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A General Outlook on the Women and Human Development in Arab States

Abstract

There are similarities and differences in the level of human development in Arab states that control large geographical borders. It is stated that it is imperative to initiate improvements in the financial, social and women's empowerment as well as information and technology fields in order to secure the progress of the Arab states. This article examines the human development of women in Arab states. For this purpose, the place of women in the total labor force and their participation in employment and education level were examined from a comparative perspective. By examining women's participation in the workforce in terms of human development, cultural, economic and political factors that are important in workforce participation are mentioned. In the last part, it has been tried to question whether there is a relationship between women's participation in the economy and their participation in decision-making processes in terms of human development perspective.

Keywords: Women, People, Human Development, Arab States, Female

Arap Devletlerinde Kadın ve İnsani Gelişme Üzerine Genel Bir Bakış

Öz

Geniş bir coğrafi sınırları kontrol eden Arap devletlerinde insani gelişme düzeyi açısından benzer ve farklı yönler bulunmaktadır. Arap devletlerinin ilerlemesini güvence altına almak için mali, sosyal ve kadınların güçlendirilmesi ile bilgi ve teknoloji alanlarında iyileştirmeler başlatmanın zorunlu olduğu ifade edilmektedir. Bu yazıda, Arap devletlerinde kadınların insani gelişimi incelenmektedir. Bu amaçla, kadınların toplam iş gücü içindeki yeri ve istihdamına katılım durumu ile eğitim düzeyi karşılaştırmalı bir bakış açısıyla incelenmiştir. Kadınların işgücüne katılımını insani gelişme boyutu açısından irdeleyerek, işgücüne katılımında önemli olan kültürel, ekonomik ve politik faktörlere değinilmiştir. Son bölümde ise, kadınların ekonomiye katılımı ile karar alma süreçlerine katılımı arasında insani gelişme perspektifi açısından bir ilişki olup olmadığı sorgulanmaya çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Cinsiyet, İnsan, İnsani Gelişim, Arap Ülkeleri, Kadın

Introduction

In modern age the territory in which Arab nations are settled entire 22 states. Arab states extend over an area comprising of North Africa, Eastern Mediterranean and Arab Peninsula spreading from Atlantic Ocean toward the Indian Ocean. The current population of these countries is more than 453 million half of which represent the population below age 25 (UNDP, 2015, Introduction section, para. 1; World Population Review, 2022). The joint foundation of these states is Arab League (League

of Arab States) that was established in 1945 in city of Cairo. Despite the existence of divergent political, social and financial systems all states share a common background on the basis of language (Arabic), cultural and historical heritage and religion (Islam). It is feasible to categorize Arab states under three groups:

1. Sub-Saharan Arab States: Comoro Islands, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somali, Sudan and Yemen.

2. Petrol Exporting Arab States: Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.

3. Mediterranean Arab States: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia (Rauch & Kostyshak, 2009, pp.165-188).

There are however three key problems that pervade the region: gender inequality, poverty and social exclusion and authoritarian regimes. In order to remedy these pivotal issues it is imperative to improve three basic domains which can be listed as liberties, information and technology and lastly women's empowerment (UNDP, 2015; UNDP, 2002).

The title of present research *Women and Human Development in Arab States* is directly addressing to the issue of women's development. The increased participation of women into national economy, political processes and education is not only essential to empower women but it also matters greatly to secure human development. The main problem concerning relevant studies is that there is lack of adequate, systematic and correct data on these problems; hence present research aims to draw a general perspective on the issue of women and human development based on the particular region.

It is widely agreed that women's participation to the economy and labor force holds utmost significance for socio-economic development. In any given country women's participation to the economy plays vital role for financial development. It is also globally acknowledged that without ensuring women's participation to the economy financial development would be infeasible. Indeed, a closer examination of top 35 countries in IMF list of developed countries indicates that among these countries there is a high ratio of labor force participation among women between the ages of 15-64. In the top ranking seven developed countries, women's participation ratio to labor force is 53.71% on average as of year 2021 (IMF, 2011). During the same period, the average ratio in European Union is 51%, average of Europe is 52% and average of OECD is 52%. As manifested developed economies are, at the same time, the countries in which women's participation to the labor force is the highest (The World Bank, 2022).

There are, on the other hand, several factors impinging upon women's participation to the labor force. These are family income level, age and fertility, religion and education (Psacharopoulos & Tzannatos, 1989, pp. 187-201). As these factors are examined it

surfaces that the factors collectively render a positive or negative effect on women's participation to the labor force. It is still a solid fact that family income rises correspondingly when women participate in the labor force.

In addition to women's participation to the labor force their employment also introduces with itself a number of issues the most common of which is discrimination in employment. Women are forced to face discrimination in sector, profession, employment type and position.

