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The Jordanian Women's Movement: Perspectives, Successes and Challenges

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Arab Women’s Organization

The Arab Women Organization of Jordan (AWO) is a non-governmental and non-profit human rights’ organization dedicated to considering women’s rights as human rights. Since foundation in 1970, AWO had adopted a vision to strongly support gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. For more information, see: www.awo.org.jo

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Introduction and methodology

This research aims to explore and capture the impact of the JWM on women and society. The research is based on a thorough review of academic literature and 22 in-depth interviews with members of the JWM, academics and activists, conducted between February and March 2021 (full list of research participants in annex 1).

The Jordanian Women's Movement (here after JWM) has been active since the mid-20th century and went through several shifts against the backdrop of major political transformations. In the 1940s, women's activity mostly involved charitable work, which was seen as socially acceptable work for women in a public sphere that was predominantly reserved for men.

In the years following the Nakba of 1948, the discourse in women's movement started to shift, with the growing pan-Arab and anti-colonial sentiments and as Jordan witnessed a short period of political openness. Demonstrations calling for women's suffrage, organized by women in 1950s, led to the issuance of a decision granting educated women the right to vote. However, political activism came to an abrupt end, when martial law was introduced in 1957, forcing the JWM along with other political parties to move underground. Following the war of 1967, large numbers of women were driven into public work, providing emergency relief for the influx of Palestinians displaced by the Israeli occupation.

In 1974, another shift in the discourse of the JWM started as the issue of women's rights was being increasingly recognized as a universal concept. In the international arena, the 1972 UN resolution 3010 declared the year 1975 as Women's International Year. In line with these developments, King Hussein issued a royal decree to allow all adult women the right to vote. In 1989, parliamentary life resumed as martial law was lifted. The 1989 elections were considered the freest elections that Jordan had witnessed; it was the first time for women to directly participate in parliamentary life.

In the 90s, women became more involved in human rights' issues and participated in conferences and conversations at the international level. The Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) was established by a government's decision in 1992 to serve as a national machinery to promote women's status in Jordan. Another shift in the discourse in women's activism took place in the mid 90s, when women's issues were framed as issues of development.

Over the years, the JWM played a key role in the advancement of women in society, and as a byproduct, the advancement of society itself. Great efforts have been undertaken to amend and abolish discriminatory laws, advance women's education, improve their participation in political and economic life, and raise awareness on key gender issues. However, obstacles that hinder the work of the JWM still exist and include the patriarchal nature of society and institutions, shrinking civic spaces, lack of coordination and funding among others.

Defining the Jordanian Women's Movement

Before examining the development and impact of the JWM, it is important to clarify how the movement is defined and who it encompasses. Often referred to in academic literature is the definition by the Encyclopedia of Feminism of a 'women's movement' as a 'vague, catch-all phrase which means different things to different people... it can include any and all activities and organizations which have the aim of improving women's status and situation.'¹

Ababneh (2021), included in her definition of the JWM 'the work, whether coordinated or not, of all actors, organized in groups or as individuals, working on women's issues (however defined)'.² Layla Naffa, the Director of Programs at the Arab Women's Organization (AWO), confirmed that there is debate among academics regarding the definition and argued that the movement includes 'several organizations and individuals who adopt a gender perspective in their social or political work... even if they were not a united and coordinated body' (Layla Naffa, interview). Given that the JWM is not coordinated and organized under one umbrella raises the question on whether it can be considered as a movement. However, there seems to be some consensus that individual and group efforts fighting for women's rights and gender equality, whether consolidated or not, can be considered part of the women's movement in Jordan. According to Salma Nims, Secretary General of the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW), the JWM includes 'the pioneers of the women's movement from the early years... as well as human rights advocates and organizations of different sizes, working on several issues' (Salma Nims, interview). She added that the question of the necessity of having one collective movement is not unique to Jordan and remains unanswered globally.

Amal Sabbagh, former Secretary General of the JNCW, included in her definition 'any person who believes in and is committed to women's issues and justice... including organizations, university professors or individuals' (Amal Sabbagh, interview). She stressed that the documented history of the women's movement almost exclusively focuses on the political movement, and while very important, the work of women who fought for women's rights in other ways, is often overlooked.

For the purposes of this research, and in line with the definitions mentioned above, we consider the JWM to include the work of individuals, groups and organizations which focuses on advancing the status and situation of women. This can vary from organizations working within formal structures, to groups who are formally or informally mobilizing, or teachers and community members who are deconstructing patriarchy in their everyday life. While the majority of this paper focuses on the historic political activism of the JWM as well as the recent work of the movement as part of civil society- given the focus of most literature – it also tries to shed light on other aspects of the movement and the challenges facing it today.

Women's integration into public life: a brief history

Women's integration into public life was seen as an essential step in the early years of Jordan's establishment. This however was not welcomed by all; while some groups worked for the liberation of women, others resisted it as they believed that the traditional role of women should be preserved. Consequently, women had to fight to secure their civil, economic and political rights, as they organized and participated in demonstrations between the 1940s and 1970s to call for equality and their right to vote and run for elections.³

1940s

In the early years, the public sphere was mostly reserved for men and so women's involvement in charitable and philanthropic activity was one-socially acceptable way to step outside the private sphere.⁴ Among the first women's organizations founded were the Women's Solidarity Society and the Jordanian Women's Federation in 1944 and 1945 respectively. Both organizations carried out charitable and philanthropic activities as well as provided health and education services for vulnerable groups.⁵ These organizations were in Amman and were led by elite women; Princess Musbah, Prince Abdullah's wife – later King Abdullah- was the association's honorary president and Princess Zain Al Sharaf was its working president.

