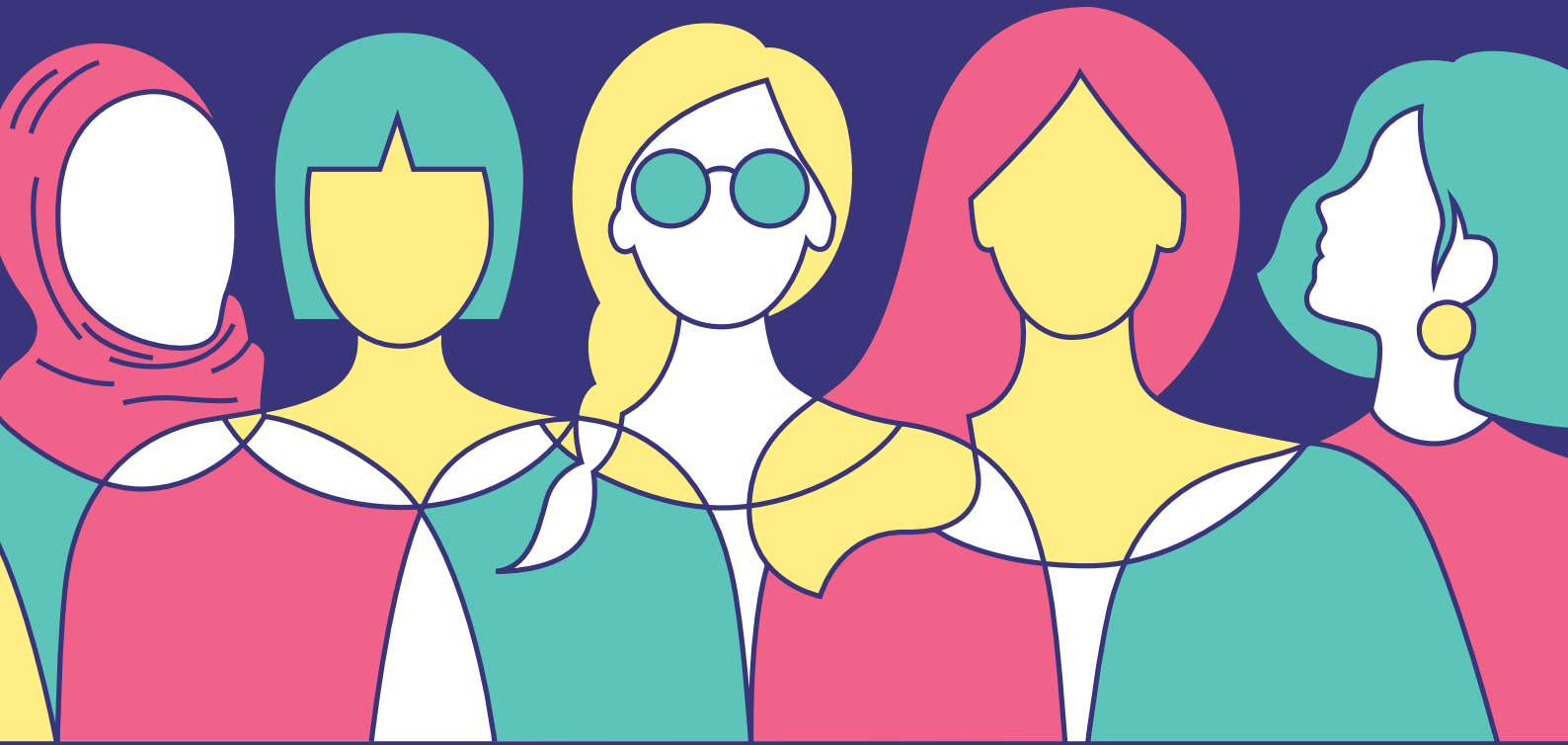


# WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN LEBANON

*and the Limits of  
Aid-Driven Empowerment*



# Team

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## **Author**

Gabriella Nassif

## **Programme Officer**

Mia BouKhaled

## **Programmes Associate**

Julia Wysocka El Haddad

## **Deputy Director, Publications**

Léa Yammine

## **Director**

Marie-Noëlle AbiYaghi

## **Copy-editing**

Muriel N. Kahwagi

## **Design & Layout**

Nayla Yehia

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# 1 Introduction

The question of women's political participation in Lebanon could not be more timely. As of 17 October 2019, nation-wide protests have erupted in response to increasing austerity measures that culminated in a tax on Voice over IP (VoIP) calls, commonly referred to as the "WhatsApp tax."<sup>01</sup> Calls for a non-sectarian and "non-political"<sup>02</sup> revolution have drawn Lebanese representing nearly every sect, every class, and every gender out into the streets, which led to the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri on October 29, 2019.<sup>03</sup> In a familiar scene witnessed during the Sudanese uprisings in 2018, and in Chile and Iraq in 2019, women were once again at the front line. At one point, a young woman – now memorialised as the symbol of the uprisings – was videotaped kicking an armed bodyguard to prevent him from attacking protesters; at another point, an arm-in-arm link of more than 30 women separated protesters from riot police in Riad Al-Solh.

But the reality reflected in these images, and in news agency accounts of women protesting, is not reflected in the current socio-political reality in Lebanon. In 2018, Lebanon ranked 147th out of a total of 149 countries according to the Global Gender Gap Index, with one of the lowest rates of women's political participation in the region.<sup>04</sup> Women in Lebanon have been unable to crack the "political glass ceiling," and continue to make only piecemeal advancements. For example, though the 2018 Parliamentary election boasted the highest number of registered women candidates in the country's history, less than 5% of the total 128 parliamentary seats are now

occupied by women.<sup>05,06</sup> Similarly, though the appointment of four women to the ministerial cabinet in an accomplishment worth celebrating, marking a first in the country's history, these women collectively make up less than 10% of the cabinet.<sup>07</sup>

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of women's position in Lebanon as "second class citizens."<sup>08</sup> The many structural factors that sustain this reality – including the personal status codes, social perceptions of women that tie them to the private realms of

the family and the household,<sup>9</sup> the limited legal protections women have access to,<sup>10</sup> and the processes of gendered citizenship more broadly<sup>11</sup> – have been well documented. Research into the specific role of women in Lebanese politics, however, is less comprehensive.<sup>12,13</sup> Extant literature focuses primarily on the various structural factors that prohibit women’s political participation, such as sectarianism, political clientelism, and political familism.<sup>14</sup> As Zaiter and El Masry, a notable exception to this literature, argue, a focus on structural factors, while important, cannot account for women’s individual experiences of, and within these systems. Micro-level analyses are critical to any discussion of women’s political participation in Lebanon, and can broaden understandings of women’s political participation outside of formal political structures.<sup>15</sup>

Another dearth in this literature on women’s political participation in Lebanon is an analysis of the role of international development, and donor-funded initiatives focusing on “empowerment.” Women’s political empowerment programming (WPE) and women’s political participation (WPP) programming in Lebanon are expansive. Though programs focus on a range of issues, they overwhelmingly share the same goal: to increase women’s formal political participation. To date, there has been no systematic review of donor interventions on WPP or WPE initiatives, at either the global or regional

levels.<sup>16</sup> Information that does exist is usually produced by the donor agencies and their local partners in the form of program evaluations and short programmatic descriptions. These documents, generally, do not offer larger critiques of the socioeconomic landscape in Lebanon, and, therefore, cannot account for the underwhelming impact of these initiatives. Why have these programs been unsuccessful in advancing large numbers of women into formal political positions?