However, it is a known reality that women's participation to the labor force has positive effects on the continuity of social welfare, sustainable economy and financial growth (Tzannatos, 1999, pp. 551-559). In Arab States the other hand the low ratio women's participation to the labor force triggers huge costs for the family and national economy.

It is possible to argue that financial performance in Arab States has been comparatively lower than pre-1980s. Particularly in the process that started in the 1960s a majority of Arab States adopted import-substitution industrialization strategies which ended up ineffectively functioning bureaucracy.

The emerging bureaucracy however was compensated with long years with revenues and financial aids. Owing to the sharp declines in petrol prices at the end of 1980s Arab States were forced to seek the ways to adopt global financial practices, attract foreign investors, favor export-oriented commerce, support private sector and mitigate public expenses. Nonetheless since the process worked in a slower pace compared to the Latin America and South European countries, there was satisfactory climb in financial development (Clement, 2001, p.11).

Table 1. GDP Per Capita (\$)

| Country/Region | 1970 | 2007 | Average Annual Growth Rate |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|----------------------------|
| Arab Sub-Saharan Africa | 1,122 | 2,076 | 1.7 |
| Non-Arab Sub-Saharan Africa | 2,266 | 2,202 | -0.1 |
| Arab Fuel-Endowed Countries | 10,040 | 14,093 | 0.9 |
| Non-Arab Fuel-Endowed Countries | 9,712 | 13,328 | 0.9 |
| Rest of Arab World | 1,884 | 5,100 | 2.7 |

| Table 1. more | | | |
|------------------------|--------|--------|-----|
| Rest of Non-Arab World | 2,580 | 10,899 | 4.0 |
| Latin America | 5,254 | 9,744 | 1.7 |
| Southern Europe | 13,484 | 30,015 | 2.2 |

Source: World Bank. (2015, June 15). World Development Indicators. Retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators>

Asian and Latin American countries that attached diligence to increasing women labor force have risen as an attractive destination during the globalization process for the foreign investors from multinational corporations. In parallel with the boost in globalization, a new demand for cheap and flexible labor force emerged in the domains of insurance, banking, airways and similar service sectors as well as manufacturing industry. Hence employees opted for the countries in which women's labor force participation is higher since women are more suited to this kind of employment. Consequently, due to the low ratio of women's participation to the labor force, multinational corporations are not yet fully encouraged to invest in Arab states.

1. Women's Human Development and Participation to the Economy

United Nations Development Program (UNDP), an affiliation of United Nations Organization, analyzes the critical financial and current issues in its Human Development Reports having been released since 1990 and it also issues a Human Development Index comprising of education, health and income indicators (Deniz & Hobikoğlu, 2012, p. 123).

Human Development Index is a significant to utilize in construing the human development level of any nation. This index deals with class indicators such as financial growth as well as development level based on social and political dimensions. Social and political development criteria are access to the education, health and political participation (UNDP, 2014, p.13). There is also a long list of indicators used to comprehend women's financial and social position.

In Arab states gross domestic product per capita is, as of year 2013, 7582 Dollars and as of year 2021, 6412 Dollars while the same ratio corresponds to 5689, 97 Dollars in 2013 and 13, 037.5 Dollars in 2021 in East Asia and Pacific regions. Yet Human Development Index indicates that East Asia and Pacific regions provide a higher performance. Index value than Arab states in which the figure as of year 2013 was 0.682 whilst in East Asia and Pacific states the index value in the very same date corresponded to 0.703 (UNDP, 2014). Regions with high index of Gross Domestic Product per capita also tend to provide a higher Human Development Index whereas this situation is exactly opposite in Arab States (UNDP, 2014; The World Bank, 2022).

It is however not sound to claim that the financial development in Arab states did not contribute to social development at all. In 1960 the median length of education in Arab States was merely 0.9 while in year 2012 the ratio climbed to 6.3 and in year 2021 the ratio climbed to 8. There has also been a remarkable fall in the ratio of illiterate population. In 1990 illiterate population in Arab states was 40.7% but in year 2000 the percentage descended to 31.3% (UNESCO, 2003, p.10). Likewise average life span expectancy climbed to 70, 2 in 2013 and to 70,9 in 2021 (UNDP, 2014; UNDP, 2022, p. 289).

Arab states also exhibited an increase in the literacy rates of women. In 1980 64.9% of Arabian women aged 15 and above were illiterate while in year 2000 the ratio descended to 40.2%. Correspondingly in 1960 the median length of education in Arab States was merely 0,9 but in years 1999 it jumped to 5,3 years and to 6,3 years in 2012 and to 7,6 years in 2021 (World Bank, 2004; UNDP, 2014; UNDP, 2022, p. 289).