Following the Nakba of 1948, Jordan witnessed a growth in the popularity of ideological parties including the Ba'thists, communists, and others, who joined together as the Jordanian National Movement. The ideas of these parties - modernization, women's rights, and an end to British colonialism - attracted many urban and middle-class women. For the most part, women's contribution to the national movement was mainly through social work and welfare, and their support for Arab nationalist causes, rather than actually joining political parties.⁶

1950s

In the years following the Nakba, with the growing pan-Arab and anti-colonial sentiments - before the abolition of the British-Jordanian treaty and the Arabization movement of the army– Jordan witnessed a short period of 'political openness' and was affected by the Algerian revolution and the tripartite aggression against Egypt which ignited solidarity sentiments across Arab countries and affected the women's movement.⁷

The Women's Awakening League emerged in 1952 as the women's group of the communist party. The League opposed and called for the elimination of the British presence and the liberation of women and society from class and colonial systems. This led Bagot Glubb, the British commander of the Jordanian army to order the closure of the League. The league continued to work underground until it began working openly again in the early 70s as the Arab Women's Organization.⁸

In 1954, the Arab Women's Union was founded by striving women sympathetic with the Jordanian National Movement, and it brought with it a major shift in the work of the JWM. In addition to social work and welfare, the union also campaigned vigorously for women's right to vote under the leadership of Emily Bisharat; Jordan's first female lawyer.⁹ The Union also participated in the demonstrations and

protests, and signed memorandums condemning the tripartite aggression against Egypt and supporting the Algerian revolution and the Palestinian women's struggle against the Zionist aggression.¹⁰

The influx of Palestinian refugees greatly impacted Jordanian women, as it provided them with an opportunity to learn about the different dimensions of the occupation, to share discussions with Palestinian women about occupation and freedom. It helped mature important concepts around freedom of the land, and its relation to freedom of the self.
(Abeer Dababneh)

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) was founded in 1951 with the purpose of supporting all voluntary activity, societies and organizations in Jordan.¹¹ The Jordanian Constitution of 1952 also explicitly stated that men and women were equal in rights and duties, and guaranteed citizens' right to establish political parties, societies and unions.¹² That said, these developments were more theoretical than practical; out of the 340 societies founded between 1951 and 1979 registered by MoSD, only 22 were women's societies. Additionally, many of these organizations, including the Women's Awakening League, and the Federation of Jordanian Women, were either dissolved after just a few years, or forced to move underground. Despite this, these groups still achieved important work, for instance, the Women's Awakening League, organized a large demonstration in which over 800 women participated in Jericho in 1956, demanding equal gender rights and full suffrage for women. However, they were met with repressive responses from the government.¹³

In 1955, following petitions and demonstrations calling for women's suffrage, the Council of Ministers issued a decision that granted educated women (a condition that did not apply to men) the right to vote, but not to run for parliamentary elections. Despite this decision, demonstrations calling for gender equality continued with increasing participation but limited success.¹⁴

This period of 'political openness' came to an abrupt end in 1957, when the regime introduced martial law, banning all political activities and even the Arab Women's Union.¹⁵

1960s

Despite the decline in political work following the declaration martial law and organizations taking on more charitable work, women's organizations and groups continued to work in illiteracy elimination and campaigning for political rights and the amendments of laws. In 1960, the Electoral Law was enacted, which stipulated that only male Jordanians had the right to vote, provided they were over 20 years of age and had registered for voting.¹⁶

It [the JWM] worked on illiteracy elimination, which may seem like development work, but is actually political... why was it political? Because an uneducated woman did not have the right to vote. (Hadeel Abdul Aziz)

The JWM witnessed a paradigm shift in the 60s; the huge shock of the defeat of the Arab armies in the war of 1967 politicized women and empowered them to push the boundaries of stereotypical gender roles. Following the war, large numbers of women were driven into public work, providing social services and emergency relief for the influx of Palestinians displaced by Israel's occupation of the West Bank. During this period, many women worked on supporting the Palestinian cause through humanitarian assistance. For example, **Emily Naffa**, founded the AWO in Baqa Camp.¹⁷ Many female activists also

worked undercover alongside the political parties that were banned following the declaration of a state of emergency in the country. Moreover, active opposition forces were not spared the threats or harassments at that time. It is worth noting that **Emily Naffa** was suspended from her work at Ahli Bank in 1958 because she was one of the founders of the **Union of Banks**.

1970s

In the early 1970s, the JWM started to transform along with the political developments that Jordan witnessed during that time. As some organizations closed, new organizations were founded and registered as societies. This was facilitated by the amendment of the Charitable Societies Law by deleting the word 'charitable' from the Law's title and societies definition. In this context, the AWO emerged in 1970 as the first society registered in such circumstances.¹⁸

In 1974, a third shift in the discourse of the JWM started as the issue of women's rights was being increasingly recognized as a universal concept. In the international arena, the 1972 UN resolution 3010 declared the year 1975 as Women's International Year. In line with these developments, King Hussein issued a royal decree to allow all adult women the right to vote amending the definition of Jordanian in the 1960 Electoral Law from 'every male person' to 'every person whether male or female'. However, at that time, running for elections was not possible as the country was under martial law and parliamentary life was suspended (1974-1984).¹⁹ In that same year, the Arab Women's Union was allowed by the government to resume its work, under a new name 'The Society of Women's Federation in Jordan' (SWFJ).²⁰

This generation has the right to ask, why 1974? How did the government allow a women's union to operate while martial law was in force? The reason was that universally, women's issues were gaining attention and Jordan was among the countries that did not have any women's federations. So, to avoid any embarrassment in front of other countries or the United Nations, the Union was allowed to be established in 1974. (Abla Abu Elbeh)

In 1975, the first World Conference on Women was held in Mexico City. Important partnerships between the JWM, the Palestinian women's movement, and other international parties emerged, and together were able to pass resolution 32, condemning Zionism and its impact on the liberation of Palestinian and Arab women.²¹ ^a

For the first time ever, in 1978, the government appointed three women - Ina'am Al Mufti, Widad Bulus and Naela Rashdan - to serve as members of the first National Consultative Council, which had a total of 60 members. The council was a body representing society in the absence of Parliament. This was the first-time women participated in any official governing body since the state was founded in 1921. However, when the Personal Status Law (PSL) was passed in 1976, such improvements were contradicted as the law maintained the traditional role of women, as wives and caregivers, and emphasized them as dependents.²²

^a Later, in the 4th Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, the American and Israeli alliances succeded in casting aside the plight of Palestinian women under occupation and the important achievements of the Mexico conference all together.

As women finally gained some say in political discussions, new institutions and agreements developed to reflect this: in 1977 a Women's Affairs Directorate was set up at the Prime Ministry up by the government in response to a UN recommendation.²³ Additionally, in 1979 Ina'am Al Mufti was appointed Minister of Social Development, and became the first female Jordanian minister, followed by Laila Sharaf, who was appointed Minister of Information five years later.²⁴

In the second half of the 70s, civil society started to gradually open up as new organizations were established, among which were women's and cultural organizations as well as associations of writers, artists, and playwrights. In addition, environmental organizations and organizations of people with disabilities were established. Elite women established a number of women's clubs and societies, most notably the Business and Professional Women Association in 1976.²⁵ Accordingly, this phase witnessed a change at the level of women's organizations and actions, and women were more able to consolidate their efforts.