This report seeks to answer this question, and to fill the gap in the literature on women’s political participation and empowerment, by conducting a mapping of WPE and WPP initiatives in Lebanon from 2009 to 2019, and analysing their collective impact on the current status of women’s political participation. The report begins with a general discussion of women’s political empowerment and political participation, and traces how the historical development of these two concepts globally affects the ways that current WPE and WPP initiatives are structured in Lebanon. Next, the report analyses how the assumptions underpinning definitions of women’s political participation have produced poor WPE and WPP project results, using evidence from a selection of initiatives that occurred in Lebanon. Finally, this report presents a larger mapping of WPE and WPP initiatives in Lebanon from 2009 to 2019.

# Methodology

This report attempts to answer current gaps in the literature analysing WPE and WPP donor-funded initiatives in Lebanon, and asks the following question: what explains the current gap between donor-funded WPE and WPP initiatives, and the continued low rates of women's political participation and overall low political empowerment in Lebanon?

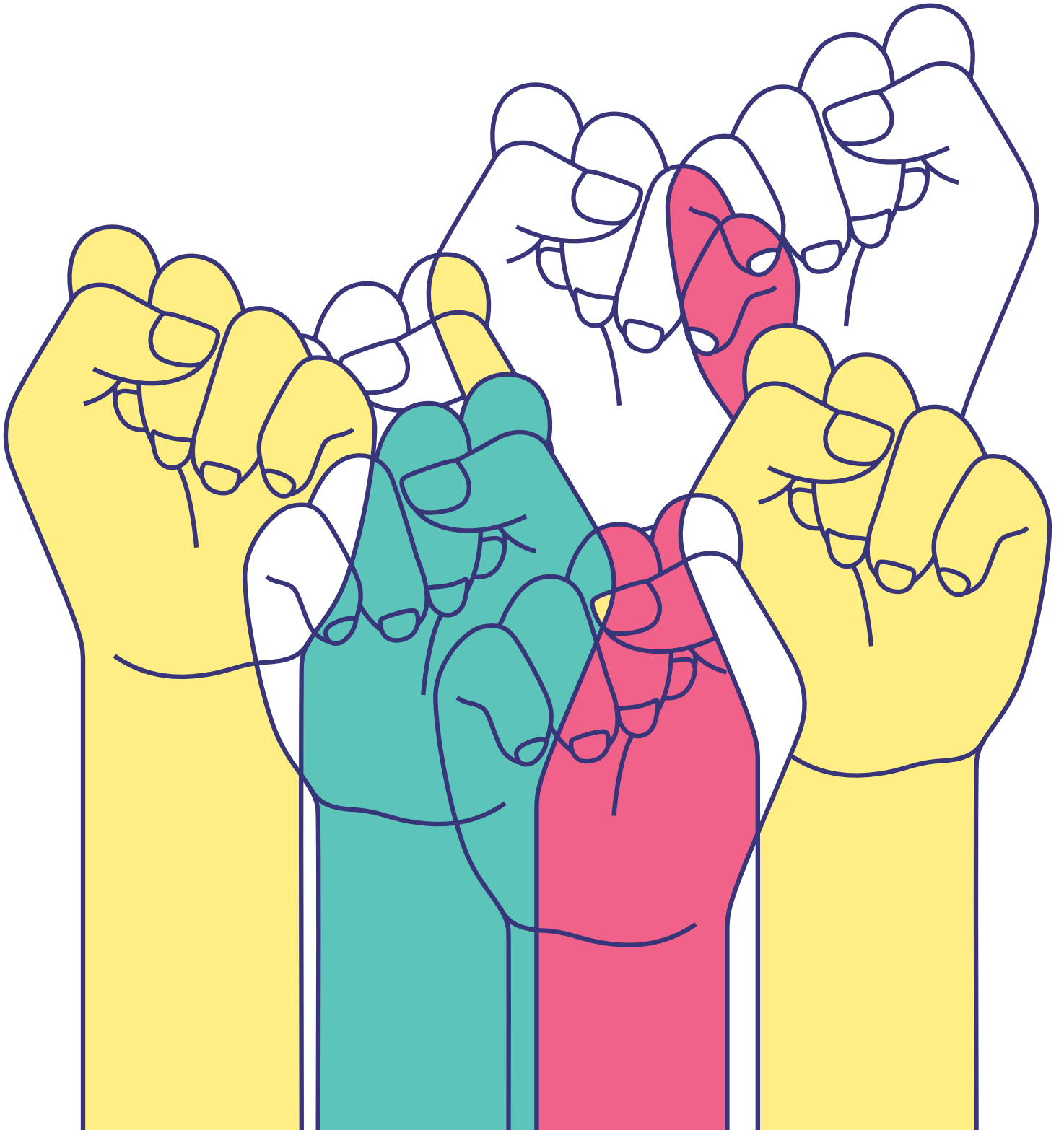
To answer this question, this report starts with a rigorous review of the terms “women's political empowerment” and “women's political participation,” and highlights their relationship not only to each other, but to the broader fields of international development and official donor assistance (ODA) and feminist theory, specifically in relation to development practice. This review begins, loosely, with the advent of the international feminist movement in the wake of global development meetings, such as the Third and Fourth World Conferences on Women in Nairobi and Beijing, respectively, and with the creation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Special attention was given to academic journals dedicated to issues related to women's political participation and women's equality and feminist theory in international development. This was complemented by a review of the grey literature, specifically, research and other materials produced by the United Nations and other intergovernmental or global organisations. Part III of this report synthesises this information, and presents an overview of how the terms “women's political empowerment” (WPE) and “women's political

participation” (WPP) developed, including how the terms are used today, both theoretically and in development practice; the critiques facing these terms and their usage; as well as best practices associated with projects loosely grouped under the umbrella of WPE or WPP programming, implemented using ODA. This lays the foundation for the discussion to follow in Section IV, which reflects on WPP and WPE programming in Lebanon between 2009 and 2019.

Section IV presents an overview of selected WPE and WPP programming in Lebanon between 2009 and 2019. An initial search for WPE and WPP projects began with a focus on approximately 10 organisations that were known to have conducted such programming based on the past experience of Lebanon Support, and the research consultant who supported in the data collection for the development of this report. This information was supplemented by a review of organisation websites, followed by thorough analysis of implementing partner websites, or the organisations cited as project partners, and project beneficiaries, if and when possible. Given that the majority of information on the projects discussed herein comes from the implementing organisation's website, an effort was made to substantiate this information with third-party sources, such as news outlets (*Annahar* or *The Daily Star*), social media, blogposts, YouTube videos, and three informal interviews. After an initial search, WPE and WPP initiatives were then grouped according to four primary pillars, indicating the focus of these programs: increasing women's descriptive

representation; gender mainstreaming; supporting civil society organisations and networks; and, finally, increasing the capacity of women voters. Budgetary information for initiatives has been included, when and if it was available, as were specific

programmatic activities and participant testimonials. It is important to reiterate that the majority of this information was taken from donor websites and the websites of their implementing partners, something that the analysis in Section V attends to.







