstacles that limit the effectiveness of the role of the NCW, are still in existence. First, there is still a societal and cultural problem in Egypt, which hinders the political participation of women. Ambassador Mona Omar stated

“We still have a societal problem in Egypt with regards to women. Yes, there has been progress but we still have a long way to go. The situation of women suffered from a serious setback during the reign of the Muslim Brotherhood, but the 30 June Revolution reformed what has been damaged. Nevertheless, we are still suffering from stereotypes towards women even in state appointments. When forming the cabinet, women obtain a small and marginal ministerial portfolios, in addition, we do not have single woman as a governor until this day”²

Moreover, when the NCW presented the list of the 200 candidates to all political actors and parties, unfortunately only two or three names have benefited from it due to their individual efforts and not because of the support they gained from their parties³.

Second, obstacles related to the legal/constitutional framework. The Constituency Division Law (which organises the division of electoral districts) fails to ensure equal representation for voters in different constituencies⁴. “The Constituency Division Law is not supportive to women”⁵. In addition this law is not in line with Article 102 of the Constitution which states “the division of constituencies shall be defined by the law, taking into account the fair representation of constituencies and governorates and the equitable representation of voters”⁶; a matter that leads to the verdict of the Supreme Constitutional Court on 1 March 2015, deeming Article 3 in Presidential Decree Law 202 for 2014 unconstitutional, and in effect postponing parliament elections⁷. This in addition to the non-inclusion of a parliamentary quota system for women in the

¹Isis Hafez, Op.Cit.; and Mona Omar, Op.Cit.; and “NCW Training Programs”, National Council for Women, last modified February 22, 2015, accessed March 20, 2015. <http://ncwegypt.com/index.php/ar/media-centre/ncw-news/145-2013-02-25-07-17-01>.

²Mona Omar, Op.Cit.

³ Ibid.

⁴“Court Rules Election Laws Unconstitutional, Parliament Elections Postponed”, *Mada Masr*, March 1, 2015, accessed March 24, 2015, <http://www.madamasr.com/news/court-rules-election-laws-unconstitutional-parliament-elections-postponed>.

⁵Mona Omar, Op.Cit

⁶*Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt 2014*, Op.Cit., Article 102.

⁷“Court Rules Election Laws Unconstitutional, Parliament Elections Postponed”, Op.Cit.

constitution –as mentioned earlier- a matter that does not safeguard a fair representation of women in the parliament.

Third, there are still drawbacks related to the NCW institutional capacity. The performance of the NCW has not been up to the standard with regards to attracting women cadres. Ambassador Mona Omar highlighted has highlighted this issue, mentioning that governorates have strong women cadres but the Council has failed to embrace them. In addition, the role of the Council has been and still is educational only, as the Council does not have a specific financial envelop in its budget to financially support specific women candidates to enable them to meet the high costs of running election campaigns. Moreover, The Council is careful to take a neutral and non-partisan position towards all candidates, a matter that is taken by some to be weakness in supporting candidates. Another major shortcoming within the NCW institutional framework is the fact that some governorates gain more support and attention from others, and this is due to the way personnel are chosen. They are chosen on the basis of trust and not on the basis of qualifications and experience, with the existence of the “gate keeper” phenomena in the NCW structural framework. In that regard, Ambassador Mona Omar stressed that

“The Council must have an executive role and an adequate budget that matches the importance of its role. Also, there must be a general reform in its administrative structure, and to renounce its past legacy which focused on formalities and routine and failed to tackle problems boldly and deeply”⁸

Quantitative Analysis

This part aims at analysing the results of investigating the relationship between the role of the NCW and empowering women to enter the 2015 parliamentary elections, through surveying NCW members and executives, as well as the target beneficiaries.

The population and surveyed sample

Sampling tables used to determine the sample size (285)⁹, which is corresponding to a population size of 1100.