The JWM continued to work on encouraging girls to complete their education. Haifa Al Basheer for example, campaigned to encourage women to study nursing in the 1970s due to the lack of female nursing staff in Jordan. While some families refused to allow their female members to study nursing, due to the social perception associated with, Haifa Al Basheer decided to study nursing at the University of Jordan and started working in this profession while her husband was the Minister of Health.²⁶

1980s

In 1981, MoSD established a new governmental women's organization, General Federation of Jordanian Women (GFJW). As a result, there were two main federations representing women at the time, the newly formed governmental federation, registered under MoSD, and the non-governmental SWFJ, registered under the Ministry of Interior (MoI). SWFJ welcomed this; however, both federations faced problems concerning their legitimacy.²⁷

The Federation remained suspended until 1989 when the martial law was lifted and re-emerged under a new name 'Jordanian Woman's Union' (JWU) in the early 90s. Recently, the JWU was pressured to shift registration to the MoSD until 2016 when it received a letter stating that it would no longer be registered under the MoI as it had been before, but under MoSD. According to the Cooperatives Law which governs the JWU, it prohibits any registered cooperative to replicate the work of political parties.²⁸

In 1989, parliamentary life resumed as martial law was lifted. The 1989 elections were considered the freest elections that Jordan had witnessed where women directly participated in parliamentary life, as 12 women ran for election out of a total of 647 candidates.²⁹ Although unprecedented, the fact that none of these women were elected - despite the fact that 48% of voters were themselves women - showed that attitudes towards women in positions of political power remained largely unchanged. Only one woman rose to public office, but she was appointed in the Upper House of Parliament and not elected.³⁰

1990s

In 1992, Jordan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW), which was signed in 1980. In 1993, Tujan Al Faisal became the first female in Jordan to win a parliamentary seat. That year, she was one of 3 female candidates out of 534, and all three had run as independent candidates.³¹ 1993 was also the year two women were appointed in the Upper House of Parliament and

Rima Khalaf was appointed Minister of Trade. In 1995, **Salwa Al Masri** was appointed Minister of Social Development.³² 1995 also saw the first woman appointed to the Jordanian judiciary - a number that rose to 60 women by 2010.³³

In the 90s, women's organizations started focusing on shaping and unifying the women's discourse at the political, social, and cultural level. Women became more involved in human rights' issues and participated in conferences and conversations at the international level. JNCW was established by a government's decision in 1992 to serve ational machinery to promote women's status in Jordan. Additionally, the Commission is responsible for the implementation of the National Strategy for Women, which was developed in a national women's conference in June 1999 to integrate women's issues into the Socio-economic Development Plan 1999-2003.³⁴

In 1997, 17 women ran for parliamentary elections but none of them actually won, while 3 women were appointed in the Upper House of Parliament. The 1997 elections had demonstrated a weakness in people's participation in political parties and their lack of trust in them.³⁵

In other words, the significant shift in women's movement was promoted after the mid-90s when women's issues were perceived as development issues and separated from the intersecting political and structural dimensions. This shift in discourse resulted in turning the JWM from being political to social with developmental dimensions, and from incorporating charitable organizations to non-governmental organizations working on projects that mostly depend on international funding. This shift was further enhanced in the 2000s following the growing economic programs presented by the World Bank and the introduction of Sustainable Development Goal No.5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.³⁶

2000s onward

The next important change to Jordan's Electoral Law took place in 2001 when the voting age was lowered to 18 years, thereby raising the proportion of voting women and increasing their participation.³⁷ Even more notably, in 2003 the law was changed again to introduce a quota system, allocating six seats for women (or 5.5% of the Assembly).³⁸ Although this meant that the average number of women serving in the Jordanian assembly would increase, the number of women who won a seat based on competition did not change drastically (only one woman in 2007). 7 women were appointed to the Upper House of Parliament in 2003.³⁹

That said, in 2009, nine women were appointed to the Upper House of Parliament, making up to 15% of the Senate. In 2010, the women's quota was further amended to allocate 12 seats to women. Notably, that year, 142 women ran for elections; only one woman was elected by competition and 12 by quota. In 2012, the law was amended again, raising the women's quota to 15. In the following parliamentary election, 18 women won seats.⁴⁰ This was partly because over the previous year, JNCW as well as other civil society organizations implemented a range of projects to boost women's political participation at all levels of the electoral system - from local to national elections.⁴¹

By 2016, the number of women's seats in the Parliament rose by 15% of the House of Representatives (20 out of 130 seats) and remained constant at this number in 2019. In the 2017 elections, 58 out of 177 women who stood as candidates were elected at municipal and governorate levels (an increase from 36%

in 2013 to 41% in 2017), which demonstrated that women running as local representatives had much higher rates of success than in national parliamentary elections. It is also worth noting that Prime Minister Omar Al Razaz's cabinet in 2019, had the highest number of female ministers (7 out of 28 members, making up to 25% of the cabinet).⁴²

Impact of the Jordanian Women's Movement

A growing body of research is highlighting the link between the wellbeing of women and the advancement of society. A country cannot fully develop economically and socially without the full utilization of its resources – including human resources. Investing in the education of women and their participation in public life has numerous positive effects on different development indicators including children's education and health, economic growth and poverty rates. For example, studies show that the greater women's control over resources within the household the more household resources are allocated to children's health, nutrition and education.⁴³ In line with this research, Abeer Dababneh noted that 'the more educated, politically and economically active women are, the more powerful and independent they become'. Having an education, increases women's knowledge and awareness and having access to resources and decision-making positions plays an important role in shifting power relations within the family, household and society.⁴⁴

In the following subsections we demonstrate some of the achievements of the JWM following their advocacy, awareness and programming efforts. It is important to note that some of these outcomes cannot be exclusively attributed to the JWM, as other contextual factors, whether social, economic or political, also had an impact on these developments.

Education and illiteracy eradication

Since the early 50s, the JWU worked on reducing the illiteracy rates of women in Jordan, believing in the importance of women's education as a prerequisite to practicing economic and political rights. One of their objectives was the 'elimination of illiteracy among females, to improve Jordanian women's educational and economic levels in order to prepare them to practice their rights as citizens.' In addition to fighting for women's right to vote and run for parliamentary elections, the JWM established a large number of illiteracy elimination centers across the country. After the martial law was enforced in 1957 and political activity was halted, women's illiteracy elimination classes were the only possible opportunity for the JWM to meet and engage with women as 'the movement was aware that only through education can they develop women's levels of awareness in general and politically in particular.'⁴⁵

Even though they were prohibited from political work, they were determined to continue working and worked on illiteracy elimination, which was something that the government permitted. Through these classes, they would pass on messages, ideas and information to women about their rights and roles as citizens and their right to political participation. So they took advantage of these classes, and worked in secret. They were scared, but did so because they believed in the cause. (Abeer Dababneh)

Data shows that the illiteracy rate for females aged 15 and above fell from 48% in 1979 to 33% in 1987 and to 21% in 1994.⁴⁶ In 2019, the illiteracy rate of women was 7.3%.⁴⁷ It can be seen that right from the beginning, the importance of education was recognized and emphasized by the JWM. The progress in women's educational attainment is a by-product of the efforts of the JWM and public investment in education.