# Empowered Women, Empowered Citizens

## Contextualizing Women's Empowerment: Development Theory and Feminist Critiques

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The term empowerment has a long history. For some, the term originated with the scholar Paulo Friere (1973), who theorised that “conscientisation,” or the “deep awareness of one’s socio-political environment,” was the only thing that could “inspire” individuals to challenge social inequality.<sup>17</sup> For others, the term originated among a network of global activists and scholars located primarily in the global South, known collectively as DAWN, or Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era. Concerned with

how normative development frameworks were impacting poor women of colour in the global South, DAWN began using a much more comprehensive definition of “women’s empowerment.” According to DAWN, financial and other material resources could not, alone, guarantee empowerment; contrary to normative development frameworks, the solution for women’s empowerment was not the same across various contexts. Instead, true women’s empowerment requires an analysis of local power relations.<sup>18</sup>

Internationally, however, the concept of “women’s empowerment” gained traction during the United Nations Decade for Women.<sup>19</sup> It was at this time that development practitioners were facing stringent critiques concerning the gender-blind nature of development projects. Classical development theory, which conceptualised the “problem” of poverty, among other social issues, as a problem to be solved by “Northern expertise,” was continuing to fail across various contexts in the global South. This was further compounded by the fact that classical development theory continued to perpetuate normative gender roles.<sup>20</sup>

But feminist critiques of classical development, and what could successfully empower women globally, were divided. Some feminists, later known as the Women in Development (WID) school of thought, argued that current development theories assumed that women could not be active agents in economic development, and thus completely removed women from development projects. Employing a liberal feminist approach, WID argued that women were equal to men and, therefore, played an equally important a role in economic development. To alleviate poverty, and to ultimately modernise the global South, women had to be included in development projects.<sup>21</sup>

For a second school of thought, known as Women and Development (WAD), simply adding women into development would not solve the underlying issues perpetuating gender inequality, such as patriarchal institutions and power hierarchies.<sup>22</sup> Further, WAD argued that gender, as a social category, operated differently in various contexts. Therefore, any analysis of women’s inequality must also analyse the broader sociopolitical structure within which certain women are situated. For many WAD adherents, this meant a specific focus on women’s historical relationship to exploitation, and their role within the sexual division of labour, or the labour responsibilities attributed to men and women based on normative gender roles.<sup>23</sup> Closely tied to dominant social feminist

critiques of gender inequality, WAD also foregrounded the importance of understanding gender inequality through a historical lens; gender inequalities, for example, look quite different in the aftermath of colonialism than they look in industrialised nations in the global North.

It was at this point that DAWN began to propose what would come to be known as an “empowerment approach” in relation to issues of gender and development.<sup>24</sup> Women were not a “problem” to be solved by development theory; they were active participants that could, if consulted, provide critical analyses of how development was actually working on the ground. The ques-

***This definition of “women’s empowerment” is individualistic, and does not pay attention to the ways that women are actually embedded in various systems of oppression.***

tion of intent aside, international debates that began in the global North, such as WID and WAD, could not speak to the everyday experiences of women living in the global South.<sup>25</sup> Instead of assuming that all women needed the same things to advance, DAWN argued, development feminists needed to pay attention to what women themselves needed and wanted. The “empowerment approach” was associated with women in the global South having the power to speak back against top-down development initiatives. Embedded in this concept was the political demand to challenge dominant structures.

The “empowerment approach” meant a literal redistribution of power to marginalised groups, who were ultimately better equipped to challenge intersectional oppressions in a way that development theory could not.<sup>26</sup>

By the mid-1990s, “women’s empowerment” became a powerful new buzzword, and an “uncritically accepted goal” not only among feminist development practitioners, but global organisations, such as the UN.<sup>27</sup> Introduced more formally during the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, “women’s empowerment” quickly became development’s “latest magic bullet,” a definitional powerhouse that seemed to encompass all forms of discrimination against women.<sup>28,29</sup> Women’s empowerment could mean a variety of things, including access to material resources, women’s rights to education, and protecting women from gender-based violence.<sup>30</sup> For others, such as Naila Kabeer (1994) and Srilatha Batliwala (1993), women’s empowerment also meant a focus on women’s capacity to make choices for themselves, based on a broader understanding of their own social contexts.<sup>31,32</sup> Gita Sen (1997), drawing from Batliwala, similarly argued that women’s empowerment meant more than control over resources, but a “chang[e] [in] power relations in favour of those who previously exercised little power over their own lives.”<sup>33</sup> Empowerment meant “having the capacity and the *right* to act and have influence.”<sup>34</sup>

Today, “women’s empowerment” remains a top priority of global development agendas. According to these agendas, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, “women’s empowerment” can be loosely defined as the “process[es] by which women attain autonomy and self-determination.”<sup>35</sup> “Women’s empowerment” is a measure of women’s agency, or their ability to make their own choices and to exercise their own will.<sup>36</sup> In practice, this has meant a focus on empowering women in their everyday lives by increasing their access to economic, social, and political resources. With these resources,

it is assumed that women will have all the necessary “components” to reach gender equality in the current global system.<sup>37</sup>

The current conceptualisation of “women’s empowerment” as a development equation – “add” economic, social, and political resources, and “stir” – is ultimately not much different from earlier conceptions of

## Current conceptualization of women’s empowerment

ECONOMIC  
RESOURCES



SOCIAL  
RESOURCES



POLITICAL  
RESOURCES



“STIR”

## Problematic assumption in international organisations' definitions of women empowerment



the role of gender in development theory and practice.<sup>38</sup> The earlier feminist critiques of Kabeer and Batliwala, among others, still stand: giving women access to certain resources, though it might alleviate immediate financial and social needs, will not

change the underlying systems that perpetuate gender discrimination and other social inequalities. Where international organisations picked up women's empowerment as a critically important concept, they strategically "dropped out" the more radical political demands that require a challenge to dominant social structures.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, this definition of "women's empowerment" is individualistic, and does not pay attention to the ways that women are actually embedded in various systems of oppression beyond gender, such as race, class, and disability. This is problematic, first, because it assumes that women are a homogenous social group worldwide who can be "added" into a specific development equation to produce gender equality, no matter their attachments to other social categories. Second, this definition of "women's empowerment" assumes that power is an "asset," or something that can be, "acquired, bestowed, or wielded."<sup>40</sup> This is a simplistic definition of power that singlehandedly maintains current social hierarchies at both the local and global levels. It assumes that power can be "given" by powerful development agencies located in the global North to women primarily in the global South, who would otherwise remain "helpless" if not for the help.<sup>41,42</sup>

This "liberal empowerment" approach is different from a "liberated empowerment" approach.<sup>43</sup> A "liberated empowerment" approach simultaneously challenges power relations both at the practical, or material, level, and at the societal level, a reflection of the more radical political roots of "women's empowerment," as it was defined by activists and scholars primarily from the global South.<sup>44</sup> It is both a means of achieving social justice, by empowering women economically, socially, and politically, and a goal in itself to end oppressive power structures.<sup>45</sup> "Liberated empowerment" re-centres original feminist critiques that aim to "question, destabilise and, eventually, transform the gender order of patriarchal domination."<sup>46</sup>

# Women's Political Empowerment and Participation: Another Temporary Special Measure?

The larger debates surrounding “women’s empowerment” are embedded in current definitions of women’s political empowerment and political participation. For development practitioners, women’s political empowerment is a key indicator of gender equality, alongside economic and social empowerment.<sup>47</sup> The concept of women’s political empowerment is often, however, used interchangeably with women’s political participation, and specifically, women’s formal political participation. The assumed interchangeability of these two concepts has resulted in a focus on women’s representation in formal political processes and positions as the primary indicator of women’s political empowerment. The number

of women in political positions, known as descriptive representation, is in many cases understood as the gatekeeper to “substantive representation” – when elected women officials begin to advocate for policy that is gender-sensitive – and “symbolic representation” – an increasing acceptance of gender equality among government officials and the general public.<sup>48</sup>

More broadly, this approach is reflected in the international development community’s emphasis on gender mainstreaming as a method for analysing, and ultimately, a strategy for correcting, gender inequality. Proponents of gender mainstreaming argue that the “underrepresentation of women and the low visibility of women’s perspectives” in political structures is what is causing the continued absence of “women’s perspectives” in policy and law.<sup>49</sup> This absence not only worsens gender discrimination, but ultimately perpetuates the conception of politics as a male-dominated arena. Logically, therefore, the solution is to increase women’s descriptive representation as a way to fix this imbalance.

