

*Vol:2, Issue: 8 pp: 246-254*

**JEL Codes:** A1, A10

AL-KURAITY E.A.J. , ZABOON A.A., MIKLIF, H.Z. (2021). **"Empowering Women Economically and Politically and its Relationship to Sustainable Development (Iraq and Saudi Arabia Case study)"**,

Vol: 2 Issue: 8 pp: 246-254

**Keywords:** *empowerment of women, economic empowerment, political empowerment, sustainable development*

**Article Type**    Research Article

## Empowering Women Economically and Politically and its Relationship to Sustainable Development (Iraq and Saudi Arabia Case study)

**Arrived Date**  
14.09.2021

**Accepted Date**  
12.10.2021

**Published Date**  
31.10.2021

**Eman Abdalkadhem Jabbar Al-Kuraity<sup>1</sup> , Amal Asmar Zabooun<sup>2</sup> , Huda Z. Miklif<sup>3</sup>**

### ABSTRACT

Women are considered one of the important parties and an essential axis in achieving sustainable development. It is noted that this axis did not receive sufficient support despite the efforts and energies made by women, but it is noticed in the Arab region that women face many challenges at all political, social and economic levels, and that the issue of empowerment Women and achieving gender equality is important for accelerating sustainable development, and providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic processes and decision-making will revitalize the economy. Sustainable and beneficial to society. Despite the efforts made by women to guarantee their right to political participation, 23.7% of all parliaments worldwide do not exceed. Therefore, such a study has taken upon itself to be guided by Arab governments and decision makers, especially in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, to integrate the gender equality component and women's empowerment into decisions and policies taken within the framework of achieving the 17 goals of sustainable development to empower women economically and politically.

### INTRODUCTION

Women are the mirror reflecting the growth of societies, a fact that society claimed and the reality have imposed it by time, the status of women is an important criterion that clarifies the degree of progress of any society and measures the movement of its interaction with the data of the modern era. Empowerment was economic, political or social, because the process of empowering women It is a fundamental key to achieving sustainable development. Achieving comprehensive and sustainable development in society can only be achieved with the existence of a true and fair partnership between



eman.abdalkadhem@uokerbala.edu.iq , Assist. Prof., College of administration and Economics, Kerbala University / IRAQ



amel.zabooun@qu.edu.iq , Assist.Prof., College of administration and Economics, Al-Qadisiyah University / IRAQ



dr.huda.miklif@uokerbala.edu.iq , Assist. Prof., College of administration and Economics, Kerbala University / IRAQ



women and men in which women can participate in setting development plans and bring about changes in their outputs, because the marginalization and exclusion of women from political, economic and social life makes them a disrupted energy and an untapped resource.

Therefore, working to empower them will lead to their active participation in political and economic decision-making and an active element in the process of change that guarantees sustainable development.

### **Problem Statement**

Women in Iraq and Saudi Arabia constitute half of the society, as we note that the process of involving women in economic and political terms for both countries is still limited due to the social heritage based on the policy of exclusion and marginalization, and therefore it is necessary to empower them and activate their participation in both Iraq and Saudi Arabia in all aspects of life, whether economic or political.

### **Significance of the Study**

The importance of the study lies in the international attention given to women through the principle of empowerment, because the process of empowering them economically and politically achieves their economic and social independence and represents fairness for women and works to make them an active partner for sustainable development.

### **The Hypothesis of the Study**

The lack of the principle of equality between men and women is a major obstacle to achieving sustainable development goals in both Iraq and Saudi Arabia, which made them seek to empower women and activate their role in the economic and political aspect in particular

## **LITERATURE**

### **The Theoretical Rooting of the Concept of Empowerment and Sustainable Development**

Many definitions have been made about the concept of empowerment. The World Bank has defined empowerment as "a process that aims to enhance the capabilities of individuals or groups to present certain options and turn them into procedures or policies aimed at the end of raising the efficiency and organizational integrity of an institution or organization. A dynamic process that seeks to eliminate all forms of discrimination and inequality between members of society. According to this definition, the success of the empowerment process can only be achieved by removing all obstacles that place marginalized groups in lower ranks (Yusuf & Hussein, 2010 :20-21).