Box 1: Educators

Universally, academics and teachers have played a big role in the advancement of the feminist movement and women's rights, however, they often faced hardships especially if they had political ideologies or tried to advocate for social change. This is also the case in Jordan. Janet Al Mufti and Rula Qawas are examples from two generations of teachers who have had a great transformational impact on a multitude of students and colleagues in their efforts towards social justice and women's advancement.

Janet Al-Mufti is considered one of the first Jordanian women to enroll in political work in Jordan. She was a member of the Second National Consultative Council (1980-1982). She also ran for parliamentary elections in 1989 and 1993, but she did not succeed in reaching parliament. She became a member of the twenty-second Senate in 2007. However, her role as an educator and teacher has not been so widely celebrated or spoken about. Janet had a great impact on generations of students, as well as fellow teachers, during her career as a teacher and educator whether in her years teaching English at the Zain Al Sharaf Secondary school, or as a lecturer at the University of Jordan or the University of Petra. Her colleague and friend, Fadia Abdulhadi said 'She was a source of inspiration and guidance not only to her students but to her colleagues as well. Her office was like a cultural forum; where we used to gather to discuss new publications in literature or current public issues, and everyone was always eager to hear her opinion. With students she focused on socio-political education in addition to academic education' (Fadia Abdulhadi, interview).

Rula Qawas is considered the first academic to introduce courses explicitly on feminism at the University of Jordan. In 2006, she founded the university's Center for Women's Studies serving as its director from 2006 to 2008. She was a Jordanian academic and lifelong educator, known for her advocacy for women's advancement in Jordan. Whoever met or was taught by Rula would know that she was a proud feminist who always encouraged her students to 'weave their own narratives' through constantly 'deconstructing and unlearning patriarchy', as she was in her words, 'committed to empowering women and community members to become strong advocates for gender equity and social justice.'⁴⁸ Rula became the Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages at the university in 2011. Her deanship abruptly ended halfway through her contract, after she was dismissed from her post over a project in which students from her feminist theory class posted a video exposing verbal sexual harassment on campus.

Economic participation

Over the years, the JWM advocated for gender equality, focusing on women's right to economic and political participation. Particularly during the 40s and 50s, this was opposed by several groups who believed in preserving the traditional role of women in the private sphere.⁴⁹ This opposition continued over the years, as women's participation in the labor market continues to be one of the major development challenges in Jordan today.

While the Jordanian economy failed to create sufficient job opportunities for men and women, women's labor force participation remains significantly low due several structural and social barriers. The PSL clearly differentiates between the rights and responsibilities of men and women – placing the responsibility of financial maintenance of women on men. By law, women are required to get permission from their husbands to work outside the marital home and if they do so without consent, they lose their right to financial maintenance. These gender roles are reinfused into society through educational curricula, which fail to promote principles of gender equality; media content which promotes gender stereotypes and the teachings (fatwas) of some religious figures, which are based on their personal interpretation of religion.⁵⁰

As a result of years of advocacy and programming efforts, several laws have been amended with the objective of increasing women's participation in the labor market, among them are:

Social Security Reforms: in 2007, the Social Security Corporation (SSC) initiated a participatory discussion process. Through this process, the SSC ensured that in addition to government, employers and unions, the voices of youth, women and small enterprise workers were heard and documented. The final reform of the law was designed to 'achieve financial sustainability, enhance social justice and gender equality, and expand social protection.' One of the reform's primary objectives was to increase women's economic participation and protection, mainly through the introduction of a maternity insurance.⁵¹ In 2019, further amendments were made to the law, including the allocation of 25% of the maternity fund resources to social protection programs related to maternity.⁵²

The Regulations of Flexible Work System, No. 22 of 2017: was introduced to provide greater flexibility in employment conditions for workers with family responsibilities, such as women with responsibilities for childcare and pregnant women. The regulations provide for various forms of work, including remote working, part time working and flexible working hours.⁵³

Amendments to Labor Law No. 8 of 1996: the JWM formed a coalition "Coalition Rights" comprising 9 women organizations in addition to unions and labor entities with the aim of lobbying with members of parliament and the government to amend certain articles in the labor law in order to 'eliminate discrimination against women and boost their participation in the labor market.'⁵⁴ In 2019, several amendments to the law were made including:⁵⁵

- **Discrimination in wages:** the law introduced the concept of 'discrimination in wages' which is defined as gender-based inequality in payment of wages between employees. The amended law imposes a penalty on the employer ranging between 500 to 1,000 JOD if the employer discriminates in payment of wages between employees based on their gender.
- **Daycare centers:** childcare is often cited as one of the main reasons leading women to leave the labor market.⁵⁶ Article 72 of the Labor Law in Jordan stipulated the establishment of a nursery in

the workplace when there were at least 20 female employees bearing 10 children among them all under the age of four years old. However, the application of the article has proved to be problematic as most companies in Jordan are classified as small or medium in size, and some companies refrained from hiring women, in turn reversing the intended goal of the article.⁵⁷ “Coalition 72” which was made up from 12 civil society organizations, groups and activists, was formed to lobby for amendments in the law that guarantee the establishment of daycare centers for employees and their families.^b The law was amended and now requires an employer to offer childcare facilities when employees cumulatively have 15 or more children under five years of age.⁵⁸

- **Work permits:** article 12 of the law was amended to exempt children of Jordanian mothers married to non-Jordanians and Gazan refugees from the issuance of work permits. The coalition also called for the need to amend the subsequent paragraphs of Article 12 with regard to occupations closed to non-Jordanians, so that they have the right to work in any job or any sector without restrictions.
- **Paternity leave:** the law introduced paternity leave – granting fathers three days of paid leave after the birth of a child.⁵⁹

Tax Law Reforms: Hundreds of Jordanians demonstrated in June 2018 against a new tax bill that imposes steep tax hikes to narrow public debt. Women’s groups and activists were among those who protested the law, considering the proposed law as a tool to further marginalize women. JNCW made several proposals to ensure that the law adopts a fair and progressive tax system that encourages women’s employment and takes into account the additional barriers that they face. After the resignation of Al-Mulki’s government, the proposed law was withdrawn and reformulated. One of the recommendations provided by JNCW was incorporated – introducing an explicit acknowledgement of the female breadwinner status affirming women’s right to benefit from tax exemptions for dependents, without the conditionality under the previous implementation of the law, of being a widow or (ex)husband unemployed.⁶⁰