At the global level, strategies of gender mainstreaming in politics generally focus on supporting the creation of a women’s quota in electoral bodies, and the creation of a national women’s machinery (NWM).<sup>50</sup> The aim of both NWM – a “bureaucratic body whose mandate includes [...] increasing gender equality” – and women’s quotas is

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primarily to institutionalise gender equality by ensuring that women have access to the state apparatus.<sup>51,52</sup> These strategies place the primary importance on the state as a leading actor in achieving gender equality, and assume that changes at the level of the state will ultimately “trickle down” to other areas of governance at the municipal and local levels.<sup>53</sup>

But the conflation of women’s political empowerment with women’s descriptive representation in political positions is problematic for a number of reasons. These measures are, again, individualistic and instrumentalist, and do not necessarily take into account the broader social landscape in which women access political positions and processes.<sup>54</sup> Similar to “liberal empowerment” approaches to women’s empowerment, women’s descriptive representation flattens the heterogeneity of women as a social category by assuming, first, that institutionalised spaces for women’s political participation, such as NWM and women’s quotas, will equally benefit all women. In other words, they assume that the women elected to these positions will accurately represent the demands of all women constituents. Second, they ignore questions concerning “which” women can actually access these positions, which ignores the material and ideological privileges certain women benefit from.<sup>55</sup>

Further, measuring women’s political empowerment based on the number of women in political positions only addresses what Mariz Todros calls “political events” – such as election cycles, or political candidacy – as opposed to wider definitions of political participation.<sup>56</sup> These specific political events prevent a broader analysis of how and why women are interacting politically, if at all. A focus on “formal” political events ultimately means the erasure of women’s political empowerment at times of protest and upheaval, as discussed in the introduction of this report, and avoids an analysis of the political events that women undertake in their daily lives.<sup>57</sup> This effectively establishes

a binary between formal and informal politics that is continuously reproduced through donor-funded WPP and WPE initiatives. As one study noted, this has had far-reaching effects: many of their interviewees, who were at one point participants of WPE and WPP donor-funded initiatives, believed that “true” political participation specifically

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meant participating in electoral processes. Their community activism, on the other hand, was identified as non-political.<sup>58</sup>

The assumptions underpinning the existing literature on women’s political empowerment and participation have direct implications for donor-funded WPE and WPP initiatives. Though the activist definitions of women’s empowerment originally called for a redistribution of power to women and other marginalised groups, current definitions used by international development practitioners have moved away from challenging societal power structures. Instead, they have adopted what

Sardenberg calls a “liberal empowerment” approach that focuses on empowering individual women by giving them access to social, economic, and political resources.<sup>59</sup> While this might alleviate immediate socioeconomic concerns for women, it does not challenge the underlying systems that maintain gender inequality. Similarly, international development definitions of women’s political empowerment reflect a focus on individual women’s empowerment, and consequently lack an analysis

of the broader socioeconomic landscape. Further, the conflation between women’s political empowerment and women’s political participation has reinforced a focus on women’s participation in formal politics only. This narrow definition of women’s political participation has limited broader conceptualisations of women’s political empowerment which, as the next section will demonstrate, has implications for donor-funded WPE and WPP initiatives.





# 4 WPE and WPP Initiatives in Lebanon, 2009-2018

Over the last decade, initiatives targeting women's political empowerment and participation have become a primary area of funding in Lebanon. Yet, little information exists on the effectiveness of these initiatives, and whether or not they have translated into tangible gains for women's political empowerment. The little research that does exist focuses on women's descriptive representation in electoral bodies as a primary indicator of the success of these initiatives, specifically the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments.<sup>60</sup> In some instances, donor publications, such as program evaluations or reports, can provide important information on WPE and WPP initiatives; however, it should be acknowledged that these materials often contain implicit biases toward the donor and therefore, do not adopt a critical analysis toward WPE or WPP initiatives.

In Lebanon, WPE and WPP initiatives can be loosely organised around several key themes that align with current international best practices for women's political empowerment programming.<sup>61</sup>

- A. Increasing women's descriptive representation in formal political institutions,**

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- B. Supporting gender mainstreaming in government,**

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- C. Supporting civil society networks and organisations, and**

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- D. Supporting women voters.**

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A review of WPE and WPP initiatives in Lebanon reveals a number of overarching patterns. Though all four categories are important for advancing women's political empowerment and participation, the results of the mapping exercise conducted in this report show that the overwhelming majority of funding goes to WPE and WPP initiatives that focus on increasing women's descriptive representation in formal politics. Of the

WPE and WPP programming focused on supporting women leaders and candidates, all 13 projects discussed in this report were dedicated to increasing women's descriptive representation at the municipal and national levels. Under the category of "Supporting Women," projects overwhelmingly focused, again, on increasing women's access to political positions (four out of seven projects). These initiatives focus on a range of topics including national- and municipal-level women's quotas; supporting women leaders and political candidates; encouraging women's participation in political parties; and focusing on women's inclusion in municipal government. As discussed in the previous section of this report, the majority of these initiatives targeting women's descriptive representation, and beyond, are individualistic in nature, and seem to apply a "liberal empowerment" approach.<sup>62</sup> They focus only on women's formal political participation, preventing an analysis of broader political processes in which women play a role, and assume that an increase in the number of women in political positions will automatically result in gender-sensitive policies and a wider acceptance of gender equality.

These initiatives have created what Carmen Geha calls a "mismatch" between programmatic outcomes and the "real institutional challenges [facing women] in politics" in Lebanon.<sup>63</sup> Focusing on individual statistics, such as the number of women in political positions and individual women, specifically women leaders and political candidates, does not actually challenge the underlying systems of gender inequality that make it so hard for women to enter the political sphere in the first place.

Moreover, these initiatives are often implemented by local non-government organisations (NGO). This assumes that, first, women more often than not depend on NGOs to voice their concerns, and second, that NGOs are the best modality for implementing WPE and WPP initiatives. Though NGOs are, in many ways, an important

part of the landscape of social justice in various countries, including Lebanon, they have also been criticised for their role in perpetuating existing socioeconomic hierarchies.<sup>64</sup> As formal organisations, NGOs must participate within the extant social circumstances; for instance, across the Arab region, NGOs must be formally registered

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with the government in order to function. This registration has undeniably made many NGOs subject to government surveillance, which has contributed to the dilution of more radical social justice demands.<sup>65</sup> This is part of a larger process known as "professionalisation," in which NGOs organise themselves internally to reflect those bureaucratic qualities that international donors and governments require in order to be acknowledged as a successful and well-functioning organisation.<sup>66</sup> This is most clearly seen in relation to the grant-funding process, and the overall competition between various NGOs to secure such funding. NGOs must be "qualified" to

receive these grants, something that is determined entirely by the donor organisation. For many donors, this means having the “right” staff, in other words, highly educated staff who have specialised in certain issues or topics.<sup>67</sup> In some instances, donors will continue to work specifically with certain NGOs which, as some research shows, are often “the most institutionalised, [or] headed by well-known figures.”<sup>68</sup> NGOs are also often required to have on-staff budgetary expertise, to have access to a bank, and to be able to produce financial records, things that activists and social movements, especially, and even smaller NGOs, are usually unable to provide, effectively blocking them from receiving such funding. This “project logic” not only

determines the internal structures of NGOs, but also contributes to the ways that NGOs choose which issues to focus on, and how to articulate them in their work.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, many of the initiatives highlighted below focus on “political events,” such as the 2016 municipal elections and the 2018 parliamentary elections. The short duration of these political events often means short-term WPE and WPP initiatives, which are incapable of producing sustainable, long-term change.<sup>70</sup> Donors should ensure that they can effectively engage in local contexts for a significant amount of time, and that they have the resources to maintain a flexible programmatic approach so that they can make changes as the project demands.<sup>71</sup>