As employment participation ratios are examined with respect to gender it surfaces that Arab states are the countries in which the participation of aged 15 and above women into the labor force is the lowest. In 2012 labor force participation of women in Middle East and North Africa regions, which entail Arab states as well, was 21.25% on average. Bearing in mind that the global average is 50.3% it is feasible to claim that the participation of women into the labor force is the lowest among Arab states (ILO, 2014). The participation rate reached 23.85% in 2022 (ILO, 2022, p. 116-117)

Table 2. Labor Force Participation Rate by Sex, World and Regions (2022)

| Region | Males Labor Participation Rate (%) | Females Labor Participation Rate (%) |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| World | 72 | 46.6 |
| Low-Income Countries | 75.2 | 56.8 |
| High-Income Countries | 67.5 | 53.3 |
| Africa | 71.1 | 53.7 |
| The Pacific | 66.7 | 58 |
| South Asia | 72.5 | 22.3 |
| Latin America and the Caribbean | 73,2 | 49.4 |
| Eastern Europe | 67 | 51.6 |
| Arab States (Non-GCC) | 69.4 | 11.9 |

| Table 2. More | | |
|-------------------|------|------|
| Arab States (GCC) | 84.7 | 35.8 |

Source: ILO. (2022). World Employment and Social Outlook Trends 2022. Geneva: International Labor Office.

Another revealing fact is that in Bahrain, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Qatar which rank the top in women's education among Arab states the ratios are still incomparably low when contrasted with the ratio of women's participation in the countries with the highest human development index. Bahrain. Since in Egypt and Jordan male labor force was transferred to petrol-exporting Arab states, women have replaced men's positions thus enhanced the ratio of women's participation to the labor force. As monitored in GCC countries there is a steady increase in women's participation to the labor force, however since migrate women are also included in the measurement of labor force participation there is still confusion as regards the real data for the native citizens of these countries.

Table 3 Female and Male Labor Participation Rates in Selected Arab Countries (2021)

| Countries | Female (%) | Male (%) | Female to Male Ratio |
|--------------|------------|----------|----------------------|
| Algeria | 16 | 64 | 0.25 |
| Bahrain | 42 | 84 | 0.50 |
| Egypt | 15 | 67 | 0.22 |
| Kuwait | 47 | 84 | 0.55 |
| Lebanon | 21 | 71.6 | 0.20 |
| Jordan | 13 | 62.7 | 0.20 |
| Morocco | 22 | 66 | 0.33 |
| Oman | 29 | 85 | 0.34 |
| Qatar | 57 | 95 | 0.60 |
| Saudi Arabia | 31 | 80 | 0.38 |
| Syria | 16 | 71 | 0.27 |
| UAE | 47 | 88 | 0.53 |
| Yemen | 6 | 68 | 0.08 |

Source: The World Bank. (2022). Data. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator>

In Arab states in addition to low ratios of women's participation to the labor force there is also a striking backwardness in women's prevalence within professional and technical domains. As the ratios present Arab states are the countries with the lowest women participation in professional and technical domains.

Table 4. Professional and Technical Workers by Sex in Selected Arab Countries (2016)

| Countries | Female (%) | Male (%) | Female to Male Ratio |
|--------------|------------|----------|----------------------|
| Lebanon | 48 | 52 | 0.93 |
| Syria | 39 | 61 | 0.65 |
| Morocco | 36 | 64 | 0.55 |
| Algeria | 44 | 56 | 0.79 |
| Kuwait | 34 | 66 | 0.52 |
| Egypt | 38 | 62 | 0.60 |
| Tunisia | 41 | 59 | 0.71 |
| Saudi Arabia | 23 | 77 | 0.31 |
| UAE | 22 | 78 | 0.28 |
| Qatar | 23 | 77 | 0.31 |
| Bahrain | 18 | 82 | 0.22 |
| Yemen | 15 | 85 | 0.18 |

Source: World Economic Forum. (2016). The Global Gender GAP Report 2016. Geneva: World Economic Forum.

As can be witnessed in Table 4 in countries such as Bahrain, Qatar and United Arab Emirates which welcomed major developments in women's education there still exists a large discrepancy in the number of female professional and technical employees. The reason accounting for this conflict is that rather than the inadequacy of competent women in the market, social-cultural factors play vital role in the placement of women to professional and technical occupations. In several Arab states men are still considered as the sole breadwinners and it is regarded as a shame for a husband to let the wife work outside home.

Although Arab states are still at the bottom of the global list in terms of women's participation to the labor force the financial growth witnessed from the 1960s paved the way for new employment and educational opportunities for women (Moghadam, 2003, p. 18). Nonetheless in a vast portion of Arab states these opportunities have been reserved for urban and elite women alone.