In view of the great importance achieved by empowerment, the term women empowerment emerged in the 1980s and became a central concept in gender studies, and the World Bank considered it one of the basic elements of the development process and combating poverty, and the process of empowering women and improving their living conditions and their equality with men and their participation in the decision-making process in its various economic, social and political aspects, and this is necessary to achieve sustainable development (Abdul Karim & Shatha , 2015:102). Because gender inequality is a barrier to achieving sustainable development. There are three types of empowerment, which are (economic, political and social empowerment).

Our study will be limited to two types, namely, economic and political empowerment for the great importance achieved by these two types, as for economic empowerment, which is raising the ability of women to work in key and leadership positions and self-employment, for example, the ability of women to invest Or borrowing to do various projects (Shawq, 2019:5).

The empowerment of women from the economic point of view is of great importance because their economic participation is a fundamental pillar for achieving sustainable development and a means to advance economic growth rather than merely seeking to remain dependent on society. In addition to woman's access to the field of Economic activity and her participation in the process of production

would contribute to her economic liberation, because women involved in economic activity are more able to participate in decision-making.

Therefore, economic empowerment seeks to achieve a set of objectives, namely (Longwe, 1998 : 19):

1. An increase in the size of women's participation in the labor market.
2. The extent to which women benefit from the return on participation in development.
3. Working to empower women and increase their capacity and self-reliance, in order to contribute to economic life.

It is noted that there are many reasons behind the weak economic empowerment of women, which are as follows: (United Nations Development Program, 2011 :7)

- 1- The low rate of participation in the labor market due to the societal culture based on discrimination based on gender.
- 2- The low rate of women's participation in the private sector due to the dominance of traditions and social customs and the weakness of the labor law enforcement in addition to the limited loans granted to women.
- 3- Weak knowledge and skill building for women and high school dropout rates for girls.

As for political empowerment, it is another type of empowerment of women, which is crystallized in supporting the political participation of women, by increasing their representation in decision-making positions, and increasing their membership in political parties, professional associations and civil society organizations (Abdul Karim & Shatha, 2019:109). As for sustainable development, this concept and its theoretical origination goes back to the Pakistani researcher Mahboob Al Haqq and the Indian researcher Amartya Sen during their work within the framework of the United Nations Development Program, which considered sustainable development to be (economic- social) development, not just economic (Medhat & Yasmine, 2017:85).

A report on the United Nations, which emphasized that development must meet the current urgent needs without compromising future needs, and in 1992 the Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where the concept of sustainable development has become a general concept that has a large part in the formulation in contemporary environmental policy (Adnan, 2018 :3) and after that the Copenhagen Conference was held in 1995 and the Women's Summit in Beijing in 1995 which emphasized the need for sustainable development. In 2005, the Arab Ministers of Social Affairs and Planning in the League of Arab States approved the new development trend related to sustainable development and the development goals of the new millennium for the purpose, especially those aimed at empowering the groups that should be more involved in achieving development, such as women and youth, and this was confirmed at the third conference of the Arab Women Organization in Tunis. In 2010, under the slogan women are a basic partner in the sustainable development process (Medhat & Yasmine, 2017: 87).

### **The Relationship of Empowerment to Sustainable Development**

Women are considered half of society, and it is not possible to achieve development in any country if this half of economic, political and social life is excluded or marginalized, because the exclusion process makes them an idle energy and an untapped resource 11. Where interest in women came in many conferences, including the Mexico Conference in 1975 and others in Copenhagen from 1980 and another conference in Nairobi in 1985, in addition to the results of the Fourth International Conference on Women in Beijing 1995, where these meetings reached new development concepts such as the approach to empowering women. The concept of empowerment is a new concept that shows the need for women's participation as an active element in development, as it is defined as "a holistic process that begins with a woman's self-awareness and sense of control over her private life

and her ability to make decisions. On the collective level, it is the ability of women to participate in the development process" (Mounira, 2016 :186).

The term empowerment of women has been associated with development, and it went through three approaches the first approach related to the integration of women in development (IFD) in 1973, which emphasized the need for support for the integration of women to work in many sectors and the necessity of their assigning her positions. This trend also tried to bring about legal and administrative changes to ensure better integration of women in the economic system, and given the lack of its base in the first approach, came the second approach This approach focused on thinking about how to develop technology that contributes to reducing the burden of the family so that women have more time to be directed to productive work.