## A. Increasing Women’s Descriptive Representation

### Women’s Quotas

Increasing women’s descriptive representation in Lebanon has taken shape through a continued push to institutionalise a women’s parliamentary quota. A women’s quota in the national parliament in Lebanon would, ideally, reserve seats for women in parliament and, as a byproduct, force political parties to allocate seats on party lists to women.<sup>72</sup>

Though demands for a women’s quota have been rejected in Lebanon since 2009, international donors continued to fund WPE and WPP initiatives on the issue. According to a 2016 review of the work conducted by 65 NGOs working on issues related to women’s political empowerment, the National Commission of Lebanese Women (NCLW) noted that approximately 21 continued to make demands for women’s quotas not only at the parliamentary level, but also at the municipal level and in the judiciary.<sup>73</sup>

In 2017, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Lebanese Elections Assistance Project (LEAP), in collaboration with Women in Front (WIF) and funded by IE Med, conducted an awareness campaign on the gender imbalances and inequality in Lebanese politics, and emphasised the importance of institutionalizing a women’s quota.<sup>74</sup> The project created two animated

clips that highlighted some of the controversies surrounding women's quotas, and presented arguments in favour of the quota as a "temporary measure to get us back on track."<sup>75</sup> That same year, the UNDP, as part of its "Technical Support to the Lebanese Parliament" project, in collaboration with the Women in Parliament coalition, established the "National Coalition to Promote Women's Political Representation."<sup>76,77</sup> Collectively, this coalition developed a set of demands relative to a women's quota that was later reviewed and approved by the NCLW. These recommendations were later presented in the form of a draft law proposal to include "gender" in new electoral laws, and were submitted to the Office of the Minister of State for Women Affairs (OMSWA) for adoption.<sup>78</sup>

Similarly, a US Agency for International Development (USAID) project entitled Women's Leadership as a Route to Greater Empowerment, known as "Women in Power," also worked to support the adoption of a gender quota in Lebanon. With support from the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the project, according to a review document, "assisted a major civil society coalition with strategic planning for a gender quota campaign that engaged with high-ranking government and municipal officials."<sup>79</sup>

## Women Leaders and Political Candidates

Funding to support women leaders and political candidates in Lebanon has also become an important focus for international donors. In light of the new electoral law (2018) and ahead of the 2018 parliamentary elections, donors emphasised the continued need not only for capacity-building, but for the production of toolkits and other resources for women candidates to access in preparation for the elections. The German development organisation Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), with funding from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), has been providing

targeted support to elected women officials in Lebanon, alongside Jordan and Palestine, as part of its program "Strengthening Women in Decision-Making in the Middle East" (LEAD) since 2015 as part of its regional Special Initiative for Stabilisation in North Africa and the Middle East. While no approximate budget was listed on GIZ's website, a German government report verified that in 2016, a "3.3 million EUR top-up" was awarded for programming in all three project sites.<sup>80</sup> The program established a Regional Mentoring Project, which brought together 12 established women council members with 12 mentees, or "women having more experience in politics or local administration."<sup>81</sup> These meetings centered around an agenda driven by the mentee, which might include "technical and administrative matters," or, as a council member from Algahzya municipality noted, discussing how issues such as gender and sex, and age, often negatively impact women council members' abilities to work in local government.<sup>82</sup> The project also included a regional meeting between the members of each mentoring network in Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine, where many of the participants vouched for the usefulness of the program. As Ghada Ghanim, a municipal council member in Sagben claimed, "I have always [wished] that there was someone to provide some guidance [on municipal work] based on a prior knowledge and experience."<sup>83</sup>

GIZ's LEAD program also included targeted support to its partner organisations in Lebanon, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), the NCLW, and the Lebanese Organisation for Studies and Training (LOST). This support included activities to, according to GIZ's website, "implement[t] gender audits in municipalities" and to operationalise audit results in local ministries and government offices.<sup>84</sup> GIZ conducted trainings to approximately 5-7 participants in Lebanon, certifying them to conduct formal Participatory Gender Audits (PGAs). As of late 2018, these trained facilitators were "in the process of conducting PGAs in three major political parties," alongside PGAs in primary line ministries.<sup>85</sup>

In 2017, WIF, with funding from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Lebanon, established the Counselling Office for Women in Politics (COWP) to provide “continuous support and guidance” to women candidates ahead of the 2018 parliamentary elections in the form of an advisory council of experts and political coaches, and additional resources on electoral laws and procedures. The project’s objectives included, according to the Women in Front webpage, increasing women candidates’ “knowledge [of] political life and elections” through six days of training sessions; six days of one-on-one support, provided by the project’s advisory council; and through the creation of the counselling office.<sup>86</sup>

***Focusing on individual statistics, such as the number of women in political positions and individual women, does not actually challenge the underlying systems of gender inequality that make it so hard for women to enter the political sphere in the first place.***

The UNDP’s LEAP project continues to be one of the primary donors for women’s political empowerment programming in Lebanon. LEAP is funded by the European Union (EU), the USAID, the United Kingdom, and the UNDP. The project, which ended on December 31, 2019, had an approved budget of 11,576,019.30 USD.<sup>87</sup> In 2017 and 2018, UNDP LEAP established the “Candidates

Network 2017” and the “Candidates Network 2018.” In partnership with WIF, the Candidates Network 2017 conducted trainings in eight different regions (Akkar, Tripoli, Beirut, Nabatieh, Baalbak, Zahle, Zouk Mikael, and Aley) to build women’s capacity to participate as political candidates in the 2018 parliamentary elections.<sup>88</sup> The trainings focused on the following issues: the women’s quota and temporary special measures (TSMs); information required to run for a parliamentary election; how to develop a successful electoral campaign; and how to build alliances and successfully network. Approximately 340 women took part in the trainings. In partnership with UN Women and WIF, the Candidates Network 2018 conducted additional eight informational sessions in eight different regions, including Rayfoun, Sin El Fil, Chtaura, Tripoli, Saida, Zgharta, Baakline, and Beirut. As the UNDP LEAP Annual Report 2018 notes, of the 302 participants in the Candidates Network 2018, 23 ran for the 2018 parliamentary elections, a major success for the project.<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, the NDI, in partnership with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), organised a “political boot camp” for potential first-time women candidates for the parliamentary elections.