2. Women's Participation to the Economy and Decision-Making Power

Women's employment in registered and profit-making sectors is a vital sign of their status. Access to financial means and the consequential financial independence correspondingly raise the participation of women to decision-making processes in private and public area. In particular the registered employment of women as paid employees enables a wider visibility in public area. The inclusion of women to the work life as paid employees reshapes gender relations and politically empowers women which in turn fuel a collective movement among women Pearson, 1998, p.183).

Table 5. Women in Administrative Positions in Selected Arab Countries 2016 (%)

| Country | Female | Male | Female to Male Ratio |
|--------------|--------|------|----------------------|
| UAE | 17 | 83 | 0.20 |
| Bahrain | 5 | 95 | 0.05 |
| Syria | 6 | 94 | 0.06 |
| Oman | 7 | 93 | 0.07 |
| Egypt | 12 | 88 | 0.13 |
| Yemen | 10 | 90 | 0.11 |
| Jordan | 11 | 89 | 0.12 |
| Kuwait | 7 | 93 | 0.07 |
| Morocco | 16 | 84 | 0.19 |
| Algeria | 20 | 80 | 0.25 |
| Lebanon | 4 | 96 | 0.04 |
| Qatar | 5 | 95 | 0.05 |
| Saudi Arabia | 0 | 100 | 0.00 |

Source: World Economic Forum. (2016). The Global Gender GAP Report 2016. Geneva: World Economic Forum.

Low participation of women to the labor force parallels with low participation of women to the administrative positions. As manifested in Table 5 countries with low women labor force ratios are the exact countries in which there is low participation of women to the administrative positions. Excluding United Arab Emirates women's ratio in administrative positions is overlapping with the low ratio in labor force participation.

In Arab states low participation of women to the economy correspondingly brings about low participation of women to the national parliaments. Arab states are the single region in which women ratio in the senate is indicated by one-digit numbers. Doubtlessly there are divergences among different Arab states. There is also a steady progress on this issue as well. Although in a number of Arab states there are many women ministers and vice ministers but in terms of representation women's representation ratio is way lower in Arab states compared to the other regions

Table 6. Women in National Parliaments in Selected Arab Countries 2016 (%)

| Countries | Male | Female | Female to Male Ratio |
|--------------|------|--------|----------------------|
| Oman | 99 | 1 | 0.01 |
| Kuwait | 98 | 2 | 0.02 |
| Syria | 87 | 13 | 0.15 |
| Algeria | 68 | 32 | 0.46 |
| Egypt | 85 | 15 | 0.18 |
| UAE | 78 | 22 | 0.29 |
| Saudi Arabia | 80 | 20 | 0.25 |

Source: World Economic Forum. (2016). The Global Gender GAP Report 2016. Geneva: World Economic Forum. p .56.

As the ratios of parliamentary representations are examined the list goes as such: Algeria ranks 24th, United Arab Emirates ranks 73rd Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia rank 131st (World Economic Forum, 2012).

In Arab states the steady increase in women's participation to decision-making process and rise in the proportional representation ratio in the parliament are equally important as the new voice of nongovernmental women organizations. Nongovernmental women organizations play key role in social and political changes at most. The increased number of women representatives in parliaments, minister or vice minister positions may fall short in solving women's problems. Empowering autonomous women organizations makes women-oriented policies even more significant (Weldom, 2002, p. 209).

Non-governmental organizations and non-governmental movements provide critical support in the betterment of women's human development yet social regulations, traditions and political conjuncture affect women's participation to decision-making processes.

Conclusion

In modern age women's participation to the nationwide labor force, economy and politics has been gaining increased gravity. Women's access to equal employment opportunities and financial security further enhances women's independence and

reverence. Another issue gaining increasing momentum is to possess equal rights regardless of gender in global financial level. From this perspective, the states are required to provide minimum conditions to ensure gender equality for the aim of presenting a favorable scheme for women's development.

Despite possessing citizenship rights women are still in a disadvantaged position compared to male employees in Arab states; furthermore, as seen in Gulf Countries women are in a less advantaged position than foreign workers. This disadvantage manifests itself in training, promotion, payment and entrepreneurial opportunities as well.

As a natural consequence of globe-wide progress several changes inevitably have taken place in Arab states but still it is imperative that governments provide equal socio-economic opportunities to women and support their financial participation.

To ensure women's financial participation an integrated approach needs to be practiced. Via this approach while boosting women's participation capacity to the labor force a suitable social substructure should be concocted for increased women participation. Capacity enlargement is not sufficient on its own for integrating women into the labor force. It should also be backed up with adequate professional qualities and freedom to choose.

As detailed hereinabove human development of women is, compared to the rest of globe, lower in Arab states with respect to per capita income. To draw a positive correlation between gross national product and per capita income for ensuring women's human development the countries analyzed above are required to devise and implement women-oriented social policies.

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