The emergence of many negatives in this approach has led to the emergence of the role conflict that resulted from women assuming multiple roles simultaneously and their inability at the same time to benefit from the fruits of their work in light of the prevailing gender relations that distinguish between men and women. That there be an actual repercussion for this burden as a result of the prevalence of customs and traditions that many societies, especially Arab societies, could not get rid of. In view of this approach neglecting the economic role of women and limiting them to the traditional role, the third approach of Gender and Development (GED) came, which emphasizes the concept of sustainable development and social justice (Mounira ,2016 :186).

Because women are a fundamental key to achieving sustainable development. If we want to achieve sustainable development in the long term, the necessity to empower women and achieve gender equality because it forms the basis of the foundations necessary to achieve sustainable development goals (Iraqi Ministry of Planning, 2018 :9). Because gender inequality is an obstacle to achieving those goals, because Women are the category with the least access to resources, and they are the weakest link in development. If we compare the performance of the two sexes within each indicator, we notice their lowest share without exception. Therefore, the improvement in the developmental performance in general is related to the improvement in the status of gender equality.

With reference to the performance of the gender equality index, we find an increase in the rate of inequality in the Arab world (0.535) compared to the countries of Europe and Central Asia (0.279) as well as the global average (0.443), because the role of Arab women in achieving sustainable development faces multidimensional challenges that include the gender dimension. Social- age- social class - economic level - educational status - and other matters (Arab Women Organization,15).

It is noted that women may play a direct role in achieving the goals of sustainable development, and sometimes an indirect role in achieving those goals, and at other times in enhancing their participation in achieving those goals. Below is a table that shows the aforementioned talk about the role of women in achieving sustainable development goals.

**Table 1. The Role of Women in Achieving Sustainable Development**

<b>Fundamental Goals of sustaining Women's Role to achieve the human Development</b>	<b>Goals complementary to women's participation in achieving sustainable development goals</b>	<b>Additional goals to enhance women's participation in achieving sustainable development goals</b>
1- Achieve gender equality 2- The eradication of poverty in all its forms and everywhere 3- Ensuring that everyone enjoys solid lifestyles and well-being 4- Ensuring quality, equitable and inclusive education for all and enhancing opportunities for lifelong education for all. 5- Promoting the progressive, comprehensive and sustainable economic	1- End hunger, provide security and good nutrition, and value sustainable agriculture. 2- Reducing and inequality within countries. 3- Take urgent action to address climate change and stir. 4- Strengthening the means of	1- Ensuring the provision of water and sanitation services for all. 2- Ensuring that everyone has access to affordable, documented and modern energy services. 3- Establishing infrastructures capable of resilience and stimulating comprehensive

right for all, full technical employment and the provision of decent work for all. 6- Sustaining societies 7- Peace, justice and institutions.	nutrition and revitalizing the global company for sustainable development.	industrialization for all and the forefront and encouraging innovation. 4- Ensuring the existence of sustainable consumption and production patterns. 5- Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources to mitigate sustainable development. 6- Protecting and restoring the terrestrial ecology, promoting its sustainable use and management, managing forests in a sustainable manner, combating desertification, halting and reversing land degradation and halting the loss of biological diversity.
--	--	--

Source: Arab Women Organization, Women and the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in the Region, Pilot Study - 2030, without Age, p. 15

### **Analyzing the Economic and Political Reality of Iraqi and Saudi Women in Light of the Sustainable Development Aims**

For a period of time, Iraqi women have been suffering from economic and political marginalization and exclusion. This is due to the historical roots of male authority that used coercive methods against women to consolidate their authority and place women under the command and behavior of men. But after 2003, the situation changed, as Iraq began to restructure its institutions that specifically concern women, to harmonize with all areas of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The laws and legislations included in the Iraqi constitution for the year 2005 to guarantee women many rights, and affirms justice and equality for all without discrimination on the basis of gender, as it guaranteed her right to own property and her right to education, health care, economic participation and to occupy positions, as the quota system guaranteed her.

Her right to occupy parliamentary seats in parliament and in provincial councils (Malik ,2012 : 107) and since Iraqi women constitute about (49.7%) compared to (50.3%) for men of the Iraqi population for the year 2008, meaning that women constitute half of the society numerically, this means that women are affected by economic and political changes.

All of them, without depriving them of effective participation, and not enabling them means wasting and squandering the energies of society (Malik ,2012 :126).