During the protests against the tax law, the union was at the forefront and many organizations participated. When the government of Prime Minister Razzaz was formed, I was assigned by the Prime Minister to invite women’s organizations to a meeting with him, to discuss the law and its implications on women. (Amneh Zoubi)

Amendments to the Civil Retirement Law: as part of the list of demands provided by JNCW to the Parliament was amendments to the Civil Retirement Law of 2018 to ensure that it promotes women’s pension rights. Based on the demands, the law was amended to extend the definition of family members of the employee or pensioner who are entitled to a retirement pension, bonus or compensation, by adding the husband or wife, the mother and the father of the female employee. It entitles either spouse to combine his/her pension and his/her share of the retirement of his deceased spouse. The law no longer

^b The Coalition comprised of SADAQA, Jordan’s National Committee on Pay Equity, Jordanian National Commission for Women, General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies, Arab Women’s Organization, Jordanian Women’s Union, Workers House, Arab Women’s Legal Network, ‘Stand with the Teachers’ Campaign

provides for discontinuing the payment of the pension to the widow, the daughter or the mother of the deceased who remarry. According to the amended civil service by-law, the family allowance has been extended to the female employee if her husband is disabled, if she is the provider for her children, or a divorced woman who does not receive legal alimony for her children aged under 18.⁶¹

Licensing home-based work: in 2017, instructions were issued to license the practice of professions at home in Amman. These legislations authorized the practice of some professions at home and provided an opportunity to include persons who practice these professions in national statistics – ensuring that their economic contribution is captured.⁶²

Research shows that ‘women’s economic empowerment is not only central to realizing gender equality but directly impacts economic growth.’ Women’s higher labor force participation directly results in higher productivity, increased economic diversification and positive development outcomes. Additionally, the economic empowerment of women increases their access to and control over resources and as a result enhances their decision-making power within the home and society.

Box 2: Women’s activism to protect labor rights: successful examples of larger social movements

Over the years, several social and labor movements emerged advocating for social justice and workers’ rights. While they are not part of women’s organizations or the broader women’s movement and do not advocate exclusively for women’s rights, their contributions, and women’s roles within them, are worth highlighting and documenting.

The Jordanian Day Wage Labor Movement

Day-waged workers are ‘those who work for the government or private firms for daily wages.’⁶³ They lack job security and protection, do not qualify for most rights given to permanently hired laborers, and face discrimination in terms of pay and benefits. The Jordanian Day Wage Labor Movement (DWLM), which comprised of public sector employees, mostly from the Ministry of Agriculture, organized its first protest in 2006. A large number of women participated in this movement – surpassing the number of men by 2012. The movement staged a sleep-in in front of the royal court in 2012, where women from different governorates spent the night alongside male members. According to Sara Ababneh, this constituted ‘one of the most radical forms of social and cultural protest in Jordanian history.’⁶⁴ Through its activism, the movement was able to propel the government to meet some of its demands, including an end to day wages and qualifying day-waged workers to monthly minimum wages. While the DWLM called for specific economic reforms, it was able to do gender-inclusive political work that enhancing and protecting the rights of men and women laborers.

Stand up with the Teachers Campaign

In 2017, a group of private sector teachers from Irbid, Amman and Zarqa organized a campaign titled ‘Stand up with Teachers’ which advocated for the safeguarding of the salaries of private school teachers by requiring employers to deposit salaries electronically. The teachers organized an online campaign “My salary in the bank,” protested in front of the Ministry of Education (MoE), and met with the National Committee for Pay Equity, MoE and Ministry of Labor. Following their lobbying efforts, the ‘Regulation of Registration and Licensing of Private and International Schools of 2015’ were modified, requiring that all 37,000 private school teachers receive their wages electronically through bank transfers or e-wallets.⁶⁵

Political participation

The emergence and historical development of the JWM is outlined in section 3. While the movement largely focused on charitable work in the beginning, its discourse was highly influenced by the external political climate between the 1950s and 1970s. The activism of women within the JWM and their demand for women's full political rights paved the way for women's participation in political life today. Some of the main turning points that resulted from the movements activism in the early years include:

- After women signed petitions and organized demonstrations demanding women's suffrage, educated women were granted the right to vote in 1955 (women had to have an elementary level of education to vote, a condition that did not apply to men). Women's groups launched a wide campaign demanding suffrage for ALL women and women's right to run for elections.
- As the law only granted educated women the right to vote, the JWM worked on reducing the illiteracy rates of women between the 1950s and 1970s, to enable them to practice their political rights.
- Women were allowed the right to run for elections in 1974, but couldn't do so until 1989 when martial law was lifted.
- The Political Parties Law was passed, which granted women the right to participate in political parties in 1989.
- The Elections Law was amended to lower voting age to 18 years, which raised the proportion of voting women in 2001.
- Between 1989 and 2003, very few women were elected or appointed in the Lower and Upper Houses of Parliament. As a result of the JWM advocacy and supported by a UN demand to assign at least 30% of parliamentary seats to women, the government introduced a quota system in 2003, allocating 6 seats for women.⁶⁶ This was increased to 12 seats in 2010, and to 15 seats in 2012.

The following diagram summarizes the main shifts in women's political participation and the impact of the JWM in this regard.

