

Women's Political Participation and the SDGs in Egypt: Where Do We Stand ?

Women's political participation in the SDGs

Women's participation in processes and decisions that affect their lives is a crucial determinant to their freedom and critical to fulfilling the potential of democracy. Globally, increasing numbers of women participate in politics and decision-making at all levels, in different functions and across all spheres of government, including as voters, candidates for national or local elections, members of parliament or local councils, Heads of State and/or Government and government ministers. Research has shown that women's political participation has a positive impact on public spending and service provision for all¹. In addition, women's participation has been linked to increased progress towards achieving and maintaining peaceful and secure communities, the full realization of human rights, the eradication of disease, hunger and poverty, and the promotion of sustainable development.

However, discriminating gender norms and gendered expectations persist. In many societies, men and women believe that men make better leaders than women. Data gathered in Egypt for the International Men and Gender Equality survey (IMAGES) study shows that the majority of the surveyed men recognised women's abilities to lead, but more than two-thirds of them were opposed to women occupying positions of political authorities². More than half of the surveyed men reported that politics should be kept a 'men-only' area, and opposition to women's political leadership was particularly salient among younger cohorts of (men) respondents. Other factors limit women's political participation on equal terms and restrict women's access to leadership opportunities³. Those include the time demands of current gender roles attributed to women (and girls), including unpaid domestic and care work and child bearing; women's lower rates of involvement in political parties and lack of professional networks to help them building political support; and women's disadvantageous financial position.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises the importance of women's political participation in reaching the SDGs. Two targets focus on women's political participation, *5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life* and *16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels*.

Progress towards the SDG targets addressing women's political participation

In the past years, Egypt has made some important efforts to strengthen women's political participation.

- The 2014 Constitution acknowledges the State's responsibility in ensuring the achievement of equality between men and women in all the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights (Article 11). Special measures may be taken to ensure adequate representation of women in decision making bodies and public office.
- The 2014 Constitution established a 25% quota for women in local councils, and thus provides space for at least 13,500 women across Egypt to partake in local development decision-making processes.
- Egypt launched the National Strategy for Women's Empowerment to respond to the SDGs. The Strategy was endorsed by the President of Egypt; its first pillar focuses on women's political empowerment and leadership.
- Egypt broke the glass ceiling by appointing the first-ever woman Governor in 2017. This position was confined only to men and no Egyptian woman ever held this position prior to 2017. Egypt also appointed the first ever woman in the position of Advisor to the President on National Security.

¹ UN Women (2018), Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

² Understanding Masculinities, International Men and Gender Equality survey (IMAGES), Egypt, Key findings, 2016-2017

³ UN Women (2018), Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Snapshot of available data to populate the SDGs indicators related to women's political participation



Indicator 5.5.1: In 2015, women hold 14.9% of seats in Parliament (89 out of 596). One woman was governor (2018). 25% women's representation in the cabinet of ministers (8 women).



Indicator 16.7.1: 19% of women hold senior management positions (source NSEW 2030)⁴.

Measurement challenges

While data on women's representation is regularly collected and widely reported at a national level, there is limited data available on women's participation in local governments. There are currently no comparable statistics to monitor women's representation in local governments.

UN Women Egypt's work towards the SDGs targets related to women's political participation

As part of its work on increasing women's political participation, UN Women supports women in getting on ballots, attaining political office, and going to the polls to vote.

Women's Citizenship Initiative

The UN Women Egypt Country Office has established strategic partnerships under the nationally owned 'Women's Citizenship Initiative,' which aims at issuing national ID cards for rural and marginalized women. In Egypt, a national ID card means being registered and recognized as a citizen who can vote and has access to financial and non-financial services. The programme is considered as one of the most politically recognized and nationally owned development programmes in Egypt due to its key contributions to women's advancement on both the political and socio-economic levels. UN Women played a significant role in the provision of technical assistance, quality assurance and documentation of processes and success stories. A total of 510,000 national ID cards were issued for rural and marginalized women across Egypt, which led to its inclusion as a pre-requisite for the empowerment of Egyptian women in the 'National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women

2030.' Even though the programme has formally ended, the ongoing issuance of ID cards continues to be a government priority and is receiving funds from the national budget.

Taa Marbouta Campaign

Cognizant of the importance of women's participation at all levels, and in line with Egypt's Vision for 2030, UN Women ECO supported the National Council for Women (NCW) in launching the first nationwide campaign on Women's Empowerment. Utilizing the power of media and communications, the campaign is based on an innovative approach that aims at addressing misconceptions, redefining gender roles, and fostering women's participation in all spheres of life.

"The Secret of Your Power" breaks the glass ceiling for women, encourages their participation at all levels, and presents the unconventional roles that women can play as important actors and contributors to social welfare and overall economic growth. It is positioned as the *100 million behavioral and ideational campaign*, following its massive success with over 100 celebrities and public figures endorsing it, alongside its consideration for regional and global awards.

"The Secret of Your Power" highlights the societal barriers and constraints that women are faced with and innovatively addresses these issues raising community awareness. It particularly focuses on promoting champions of success at all levels, from grassroot to policy level. "The Secret of Your Power" has reached 100 million interactions on social media and viewership since its launch. Interactions on social media platforms have demonstrated that it is not only regarded as a public awareness raising campaign, but also a source of inspiration to many.

⁴ National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030