It is noticed from Table (2) that the rate of women's participation in economic activity in Iraq is compared to the rate of male participation and for all years of schooling, and the unemployment rate for females is also characterized by increase compared to the rate of male unemployment, which means that there are still differences between males and females in terms of participation in the activity. Economic and unequal access to employment opportunities.



**Table 2. The rate of economic activity and unemployment rate for individuals aged 15 years and over by gender in Iraq for selected years (percentages)**

Years	Average of Economic Activity		Total Economic activity in Iraq	Average of Unemployment		Average of Unemployment in Iraq
	Male	Female		Male	Female	
2008	74,95	18,04	46,84	14,33	19,64	15,34
2012	73,60	13,48	42,86	9,87	22,59	11,92
2014	72,45	13,54	42,74	8,44	21,92	10,59
2016	72,09	14,44	43,15	8,49	22,22	10,82

Source: Ministry of Planning, Central Bureau of Statistics in Iraq, Statistical Abstract for 2017, multiple pages.

In the political field, we find that the size of Iraqi women's participation in the House of Representatives depended on the (quota) system, where Iraqi women participated in the general legislative elections to choose the House of Representatives in January 2006 and the share of women in the quota was (37) seats out of (275) that is, a percentage (28.4%) according to the single-district and closed-list system.

In the second legislative elections in 2010, the list was open, while the multi-district system was followed, which included all the governorates of Iraq. Of the total number of members of the House of Representatives, and in the third legislative elections that took place in 2014-2018, women won (38-87) seats out of a total of (328-329) seats in the House of Representatives, respectively, 25% -26% (Ministry of Planning ,74-75).

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, we find that the period of the fifties and sixties spread many statements that reduce the status of women as a result of the customs and traditions that followed in these societies, but in the nineties there was a major shift represented in the entry of women into the labor market in many Arab countries as a result.

When the circumstances imposed by the education of women and the urgent need for them, as Saudi Arabia set development plans that contribute to clearing the way for Saudi women to participate in economic activity, as the Ninth Development Plan (2010-2015) focused on developing Saudi human resources, and especially the female component, because Saudi women constitute half of the society and constitute (49%) of the total number of Saudis, and it also emphasized the need to develop the contribution of women in economic and political activity, and among the steps taken by Saudi Arabia in this field is to appoint thirty women as members of the Shura Council that is, equivalent to 20% of the council members (Shuq , 2019 :5).

As for the level of economic activity, we find that the number of new entrants to the labor market of university-level graduates is one thousand male and female graduates, of whom 83.9 thousand female graduates, and these constitute 90.4% of the total number of university graduates and above.

As for the number of new entrants to the labor market of diploma stage graduates, about 83.5 thousand male and female graduates, of whom 69.5 thousand female graduates, and they constitute 88.8% of the total number of graduates of the diploma stage.

The number of high school graduates is estimated at about 39.9 thousand male and female graduates, of whom 8.2 thousand female graduates, and these constitute 64.2% of the total secondary school graduates.

Whereas, the number of new entrants to the labor market, including middle and primary graduates, is about 19.4, whereas the number of female graduates is 2.4, which represents 42.0 out of the total graduates of middle and primary school.

As for the number of illiterate persons in the labor market, it was estimated at about 3.5 of them, which constitutes 0.6 of females, which is equivalent to 13.7 of the percentage of males out of the total number of illiterate craftsmen, as is evident in Table (3).

**Table 3. The economic participation rate of Saudis aged 15 years and over by gender and educational level for the year 2016**

Educational Level	Males	Females	Total
Illiterate	17.3	0.6	3.5
Below Secondary school	42.0	2.4	19.4
Secondary or equivalence	64.2	8.2	39.9
Diploma below University	88.8	69.5	83.5
University and above	90.4	64.9	78.2
Total	64.6	19.3	42.2

Source: General Authority for Statistics, Labor Force Survey 2016, pg. 22.

As for the number of unemployed Saudis, according to the results of the labor force survey for the year 2016, we find that the total unemployment rate for the population (15 years and over) reached (5.6%), and the unemployment rate among males (2.6%) and among females (21.3%).

The survey results also indicated that the highest rate of unemployment for Saudis was (4.5%) among individuals between (15-24) years of age, for individuals aged between (25-39) at a rate of (14.8%), while the results showed that the unemployment rate was the lowest for individuals those aged from 40 years and over, at a rate that ranged between zero and (1.3%)

This means that the percentage of Saudi women's participation in economic activity was low, and the high unemployment rates among females indicates the lack of opportunities available to them.