Table 1 - Summary of Turning Points in Women's Political Participation

1940s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's Solidarity Society and the Jordanian Women's Federation were established in 1944 and 1945 respectively. The organizations focused on charitable and social work. • After the Palestinian Nakbah of 1948, Jordan witnessed a growth in the popularity of ideological parties.
1951	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ministry of Social Development was established with the purpose of organizing and supporting all voluntary activity, societies and organizations. • Adoption of the Constitution in 1952 guaranteeing the rights of Jordanian citizen to freedom of speech and press, association, and assembly.
1954	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arab Women's Union was established under the leadership of Emily Besharat and focused on welfare, social work and campaigning for women's right to vote.
1955	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After women signed petitions and organized demonstrations demanding women's suffrage, educated women were granted the right to vote. (Women had to have an elementary level of education to vote, a condition that did not apply to men). • Women's groups launched a wide campaign demanding suffrage for ALL women and women's right to run for elections.
1957	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martial law was declared- bringing the women's political activity and popular movement to a standstill. • Arab Women's Union was dissolved.
1960	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Electoral Law of 1960 was enacted stipulating that only male Jordanians over 20 years of age could vote.
1967	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 1967 Arab-Israeli war was another political occurrence that motivated Jordanian women to participate in the nationalist political struggle. Women in thousands demonstrated against the Israeli occupation. Many women were propelled into public work, providing emergency relief to Palestinian refugees displaced by the Israeli occupation.
1970	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Arab Women's Union was established to bring together the efforts of female politicians and members of political parties and to contribute to the promotion of women's rights, particularly in the political sphere.
1974	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JWU was re-established under the name 'Women's Union in Jordan.' • Election law amended to allow women the right to run in parliament elections.
1981	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JWU was dissolved for 'engaging in political activities that are not within its main objectives.' (Dababneh, 2005). The JWU was re-established in 1983. • General Federation of Jordanian Women was established.
1989	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martial law was repealed. • Women ran for Parliament in what was considered the freest elections Jordan had ever seen.
1992	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JNCW was established in Jordan. • Jordan ratifies CEDAW. • The Political Parties Law was passed, which granted women the right to participate in political parties.
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Election Law of 1960 amended to lower voting age to 18 years, which raised the proportion of voting women and increased women's political participation.
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quota system was introduced, allocating six seats for women.
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quota system was changed, allocating 12 seats for women.
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quotes system changed, allocating 15 seats for women.
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The representation of women in the 18th Parliament increased to 15.4%, as 20 women were elected. The number of elected women in the 19th Parliament decreased to 15 in 2020 (by quota).

Sources: Dababneh, A. (2005), *The Jordanian Women's Movement: A Historical Analysis Focusing on Legislative Change*; Massad, J. (2001), *The Making of the National Identity in Jordan.*; Pratt, N. (2015), *A History of Women's Activism in Jordan: 1946-1989*

Civil rights and social protection

Granting women their full civil rights was also central to the JWM, as women cannot fully participate in society if they do not enjoy equal civil rights and protection. And so, many women's groups, activists and organizations worked on different issues over the years including nationality, personal status, movement, and violence among others.

Personal status matters

For years, the JWM has been advocating to amend the PSL in order to achieve equality between men and women in Jordan. As early as the 1950s, the **Arab Women's Union** appealed to amend the law to repeal the right of polygamy.⁶⁷ Later in the mid-2000s, JWU started a regional campaign to reform family law and by initiating conversions with Egypt, Palestine and Lebanon discussing what the reform needs to address. Other organizations also held workshops and conducted media campaigns to raise awareness on the discrimination that is inherent in the law. In 2010, the PSL was amended, in a process led by the Supreme Chief Department, which some women's organizations felt were excluded from. While the changes introduced in 2010 were significant, they still did not achieve equality or meet the demands of the JWM.⁶⁸

In 2019, several changes were made the PSL in relation to DNA testing, inheritance and custody rights. However, the Assembly didn't respond to several proposals provided by the JWM, including raising the age of marriage from 15 to 16 in exceptional cases. As a result, the JWM continues to advocate for the amendment of the PSL to achieve equality between men and women in Jordan.

Nationality

The first nationality laws in Jordan were developed in 1929, echoing British nationality laws which were based on the notion of paternity. Under the British law, women were not allowed to pass the citizenship to their children and even lost it if they married non-British men – something that did not apply to British men. As the Jordanian law copied the British law, it greatly discriminated against Jordanian women. Until 1987, Jordanian women were denationalized if they married non-Jordanians and couldn't pass on the Jordanian nationality to their children. In response to lobbying by women's groups, the law was amended in 1987 to allow Jordanian women to keep their nationality if they married non-nationals. Gender discrimination in citizenship remained an issue and is still among the most prominent women's issues in Jordan today.⁶⁹

For years, civil society groups and activists conducted numerous campaigns calling for equality in nationality. Among those were "My mother is Jordanian and her nationality is my right" founded by Nima Habashneh and "My Nationality is the Right of My Family."^c In 2014, and in response to demands of those who have submitted shadow reports to the Human Rights Council, including the Arab Women's Organization, as well as negotiations with a parliamentary legislative bloc asking for civil rights for the children of Jordanian women, the government offered privileges (mazaya) to the children of Jordanian

^c The coalition was comprised of 12 civil society organizations and 18 individuals. Members came from different backgrounds and consolidated their efforts with the aim of granting Jordanian women married to non-Jordanians the right to pass their nationality to their spouses and children. The coalition advocated for a series of constitutional and legislative amendments that uphold and safeguard gender equality in Jordan. The coalition was launched on the 17th of February 2013 under the name "My Nationality is the Right of My Family."

mothers and non-Jordanian fathers. Privileges include access to education, healthcare and employment, permission to own property and invest, as well as issue a driver's license, and are granted under the condition that mothers reside in Jordan for 5 years.⁷⁰

Right to movement and travel

Prior to 2013, a Jordanian wife was not able to obtain a separate passport without her husband's written permission. This directly contradicted women's constitutional right to movement and freedom of choosing their residence.⁷¹ Reservations on article 15 were lifted and the Passports Act was amended and article 12 was annulled.⁷²

Shelters for women at risk of violence

Following years of advocacy and programming efforts, in 2016, the Regulations on Shelters for Women at Risk were issued to address the situation of women under administrative detention. Shelters, such as Dar-Amneh, which was opened in 2018, are set up to ensure the protection and temporary accommodation of women at risk of violence from family members. They provide social care, health, psychological and legal services. These reforms are intended to limit the practice of women's administrative detention.⁷³

Jordanian Penal Code No.16 of 1960

Up until very recently, the Jordanian Penal Code 'allowed men a great deal of leniency in punishment for crimes committed against women.' In 2017, after 20 years of advocacy and campaigning by the JWM, important amendments were made to the law. This included repealing article 308, coined 'the rape law,' which allowed rapists to escape punishment if they married their victim for at least three to five years, and amending article 98 so that the perpetrator who commits a crime in a fit of fury does not benefit from mitigating circumstances if the victim was a female.⁷⁴ These pivotal amendments followed several campaigning efforts over the years including advocacy and awareness programs by several civil society organizations and most recently the campaign 'Killings of Women' in 2016, online campaigning using the hashtag '#repeal_308', sit-ins staged outside the House of Representatives and the presence of women's groups and activists at the House's balconies during the debate on the law.⁷⁵

Additionally, among important amendments of the law was including article 306 as a measure to prevent sexual harassment. The article outlines a punishment for 'anyone who displays an indecent act or makes any immoral statements or gestures, by words, acts, movements, gestures or allusion, by any means [...].' While the article does not explicitly define or mention 'sexual harassment', it is one step toward criminalizing acts which constitute it.⁷⁶