In parallel, between 2016 and 2017, WIF, with funding from the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), developed the “Women Decision Makers” initiative. A two-part project, the overall objective focused on developing the political skillsets of both independent and politically-affiliated women to ultimately encourage them to run for political office. According to WIF’s website, the project was organised into two phases: the first phase included selecting 120 Lebanese women to undergo a three-day training to “strengthen” their capacity to “hold public and decision making positions.” During the second phase, 25 participants, “selected based on their political program to address specific national issues” would then continue with a six-day training, in addition to the first round

of training on topics such as policymaking, geopolitical knowledge, communication skills, and conflict resolution.<sup>90</sup>

A large focus has also been on increasing women's visibility as potential political leaders and candidates. This body of work aims to deconstruct current stereotypes that conceive of women as less capable than their male counterparts to participate in Lebanese politics. In particular, these initiatives tend to focus on increasing women's visibility across various media platforms, such as television advertisements and news segments, and social media. In 2017-2018, the Search for Common Ground launched its "Gender Sensitive Public Communications Project" in partnership with ABAAD-Resource Centre for Gender Equality. The project aimed to raise awareness of women's political capabilities through a number of media products (drama and short films) designed for television.<sup>91</sup> The project included a number of activities, such as two workshops dedicated to the use of drama and media for social change (a three-day and one-day workshop, respectively); a competition for university students to submit scripts for short films to be aired on the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International network (LBCI), following their completion of a training on gender and public communications; the production of two mini-series – "3a Ras El-Ley7a" (On top of the List) and "W Iza Ken Mara" (So what if it was a Woman) – that were aired on Al-Jadeed; and, finally, the creation of the website "Qalb El Soura," launched on International Women's Day, to promote the media materials developed during the project. The two miniseries both portrayed women protagonists who are pushed to run for the parliamentary elections: the first woman, a social worker; and the second, a paediatrician. While both miniseries did attract viewers, Al-Jadeed reported that both series fared "medium" in comparison to other miniseries on the channel.<sup>92</sup>

In 2016 and 2017, with the support of the British Embassy, WIF launched the initiative "Women do Politics – Part 1." The program

promoted women's participation across a variety of media platforms, specifically political news segments, as a way of increasing public awareness of women's political capacities.<sup>93</sup> "Women do Politics – Part 2" expanded the scope of Part 1 through 16 various activities, including capacity-building for potential candidates in the 2018 parliamentary elections; the creation of an online platform containing the information of all women parliamentary candidates; and the production of multiple political talk shows featuring these women candidates on Lebanese prime-time television stations, such as LBCI, OTV, and MTV.<sup>94</sup>

Similarly, USAID's "Women in Power" supported elected women with specific capacity-building trainings. According to an annual report, these trainings including "communication and media relations; community outreach and mobilisation; administrative and budget procedures; and management and leadership," with the aim to make these women legislators more effective.<sup>95</sup>

In 2015, ABAAD-Resource Centre for Gender Equality, in collaboration with the National Equality, in collaboration with the National Committee for the Follow up of Women's Issues (CFUWI) and Oxfam, and with funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, developed the "LANA HAQ" project. This project aimed to challenge Lebanese perceptions of women's political participation through a number of social experiments, such as the "Parking for Men Only" experiment, and by mobilizing "change-makers" to advocate for women's political participation in Lebanon.<sup>96</sup>

Also in 2015, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) funded a project, with support from the Governor of Baalbek-Hermel, and the Lebanese Organisation of Studies and Trainings (LOST), titled "Promoting Women's Role in Political Participation in Baalbek."<sup>97</sup> The project's aims included "empowering" women to become "proactively involved in the local decision-making processes" by training approximately 80 women over

the course of two months. An article on LOST's website noted that "by expanding [women's] knowledge and acquiring useful skills through trainings, the local participation of women in the municipal elections will increase."<sup>98</sup>

In 2013, WIF launched the program "Media Supporting Women Leaders: Woman Towards Parliament." The project, in collaboration with the Ministry of Information and the SMART Centre, included a two-part awareness campaign: the first included a media strategy that highlighted the current women leaders and experts in Lebanon, and the second component developed a "directory" of women experts for distribution to news and media outlets. The media strategy, which featured a number of these women leaders and experts, encouraged women to run for political positions.<sup>99</sup>

Earlier in 2009, a USAID project as part of the Consortium for elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) implemented a program titled "Strengthening Citizen Participation in Municipal Elections."<sup>100</sup> Implemented by the International Foundation for Electoral Services (IFES) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the project ran for nearly two years, from December 2009 to December 2011, with an approved budget of 2.3 million USD. Though a focus on "women's empowerment" was listed as second in program reports, the project focused heavily on building the capacities of potential female candidates ahead of the municipal elections. According to one project report, 14 of 30 women who worked with the program won seats on municipal councils. Further, the project taught approximately 120 women councillors about "communication, media, community outreach and mobilisation, municipality administrative and budget procedures, and local development strategy."<sup>101</sup> The project also established a new website, *Shariky*, that served as a networking platform for women leaders and candidates.

## Women in Political Parties

WPE and WPP initiatives targeting women's descriptive representation have also focused on increasing women's presence in political parties, and their political candidacies. In 2017, the Hivos Women Empowered for Leadership Program (WE4L),<sup>102</sup> funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW) Programme, developed the Participatory Gender Audit (PGA) initiative that targeted political parties.<sup>103</sup> Implemented by the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), the PGA analysed political parties' sensitivity to gender through an analysis of party regulations and practices. By the end of 2017, both the Free Patriotic Movement and the Future Movement committed to the PGA.<sup>104</sup> As WE4L's annual report for 2017 notes, however, political parties were hard to mobilise in favour of the PGA; as a result, WE4L altered its strategy to work more closely with women political party members, who are better able to mobilise from the inside.<sup>105</sup>

With support from UNDP LEAP, UN Women, and the EU, the OMSWA supported a workshop discussion between six political parties (Future Movement, Free Patriotic Movement, Lebanese Forces, Progressive Socialist Party, Amal Movement, and Hezbollah) on how to support women's candidacies for the 2018 parliamentary elections.<sup>106</sup> Each of the political parties was given the opportunity to address women's roles therein, and their plans for supporting women candidates ahead of the election. This discussion was part of a larger program supporting the OMSWA to develop a strategy to increase women's political participation and empowerment in Lebanon.

Similarly, in 2018, the WE4L program supported one of its local partners, LADE, who hosted a pre-parliamentary election roundtable discussion with women from various political parties (Ahrar, Free Patriotic



Movement, Future Movement, Kataeb, Lebanese Forces, Progressive Party, Syrian Socialist National Party).<sup>107</sup>

In 2016, UNDP LEAP organised the Gender and Elections BRIDGE (Building Resources in Democracy, Governance, and Elections)

training for approximately 31 women from various political parties, and focused on issues such as the current electoral system, women's quotas, and women's political representation more broadly.<sup>108</sup>



## B. Gender Mainstreaming in the Government

### Supporting National Women's Machineries

Support to Lebanon's national women's machinery, the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), has also increased with the aim of supporting women's political empowerment and participation. Funding to NCLW usually takes the form of capacity-building and technical support, given NCLW's mandate to direct and ultimately lead state actions toward gender equality. In 2016-2017, NCLW received technical support from a number of UN agencies, including UN Women, UNDP, the UN Economic and Social Commission of Western Asia (ESCWA), and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon.<sup>109</sup>

The EU, under its Promoting Social Justice in Lebanon program, funded the "Gender Equity and Empowerment of Women in Lebanon"

project, which provided technical support to NCLW, its primary beneficiary, over a two-year period (2015-2017). The project budget of 800,000 EUR contributed to activities supporting NCLW's capacity to strengthen its network of government stakeholders, specifically Gender Focal Points (GFPs) across line ministries, and to develop its ability to advocate for a women's parliamentary quota. The project resulted in a number of important outcomes. First, NCLW conducted a gender audit at the Ministry of Culture and at the Civil Service Board, and identified the need for additional training for GFPs, which was provided with project funds. Second, NCLW brought together a coalition of 150 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that is known as the "Women for Politics" coalition.<sup>110,111</sup>

### Supporting the Office of the Minister of State for Women Affairs

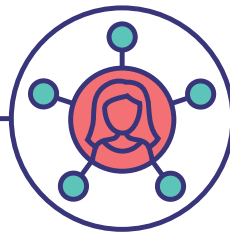
Gender mainstreaming in the government goes beyond formal support to national women's machineries. Established in 2016, the OMSWA became the focus of donor-funded, capacity-building initiatives. In 2017, the UNDP signed into agreement a new partnership with the OMSWA as part of a project entitled "Technical Support to the



Office of the Minister of State for Women Affairs.”<sup>112</sup> The aim of the project was to develop “concrete steps and performance indicators” for the OMSWA to measure its performance toward increasing gender equality and “mainstreaming the role of women in national processes.”<sup>113</sup> As part of UNDP LEAP programming, OMSWA received support to draft and implement a roadmap with the aim to increase the role of Lebanese women in the 2018 parliamentary elections.<sup>114</sup> Over two years (2017-2018), with funding from the EU and UN Women Lebanon, UNDP LEAP supported OMSWA, as part of this roadmap, to develop a set of political alternatives to a women’s quota to increase women’s political participation. As part of this roadmap, UNDP LEAP supported the OMSWA to develop a public awareness campaign that was divided into three phases reflecting three key messages, all promoting women’s increased political participation.