Therefore, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has sought within its vision for 2030 to involve Saudi women in working life more and effectively by assuming leadership positions in many fields or increasing their participation rates in the labor market from 22% to 30%, and to achieve this, it has issued many decisions in various Ministries to appoint a number of distinguished female employees in leadership positions, including the appointment of three women heads of three sub-municipalities in Jeddah ([www.alriydh.com](http://www.alriydh.com)).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

- 1- Empowering women means achieving equity between both sexes and helping women to have a full role and contribution in setting policies and decision-making for all aspects of economic, political and social life.

- 2- The active participation of women and empowering them politically and economically is far from the basic goals that countries seek to achieve in order to achieve sustainable development.
- 3- The process of empowering women in the economic, political and social fields cannot be achieved by virtue of the laws and legislations issued only. Rather, it must be accompanied by an increase in women's awareness of all of their rights and the conviction that they are able to integrate into the labor market and reach important and critical positions in the state.
- 4- Both Iraqi and Saudi women suffer from the existence of social legacies based on gender and push towards prejudice in favor of men, which hinders the process of their economic and political participation.
- 5- That Iraq and Saudi Arabia are trying to put women in the position they deserve through individuals important paragraphs and projects in development plans in order to highlight the vital role that they can play in the economic and political sides.

### **Recommendations**

- 1- Establishing information, research, training and investment centers and associations to develop women's skills, raise their administrative and technical capacity in the field of project management, and integrate them into development plans in order to enable them from the economic side.
- 2- Activating the laws regulating women's work, defining their rights in the field of political participation, and protecting them from exposure to injustice.
- 3- Increasing women's awareness of the important role they can play in achieving development through educational and media programs.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### **REFERENCES**

- Al-Jawareen, A.F. 82018). Sustainable Development in Iraq - Reality and Challenges, Iraqi Economists Network, Economic Papers, p. 3. <https://jurnal.stie-aas.ac.id/index.php/IJEBAR/article/view/1019/569>
- Arab Women Organization, Women and the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab Region, Consultative Study, 2030, without a year, p.15.
- Bazza, Y.B., Qadri, H. (2010). Women's Political Empowerment and its Impact on 2003-2008, Master Thesis, Haji Khader University, p. 20-21. Achieving Human Development in the Arab World, A Study in the Light of Sustainable Development Reports.
- Hammoud Al-Dwaihi, Women from Homework to Participation in Decision-Making, available on the [www. alriydh.com](http://www.alriydh.com) (accessed on 10.09.2021).
- Hussein, M.A. (2012). "Empowering Iraqi Women in the Fields of Development". *Al-Khaleejiah Economic Magazine*, Issue 23, p. 107.



- Iraqi Ministry of Planning, (2018). Sustainable Development Towards Better Empowerment of Women and Girls, The Iraqi Central Bureau of Statistics, p.9.  
[https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23789Iraq\\_VNR 2019 final EN HS.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23789Iraq_VNR_2019_final_EN_HS.pdf)
- Jaeid, S.H.(2019). The Causal Relationship between Saudi Women's Empowerment and Economic Growth for the Period (1999-2015), *Journal of Economic and Administrative Sciences*, Volume 3, p.5.
- Longwe, S.H. (1998). Education for Women's Empowerment of schooling for women's Subordination? In *Gender and Development*, an Oxfam Journal, volume 6, issue 2, p.19.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/741922726>
- Medhat Abu Al-Nasr and Muhammad, Y.M. (2017). The sustainable naming concept, its dimensions, its indicators, Arab Group for Training and Publishing, p. 85.
- Ministry of Planning, Central Statistical Organization in Iraq, Empowering women, a supportive environment and a supportive culture, National Committee for Population Policies in Iraq, pp. 74-75.
- Salami, M. (2016). Women and the problem of economic empowerment in Algeria, *Journal of Algerian Economic Development*, p. 186.
- Shanjar, A.K. and Delly, S.S. (2015). Empowering women in Iraq and their role in advancing the Iraqi economy, *Al-Qadisiyah Journal of Administrative and Economic Sciences*, volume 17,p.102.  
<https://www.iasj.net/iasj?ald=102838&func=fulltext>
- The United Nations Development Program in Iraq. (2011). Economic Empowerment of Women - Inclusion of Women in the Iraqi Economy, p.7.