- Pilot Test and Survey Respondents

234 questionnaires for the survey were returned from the

⁸Mona Omar, Op.Cit

⁹Uma Sekaran, *Research Methods for Business. A skill building approach*, 3rd edition, (New York: JohnWiley, 2000).

surveyed sample; 30 from the service providers (members of NCW at regional governorates) and 204 from the service recipients (women cadres and activists). This represents a response rate of 82.1%. The goodness and validity of response data is accomplished through conducting Reliability Test using the Cronbach's Alpha¹. The SPSS reliability analysis was performed separately for the indicators of each scale.

Data Analysis Methods

- Descriptive analysis

In order to analyse the results of the measured data, basic descriptive statistics were conducted to ensure that the distortion of the questionnaire responses outputs was negligible. The descriptive analysis results illustrated that the standard deviation is not large which revealed that there is only a weak distortion of the collected data for all variables. These results imply the homogeneity of the surveyed sample.

1- Service recipients Descriptive analysis:

- 77.35% of the sample strongly agreed that NCW should be able to offer financial aid in supporting women to contest parliamentary elections. 75.73% of the sample expects the NCW to play a significant positive role in the empowerment of Egyptian women during the next elections. 75.13% of the sample believes that awareness campaigns provided by NCW would increase the ability of women to contest the next parliamentary elections. 35.47% of the sample thinks that NCW budget allocated for women empowerment is not enough. 63.76% of the sample believes that NCW gives equal support to candidates from all governorates.
- 81.03% of the sample strongly agrees that intellectual level and education affects voter's decision to support women candidates. 79.23% of the sample asserted that Egyptian women's political empowerment depends on the success/effectiveness of the role played by the NCW. 78.72% of the sample thinks that dealing with the negative aspects of the culture should be one of the main tasks of the NCW. 33.16% of the sample thinks that both the voluntary and obligatory party quota system do not suit the Egyptian society, while 70.39% of the sample regard the Constitutional quota system to be more appropriate for the Egyptian society. 29.15% of the sample considered the Constituency Division Law to be unsupportive for women's right to contest the upcoming elections.

2- Service providers Descriptive analysis:

- 86.25% of the sample strongly agrees that the NCW plays a role in empowering Egyptian women. This was asserted by expectance of 82.5% of the sample that the NCW would play a significant positive role in the political empowerment of women in the upcoming 2015 elections. 82.5% of the sample believes that awareness campaigns provided by NCW would increase the ability of women to contest the next parliamentary elections. Almost 50% of the sample believes that NCW does not support specific candidates, while 61.88% of the sample believes that NCW selects candidates based on their political affiliation.
- 88.75% of the sample considered the decision of President Abdel Fattah El Sisi to allocate 14 seats for women from the seats to be chosen by him, as a kind of voluntary quota system. 86.25% of the sample asserted that Egyptian women's political empowerment depends on the success/effectiveness of the role played by the NCW. Similar to the recipients, 66.88% of the sample regards the Constitutional quota system to be more appropriate for the Egyptian society. 35.62% of the sample considered the Constituency Division Law to be unsupportive for women's right to contest the upcoming elections.

Verifying the Hypothesis

H1: The role of the NCW is expected to have a strong significant positive relationship with empowering women to enter the parliamentary elections.

Regression Model Analysis

Simple linear regression analysis is used to investigate the effect of the role of the NCW (x_1) on empowering women to enter the parliamentary elections (y). The results are listed below.

- Model (1) service recipients

The model coefficient of determination (R-square) equals 47.7%, which means that the role of the NCW explains 47.7% of the variation in empowering women to enter the parliamentary elections. These results support the relationship between the role of the NCW and empowering women to enter the parliamentary elections.

The simple regression equation is created from the "Unstandardized Coefficients" in the coefficients table. The p-values (0.0) is less than 0.05 which reveals that the role of the NCW makes a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the empowering women to enter the parliamentary elections.

¹Uma Sekaran, *Research Methods for Business*, 4th edition. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003).