The video ran with the catch phrase, “نص المجتمع، نص البرلمان” or, “half of society, half of the parliament,” and noted that “for your voice to make a change, you should be in the parliament.”<sup>115</sup>

With support from the EU’s Social Justice Programme in Lebanon under the project DAWRIC: Direct Action for Women: Reform, Inclusion and Confidence, 25 representatives from the OMSWA, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), the NCLW, and the national coalition “Women for Politics,” participated in a three-day training called “Effective Communication with the Media,” led by Maharat Foundation. This training aimed to provide these organisations with a better understanding of gender issues and women’s rights, and “provided them with the necessary principles, tips, and tools to improve their skills to effectively communicate with the media.”<sup>116</sup>



## C. Supporting Civil Society Networks and Organisations

Support to CSOs and networks has also been an important area of focus for international donors dedicated to promoting women’s political empowerment and participation. Specifically, funding has focused on encouraging collaboration between Lebanese CSOs, and building the capacity of

these networks to mobilise for change across various sectors in Lebanon. The “Women in Parliament” coalition is one such example. Launched in 2012 by Victoria Zwein and a few Lebanese activists and CSOs, some of which had been working closely with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the coalition continues to lobby for a women’s quota at the national level. As part of its work to increase women’s access to political positions, the committee receives technical support and training from international donors such as the National Democratic Institute.<sup>117</sup> In 2015, the coalition participated in a high-level meeting with Lebanese parliamentarians to discuss drafting a new law enforcing a women’s quota, and, in 2016, launched a campaign that advocated for a

30% women's quota in the newly elected cabinet.<sup>118,119</sup> In 2017, the coalition pledged to support another campaign for a women's parliamentary quota, this time led by WIF, in partnership with the European Women's Lobby and with funding from the EU.<sup>120</sup>

In 2016, the British Council funded and supported the development of the "50-50 Coalition: Women Participation in Municipal Elections" campaign, in collaboration with numerous women's rights NGOs in Lebanon, who collectively lobbied for women's equal representation in municipal elections and positions.<sup>121</sup>

Ahead of the 2018 parliamentary elections, the British Council launched its Social Action grants, which are funded by the EU's Social Justice Programme in Lebanon under the

project name DAWRIC. This programming focused on developing women's organisations' abilities to produce evidence-based data, and conduct projects and activities directly based on these research findings. DAWRIC provided capacity building sessions to 200 participants, 75% of which were women, on such research-based activities and, as a result, received 16 different action projects, with budgets ranging between 7,500 and 10,000 USD. These projects, according to the British Council's website, focus primarily on vocational training (sewing, culinary arts, secretarial and computer skills, and English language training) and, according to a participant in the social action project implemented by the non-profit organisation Voix de la Femme Libanaise in Chiyah, "give [women] strength, will, and show us [that] women have a role in [public] life."<sup>122</sup>



## D. Supporting Women Voters

Supporting women voters can take various forms but almost always focuses on capacity-building and training for women. These trainings can range from training on the new electoral law, to training on engaging in local policy-making processes. In collaboration with the Committee for the Follow-up on Women Issues and the Maharat Foundation, with funding from the EU, the British Council implemented the DAWRIC program. DAWRIC focuses on empowering women within their own communities, and specifically targets poverty and gender inequality in political life and decision-making processes.<sup>123</sup> The

project, which was active from September 2016 to September 2018, was implemented in 22 towns across four different governorates in Lebanon, and recruited 21 municipalities to participate in the project.<sup>124</sup> With a budget of 989,786.03 EUR, the project was funded under the EU's Social Justice Programme in Lebanon. The project was expansive, and included a wide range of activities, including 160 gender sensitisation sessions, with the aim to reach approximately 4,500 women and men in the 22 identified villages; entrepreneurship trainings for an initial group of 21 women; the establishment of a "Change Makers" network, which consists of gender activists, who are considered active participants in their local communities; and, finally, DAWRIC pledged to fund 21 different Social Action projects, and to create women's committees in each of the participating

municipalities.<sup>125,126</sup> Hened Haddad, representing the municipality of Chekka, noted that DAWRIC trainings “gave [her] the confidence” to establish a women’s committee. Similarly, Nina Roustom, representing the municipality of Mejdleya, reported that the “experience had been an awakening [and] that those who took part in those sessions are indeed ready for change.”<sup>127</sup>

Ahead of the 2018 Parliamentary elections, UNDP LEAP created and circulated a number of videos across various social media platforms, local news websites, and television with the “aim to enhance the meaningful participation of women – as voters [and] candidates – in the upcoming elections.”<sup>128</sup> The four videos, all produced in Arabic with English subtitles, focused on the following topics, respectively: “Introduction to the new electoral law 44/2017”; “Who is eligible to vote?”; “How to Run?”; and “Official ballot papers,” which contained information on pre-printed ballot papers, how to fill them out, and how to identify invalid ballots.<sup>129</sup>

In 2018, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), in collaboration with ABAAD-Resource Centre for Gender Equality and the Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities, launched its “Identify, Interpret and Respond” project to encourage gender equitable political participation and to prevent voter discrimination.<sup>130</sup>

Hivos’s WE4L program, which began in 2016 and will end in 2020, continues to provide support to women voters and leaders across various sectors, including politics, professional trade unions, and CSOs. Funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and operating with a budget of approximately 15 million EUR, the project spans five countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), and in Lebanon, includes five implementing partners: LADE, Maharat, Lebanon Support, the Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality (AFE), and the NCLW. While no figures exist for project expenditures in Lebanon during year three (2018),

project-related costs, excluding overhead, in Lebanon amounted to approximately 1,081,306 EUR. The aim of WE4L’s programming works along two simultaneous tracks, the first seeks to “ensure women have equal opportunities and the capacity to fully participate in political life and decision-making processes,” while the second aims to “create more public recognition and support for women in leadership positions.”<sup>131</sup> According to WE4L’s Theory of Change, it is only by addressing the issue of women’s limited political participation through both a top-down and bottom-up approach that WE4L can be the most effective in Lebanon.<sup>132</sup>

In a 2013-2014 initiative entitled “Sure, She Can” (اكيد فيا), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), in collaboration with the Arab Centre for Development, MARCH, and WIF, organised a year-long program to enhance women’s ability to participate in “policy advocacy and strategic thinking.”<sup>133</sup>

Funding also increased ahead of the 2016 municipal elections. In 2016, UNDP LEAP, with funding from the EU and in partnership with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and WIF, conducted capacity-building trainings and information sessions for local Lebanese women as part of its program entitled “Lebanese Women in Municipalities.” These trainings focused on encouraging local women to run as candidates in the upcoming municipal elections, and reached approximately 600 women across Jounieh, Aley, Beirut, Chtaura, Tyr, Tripoli, and Halba, where the sessions were conducted.<sup>134</sup> As one participant is quoted saying in UNDP Lebanon’s publication “365 days of a Gender Journey: Stories from UNDP Lebanon,” these sessions helped her to “regain [her] enthusiasm and courage...[and] motivated [her] to run for elections again, especially after listening to the testimonials of women who won the local elections in 2010.”<sup>135</sup>

