

Quotas as a Legislative Strategy to Give Justice to Women in Palestine

Theme(s):

- Governance and Decision Making

Type of Program:

- Advocacy

Country/Region:

- Palestine

Submitting/Executing Organizations:

- Palestinian Women's Federation

Author:

- Khadeja Bargouthi, Expert

Initiative overview: This is a campaign initiated by the Palestinian feminist movement in 2002 to support allocating 20% of seats in the Palestinian parliament and local councils to women.

Social discriminatory practices targeted: The campaign deals with the traditional view of women's natural role in the private sphere and in upholding social moral values.

Socio-cultural context: Women fought side by side with men during the British occupation and subsequent Israeli occupation. The struggle took different forms, from voluntary work to leading political roles in the area of public mobilisation. As a result, women have been subjected to torture, imprisonment and other forms of discrimination in spite of the fact that Palestinian women have a high educational level, representing 12% of university teachers and 12% of the workforce. They represent 6.5% of Palestinian parliamentarians, 8% of the PLO National Council, 5% of the PLO Central Council and 30% of the Al Fida party.

National laws and policies: Egyptian and Jordanian laws deprived women of political participation and the right to vote. These laws were only amended in 1975 following the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The decision was aimed at encouraging women to support traditional leaders instead of joining progressive political parties. In 1996, women exercised for the first time their right to vote in parliamentary elections. In 2002, the Palestinian feminist movement launched a campaign to support the decision of allocating 20% of seats in the parliament and local councils to women.

Objectives and Goals

1. Adopt the quota system to enhance women's political participation at the national and local levels.
2. Create a national dynamic to apply pressure on decision-makers to adopt the quota system.

Good Practices

Innovative Approaches

To launch a campaign to achieve 20% of women's representation quotas, the organisers developed the following strategies:

- Creating a coordination unit to activate various women's organisations within the framework of a unified agenda to ensure communication among them
- Agreeing on common and clear visions and aims among these groups to achieve the set objective
- Designing an effective strategy to influence decision-makers by:
 - Holding meetings with members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and other political parties;
 - Holding meetings with influential Palestinian members from the local community; and
 - Influencing the media through advocacy among groups and during events
 - Closely monitoring events and quickly responding to changes

Participatory Approach

- Diversifying roles inside the groups to ensure effective balance
- Avoiding internal conflicts between partners and adjusting any mechanism that is likely to create a competitive environment and thus impede the achievement of common aims and objectives

Overcoming Challenges

- The lack of resources to create mechanisms and activities to transform the quota system from a political issue to a social one was overcome by making strategic alliances to mobilise public opinion.
- The opposition of some political parties to the quota system was overcome by adopting successful examples from the Arab region and holding meetings with effective participants.
- The absence of empowered women to enter elections required supporting women candidates throughout the various campaign phases.

Immediate Successes

- The results were good for women. The rate of elected women reached 33% in spite of the fact that most of them were regularly elected. It is noteworthy that the rates increased and the rate of elected women increased from 55% to 89%.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Inserting the campaign into the context of national and regional political ramifications through a constant monitoring of events and activities ensured a fast response and adaptation to changes.

Ensuring Sustainability

- A strategic plan was developed based on the views of women's associations and of elected female members in order to meet their needs and support them in national councils. The main features of the plan are:
 - Supporting the elected women;
 - Supporting the campaigns of women's associations to ensure sufficient resources, the lack of which usually represents a hurdle to women wishing to fulfil their positions; and
 - Documenting the campaign experiences to highlight the struggles and experiences of Palestinian women and using them to underscore the importance of female leadership.

Contribution to Social Transformations

- The movement worked at different levels and focussed on national priority issues as well as pushing their demands for legislative changes to ratify women's parliamentary representation quotas.
- The quota system was presented as a vital research issue for university students.

Lessons for Replication

- The determination to consolidate women's issues, coupled with a strategy in line with the political and economic context, is the key to fulfilling goals.
- Adopting complementary activities as a positive approach enables taking into account the views of different effective parties fighting to achieve the same objective.
- The effectiveness of allying with supportive political parties in order to overcome the challenges faced by the concerned parties.
- The movement clearly understood political dynamics and women's daily actions and was able to develop speedy reactions.
- Benefiting from past experience was essential to confronting current challenges.
- Consolidating the spirit of negotiations and common positions in relation to different political issues was vital.