Furthermore, article 62 of the law was also amended, giving a mother the right to approve surgery and medical treatment for her children, a right that was originally reserved to the child's guardian.⁷⁷

Efforts to raise awareness on gender-based violence

Over the years, there has been countless efforts – including workshops, offline and online awareness campaigns and community programs to raise awareness on the issue of gender-based violence and its impact on women, families and society. One example is Sham'a Network which was established in 2007 as a way to unite the efforts of individuals and organizations working to combat violence against women. Since its launch, the network worked on several campaigns with community-based organizations and civil

society, including 'No to violence against women,' 'still too young for marriage,' and 'together against violence.' Similar to the work conducted by this network, several civil society organizations work tirelessly on combatting GBV through legal aid, protection services, and awareness and advocacy campaigns.⁷⁸

The movement created awareness and broke some taboos. What was not discussed 20 years ago, is being discussed today. If you look at court rulings regarding female killings in the last ten years, you will see that the reduction in sentences is much less, even though the law hasn't been amended. The judge now thinks 100 times before giving in a reduction in sentence when a cousin kills his female cousin for talking on the phone. Even if they drop their personal right, he doesn't reduce the sentence. (Salma Nims)

Guidelines on the protection from violence and harassment at the workplace

In 2020, the Ministry of Labor adopted a model for the protection from violence, harassment and discrimination at the workplace, outlining best practices to help employers in the private sector in Jordan to develop policies related to violence, harassment and discrimination. The guidelines were developed in partnership with governmental and non-governmental organizations with the aim to create a supportive and safe work environment for the worker, raise awareness on the concept of violence and harassment, affirm a policy of zero tolerance towards violence and harassment, and identify the means available to the worker to report violence and/or harassment.

Law on the Protection from Domestic Violence

In an effort coordinated by the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA), several amendments were made to the Law on the Protection from Domestic Violence in 2017, to address some of the loopholes in the law. Among those was expanding the definition of family and the members it encompasses and requiring health, education and social service providers to report any cases of domestic violence against young people and those lacking or with reduced legal capacity. Additionally, the regulations concerning reporting, consent and the settlement of disputes were standardized.⁷⁹

Mosawa Network

Mosawa Network was established in 2005 and comprises 106 grass-roots women's organizations from different governorates. It is run by AWO through a board that includes 12 focal points from 12 governorates. The network aims to contribute to the advancement of Jordanian women and their status in society in accordance with the commitments outlined in CEDAW. Each focal point is responsible for connecting the members of organizations in each governorate and moving to unite all governorates in common actions.

I joined Mosawa Network in 2007 or 2008. The network organized training for the community-based organization in Aqaba, and involved highly qualified trainers. It also organized cultural seminars and awareness raising session on political, legal and economic issues. It tackled several issues including sexual harassment, the women's quota, 308 relating to rape, PSL and inheritance. (Shadia Roussan)

Coalition of Women MPs from Arab Countries to Combat Violence against Women

The coalition was established in 2014 and includes women Members of Parliaments from both legislative chambers from Arab countries participating in the Arab League. that believe in combating violence against women. The coalition aims to develop the legislative framework and coordinate efforts to combat violence against Arab women and girls nationally and regionally. The Coalition is considered the first initiative of its kind that gathers women MPs from Arab countries to pursue reforms and legislation that will reduce the widespread phenomenon of violence against women, which is considered one of the important challenges faced by women's organizations and human rights associations.

Coalition to lobby for the implementation of the 5th Sustainable Development Goal

In an effort led by the Arab Women's Organization, women groups and organisations formed a national coalition to follow up with the government on the Fifth Goal of the Sustainable Development Global Agenda (SGDA) 2030, which tackles gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Challenges

The JWM faced and still faces a number of obstacles that inherently impact its activity and development. These include external factors such as the political climate, the legal and structural environment in which it operates and the social environment surrounding it, which is essentially patriarchal. Other factors are internal and include challenges related to organization and availability of resources.

Patriarchy

Research shows that there are several root causes of patriarchy in Jordan. First, gender inequality is established in the law, as women still face discrimination in nationality, personal status matters, political representation and access to resources. Second, patriarchy is reinforced and reproduced into society through several mechanisms, including education, media and inaccurate religious teaching (fatwas). Third, the voices of women in most cases are lacking in the decision-making processes of Muslim and Christian institutions which regulate matters of personal status. This means that the day-to-day issues of women are placed exclusively in the hands of men.⁸⁰ While lobbying and advocacy can result in legislative amendment, 'social change is one of the most difficult and slowest tasks any social agent might try to achieve,'⁸¹ making the work of the JWM increasingly challenging in a predominantly patriarchal system.

When we want to talk about a real developmental and cultural effort that would make a difference, we are opposed. For example, Ruwwad Al-Tanmeya works in Jabal Al Natheef neighborhoods in the cultural, social, and educational fields, which focusing mainly on empowerment. They were attacked and demonized. They wanted to establish libraries in schools for children, but the MoE created a committee to revise the books, some of which were rejected because they include too much fiction. No one is fighting institutional ignorance and patriarchy. (Hadeel Abdul Aziz)

While women were able to reach political positions, not all women in power believe in gender equality. One clear example of this was when two out of six female parliamentary members rejected proposed amendments to Article 340 of the Penal Code and amendments to the PSL giving women the right to 'Khulou' in 2003.⁸² A more recent study on gender mainstreaming in the 18th House of Representatives, conducted in 2017, showed that 59.3% of members believed that men and women are equal in national laws and regulations – clearly indicating a lack of awareness on gender issues.⁸³

There is a decline in the political work and ideology. Today, if we want to talk about some female icons who would be considered politicians, there is fragility, which is linked to the discussion on the offered programs and trainings on political participation. Politics does not require trainings; it is a doctrine. In terms of political achievements, I do not look at the numbers. Representation of all components of political participation is high; however, the content is fragile (Dima Karadsheh)

Shrinking civic spaces

As demonstrated earlier, since the mid-90s, women's issues started to be framed as issues of development, slowly separating them from political issues. Many organizations started to register, or were pressured to register, under MoSD rather than the MoI. These organizations are now governed by the Law on Societies No.51 of 2008. The law clearly limits civil society from engaging in political work (article 3),

makes it difficult for coalitions and alliances to form or register due to the vague provisions of the law and imposes many requirements on CSOs in their registration, assembly and access to funding.⁸⁴

Additionally, the freedom of assembly and speech of individuals and activists who are informally operating is also restricted by several laws including the Cyber Crime Law, the Press and Publications Law, the Access to Information Law and the Public Gatherings Law. According to the National Center for Human Rights, 1821 journalists and activists were charged and another 161 were detained in 2018 based on the loose definition of hate crime.⁸⁵

Coordination and narrative

Findings from this research as well as previous research show that there seems to be lack of coordination between the different actors in the JWM, influencing the movement's power and impact. While several coalitions and networks have been formed over the years, efforts remain scattered for the most part. Some research participants expressed that this is one of the biggest challenges facing the movement today, others acknowledging that the lack of coordination is partly a result of the operational and structural environment (registration, foreign funding and legislation governing civil society).