Model (1) discussion

Finally, it could be concluded that a simple linear regression is calculated predicting y based on x_1 . A significant regression equation was found ($F(1, 232)$, $p < 0.05$), with an R-square of 47.7 % and $R = 0.691$. These results provide an empirical evidence for verifying the hypothesis (H1), which supports that the role of the NCW has a significant positive relationship with empowering women to enter the parliamentary elections.

- Model (2) service providers

The model coefficient of determination (R-square) equals 12.6%, which means that the role of the NCW explains 12.6% only of the variation in empowering women to enter the parliamentary elections. These results support the relationship between the role of the NCW and empowering women to enter the parliamentary elections.

The simple regression equation is created from the "Unstandardized Coefficients" in the coefficients table. The p -values (0.0) is less than 0.05 which reveals that the role of the NCW makes a significant contribution to the prediction of the empowering women to enter the parliamentary elections.

Model (2) discussion

Finally, it could be concluded that a simple linear regression is calculated predicting y based on x_1 . A significant regression equation was found ($F(1, 30)$, $p < 0.05$), with an R-square of 12.6 % and $R = 0.355$. These results provide an empirical evidence for verifying the hypothesis (H1), which supports that the role of the NCW has a moderate significant positive relationship with empowering women to enter the parliamentary elections.

Comparison between service recipients and service provider

T-test was performed to test the difference between opinions of service recipients and service providers on the role of the NCW in empowering women to enter the parliamentary elections¹. Since the $\text{sig} = (0.139) > \alpha = 0.05$ so we can conclude that there is no significant difference between service recipients and service provider on the role of the NCW in empowering women to enter the parliamentary elections.

¹Douglas Lind et al. *Basic Statistics for Business and Economics*, (McGraw-Hill Ryerson Higher Education, 2010)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After investigating the role of NCW in promoting women's political participation in the genesis of the revolutions, with special regards to the 2015 parliamentary elections; one can conclude that the NCW plays a significant role in empowering women's political participation. However, the effectiveness of this role is rather limited due to three factors: shortcomings within the NCW institutional framework; shortcomings within the Egyptian legal/constitutional framework' and shortcomings within the Egyptian societal and cultural heritage.

First, with regard to the NCW institutional framework; remote governorates have strong women cadres but the Council has failed to embrace them. In addition, the role of the Council has been and still is educational only, as the Council does not have a specific financial envelop in its budget to financially support specific women candidates to enable them to meet the high costs of running election campaigns. Moreover, The Council is careful to take a neutral and non-partisan position towards all candidates. Another major shortcoming within the NCW institutional framework is the fact that some governorates gain more support and attention from others, and this is due to the way personnel are chosen.

Second, with regard to the Egyptian legal/constitutional framework; the Constituency Division Law (which organises the division of electoral districts and the number of candidates to run for each constituency) is not supportive to women, as it fails to ensure equal representation for voters in different constituencies. Moreover, the non-explicit inclusion of a parliamentary quota system for women in the 2014 Constitution is a matter that does not safeguard a fair representation of women in the parliament.

Third, with regard to the Egyptian societal and cultural heritage; there is still a societal and cultural problem in Egypt, which hinders the political participation of women. The social and cultural inherited traditions, particularly in rural areas, still perceive women from a negative perspective. Women are seen as bound to certain functions only, which is a major barrier hindering women's political participation. In addition to the problem of "glass ceiling" that hampers women's access to high-level positions.

Such drawbacks and obstacles could be avoided in the future for the sake of empowering women's political participation in Egypt. To achieve that, one can present some recommendations for the NCW to take into consideration, in order to have an effective role and to avoid the futility of its efforts and to have more credibility in the society, especially among women. The NCW should reconsider its neutral stance towards women candidates, and to have a specific financial envelop in its budget to financially support specific women candidates to enable them to meet the high costs of running election

campaigns. Moreover, the NCW should have a specific awareness programme with a separate financial envelope, to tackle the problem of the negative aspects in the Egyptian culture, through a better utilization of Media programmes (especially TV and radio drama due to its huge capacity in influencing and shaping public opinion).

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