Also in 2016, UNDP LEAP conducted an awareness media campaign entitled “Women in Municipalities 2016.” Through multiple

billboard advertisements, posters and flyers, and LED spread across Greater Beirut and beyond, the campaign encouraged women to run as candidates in the upcoming municipal elections and equally encouraged voters to support women candidates.<sup>136,137</sup> Under the broader EU-funded framework “Gender Equity and Empowerment of Women in Lebanon,” the NCLW also participated in this awareness media campaign, and led the development of a short documentary film called “Women in Municipalities,” which interviewed not only government officials, but also Lebanese citizens, inquiring about women’s roles in municipal government affairs. As one interviewee noted, “women are beneficial and can surely work just as well as any man” in municipal government.<sup>138</sup>

WIF also conducted earlier work with women in preparation for the 2016 municipal elections, as part of its “Women in Municipalities” project funded by MEPI. In 2014, this 12-month project worked closely with 300 women in Lebanon, of which 70 were provided “extensive professional training” on issues such as municipal and national law, budgeting, leadership skills, electoral campaigning, media visibility, and public speaking.<sup>139</sup> As Sarah Abdallah, a candidate in the 2016 municipal elections, noted about the trainings while she was a guest on the talk show *Baynetna*, “because [our trainers] had such an extensive background working in municipalities... we were able to learn to [reclaim] our legitimate [positions] in Lebanese public space.”<sup>140</sup>

# Analysis and Conclusion

The selection of WPE and WPP initiatives discussed above, though not an exhaustive list, provides a solid foundation from which to analyse current trends within WPE and WPP funding and interventions in Lebanon. Most importantly, WPE and WPP interventions in Lebanon have perpetuated a classical definition of what can be considered “political.” The focus of these projects on women leaders, women voters, women candidates and officials, and women working closely with government offices and personnel collectively reinforces the idea that there is a specific site, or place, where “politics” takes place. This counters a more nuanced conceptualisation of politics as constituted by both formal and informal political actions, and restricts the definition of what is considered as political to the electoral moment. Further, it assumes that actions can only be classified as political once they are identified as such. Doubtless, a woman running for a position in a municipal government is a political act, but as Mariz Tadros has written, such a narrow definition of what “counts” as political prevents an analysis of women as political agents over time and instead, foregrounds women’s political trajectory as merely a set of sporadic “events” instead of an iterative social process.<sup>141</sup>

A narrow definition of what counts as a political event or action also prevents an analysis of what types of support are actually needed

in order to encourage women’s political participation. Because of the overwhelming focus on the formal political arena, and consequently, women’s access to positions with political decision-making power, current programming has continued to perpetuate programming that focuses not only on the same skillsets, but the same information, in order to successfully participate in politics. Projects, thus, seem to repeat themselves in terms of content and focus. In Lebanon, this was arguably the case in the two-year period leading up to the 2018 parliamentary elections. UNDP LEAP, in partnership with OMSWA, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and the EU, organised a six-day training in February 2018 where women, whether affiliated with political parties or with civil society, were trained on “the electoral system and actors in the electoral process... the components of a successful electoral campaign... and were provided with practical tools” for forming their electoral campaign teams.<sup>142</sup> Trainings on the new electoral law, and managing a successful political campaign, were also administered to participants in the Candidates Network 2017 and 2018, supported by UNDP LEAP and WIF.<sup>143</sup> Ahead of the 2016 municipal elections, both UNDP LEAP and WIF, with funding from MEPI, implemented training programs whose aim was to encourage women to run as candidates. Though the testimonials from

project participants, as they were recorded on donor and partner websites, positively regarded these trainings, the popularity of such capacity-building trainings speaks to Carmen Geha's claim that WPE and WPP projects assume that Lebanese women, given the *right* information, might be able to effectively run for municipal and national government-level positions.<sup>144</sup> For example, the continued focus on training women about how to run a successful political campaign seems to take for granted that even with this knowledge, there exist sociocultural barriers that effectively bar women from even entering the formal political arena, let alone pursuing political candidacy. Instead of challenging these structural barriers, such programming depends on a "learn more" approach, or a focus on each individual woman's capacity as a reflection of her own knowledge of the electoral landscape in Lebanon.<sup>145</sup>

This individualistic focus is reflected in other facets of WPE and WPP programs, as well. Specifically, the interventions that claimed to raise awareness about the current socio-cultural barriers preventing women's political participation seemed to only focus on these barriers within the formal political arena. For example, in the short videos produced by UNDP LEAP as part of their "Half of Society, Half of Parliament," campaign, there is no mention of the structural, cultural, and material barriers preventing women from participating in politics more broadly, let alone running a successful parliamentary campaign.

Increasing women's descriptive representation, or the number of women who hold political positions, or participate in formal politics, seemed to be the driving focus of many of the WPE and WPP initiatives analysed in this report. But this, in and of itself, cannot guarantee women's substantive representation. That is, simply increasing the number of women in formal political positions cannot guarantee that "women's issues," more broadly, will be taken more seriously by the Lebanese government, specifically.<sup>146</sup> As Krook (2012) notes, this logic presents a number of problematic

assumptions, including questions of who, or what, "defines" women's issues, and how descriptive representation implies that all women share the same concerns and, more importantly, put their identities as women ahead of their identities within political, social, and religious groups, to name a few.

***By focusing on traditional conceptualisations of what counts as political participation, current WPE and WPP programming risks minimizing the role that women are actually playing in politics in the country.***

Similar to mainstream development understandings of women's empowerment, WPE and WPP programs in Lebanon seem to employ a liberal conception of equality. They argue that the political arena *is* available to women: they just need the right resources and the right support in order to reach formal political positions and processes. It is, therefore, simply a matter of getting women into these positions. From this perspective, capacity building workshops and trainings, high-level conference, and media campaigns promoting women's political participation all make sense. The more women are trained on the current electoral law, the more women will be empowered to run for political office. The more women voters are made aware of voter regulations and restrictions, the more women will turn up at local polling stations. And finally, the more the Lebanese public is inundated with images of women participating in politics, the sooner they will come to accept women as equally-capable political actors.

What is striking is that within this logic, there is no room for the radical definition of “empowerment” that seeks to challenge reigning power hierarchies that are at the foundation of gender and social inequalities. This perspective fails to engage with women’s limited political empowerment and its ties and interlinkages with women’s economic and social empowerment, and to address the contextual factors linked to women’s political empowerment and that vary not only between municipalities, but between towns. And finally, this approach includes little discussion on the current system of power relations and women’s own implications in it, which might give an advantage to women affiliated with one political group over another.

Finally, by focusing on traditional conceptualisations of what counts as political participation, current WPE and WPP programming

risks minimizing the role that women are actually playing in politics in the country. The increasing visibility of women as leaders across the current revolutionary protests in Lebanon challenges the notion that women’s political empowerment can only be measured by women’s participation in the formal political arena. It is these women, specifically, who are working to break down the current status quo in real time, and articulating how women’s political participation can help to move Lebanon toward a radically just future. Without attention to these political processes outside the realm of formal politics, WPE and WPP interventions contribute to widen the gap between a more institutionalised approach of “doing politics” and broader social movements, hence they remain locked in an inflexible model of women’s political participation that does not accurately portray women’s political empowerment.

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