Another challenge discussed by research participant is the lack of unification in the messaging and narrative of the JWM. Organizations within the JWM vary in their demands, some aiming for full equality and others making compromises to achieve some successes, albeit smaller, and improve women's position in society.

Compromising might weaken the cause. Sometimes, we need to call a spade a spade. As organizations that are involved in developing Jordan, we must develop common priorities and build on what is already there, we mustn't reinvent the wheel as it is already there. We also need to coordinate the action and change the discourse to be more explicit and hold people accountable. (Amneh Helweh)

Westernization, funding and opposing forces

Another fundamental problem that impacts the JWM is that many consider the movement 'a reflection of western women's liberation movement ideologies.' The 'NGOization' of the movement and its dependence on foreign funding, placed the movement in a western frame in the eyes of many individuals and groups who question the legitimacy of the JWM. While some criticize the JWM as being 'donor driven', many explained that this is not only applicable to the JWM and others stressed that being able to find foreign funding for national issues is not necessarily a negative thing, despite the general perception.

Funding is subject to the Jordanian laws; they are not invented by women's organizations, then why is it linked to them only when the country itself resorts to funding and foreign aid? Why is it considered wrong and an accusation of betrayal only if it is related to women? (MP Wafa Bani Mustafa)

I have a donor and a huge cause, which is daycare centers. Today, some women who own daycare centers are already in debt, they call every day to ask for help and support. We founded a committee in the SSC that we need to influence to obtain support for this sector. Are they all funded programs? Of course not! This is not on my timeline; however,

international organizations affected us and played a key role. They forced us to do this, it is a systematic political approach. (Randa Naffa)

Inclusion and exclusion

Another criticism that is usually directed at the JWM is that it is elitist in its approach and is disconnected from actual needs of society. The lack of inclusion of grassroots organizations was highlighted by some and opposed by other research participants who explained that the issues that women's organizations are working on are in fact 'societal issues' including violence against women, child marriage, women's economic empowerment and so on.

Lack of funding

Civil society organizations which are working as part of the JWM, similar to other CSOs in Jordan, are facing increasing challenging in securing funding for their activities. There are several reasons behind this including increasing competition between CSOs and the ability of those with stronger organizational capacities to apply and secure funding, a declining economic climate overall, impacting potential funders such as the private sector, as well as shrinking legal environment which is placing restrictions on the funding coming from abroad. The lack of funding directly and greatly impacts not only the sustainability of organizations working on women's issues, but their ability to coordinate and consolidate efforts.

Women's organizations would feel paralyzed if they do not receive foreign funding since they lack their own local developmental activities. This affects their creativity in local development. (Amneh Khasawneh)

Lack of higher political will

Finally, among the most important challenges facing the JWM in the past and today, is the need for a higher political will in order to create real change. As demonstrated earlier, in the 1970s, the amendment of the law to grant all women the right to vote was issued by King Hussein. While legal reform has to go through several channels, in many cases, this sometimes is only possible when higher political will exists and in many cases is catalyzed by the pressure placed on Jordan to meet its international commitments. In her book, **Nawal Hashisho** stated 'a woman cannot receive her full rights without the active involvement of men who believe in these rights or without real political will to create a just and equal society and to move away from generational patriarchal values.' Salma Nims, Secretary General of JNCW, provided an example of this:

The government did not respond to us to repeal Article 308. However, when the Royal committee interfered, they did actually respond. So, the same government that refused to repeal Article 308 agreed to do so when the Royal committee suggested it.

Discussion and conclusions

The JWM has been active since the mid-20th century and went through several shifts against the backdrop of major political transformations. The movement started with charitable work in the 1940s, then transitioned to political activism in the 1950s, and transitioned again to development work in the 1990s when women's issues started to be framed as issues of development. The latter shift changed the structure in which the JWM operates; while the movement incorporates efforts by individual activists and smaller movements, the majority of members now include registered civil society organizations focusing on women's rights.

Over the years, the JWM has made several achievements on the education, economic, political and social levels. Perhaps among the most notable achievements is advocacy for the abolishment of discriminatory laws impacting women's status and wellbeing. Through local and international advocacy mechanisms and awareness raising campaigns, the JWM also worked and is still working on highlighting the importance of advancing women's rights in Jordan and raising society's awareness on many issues impacting women's in Jordan.

While this research as well as previous studies focus on the historical aspect of the women's movement, the findings also highlight the importance of education and awareness raising on concepts of equality and social justice. The findings also show that among the biggest achievements done by the JWM were built on coalitions and the mobilization of resources between organizations and activists, emphasizing the need for such coalitions in building long lasting change.

As previously mentioned, these successes do not come without challenges. Perhaps the biggest obstacle facing the women's movement relates to its governing structure; while organizations are constrained by the Societies Law, which limits the extent to which they can engage in political work, individual activists also face increasing limitations to their freedom of speech, association and assembly.

Moving forward, some research participants recommend the importance of including a grass-roots approach in the way the movement operates and providing the right-holders, the women themselves, the resources and support to lead the advocacy efforts that concerns them. Others recommend tackling power and governing structures that are limiting the movement from engaging in political activism, highlighting its importance in de-constructing wider patriarchal and power structures.

Finally, most participants also emphasized the importance of encouraging the younger generation to join the women's movement and providing them with the space to express their opinions and their perceptions regarding the future of the movement, in addition to jointly setting priorities of current and future work.

Annex 1 – List of experts interviewed

Name of Participant	Position of Participant
Dr. Abeer Dababneh	Academic and Commissioner of Independent Elections Commission
Ablah Abu Elbeh	General Secretary of Jordanian Peoples Democratic Party
Dr. Amal Sabbagh	Academic and Former Secretary General of the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW)
Amneh Al-Hilweh	Regional Director of Karameh Network
Amneh Khasawneh	Director of Basma Center for Women Studies
Amneh Al-Zubi	President of Jordanian Women’s Union (JWU)
Dima Karadsheh	Researcher and President of Building Bridges Association
Dr. Fadia Abdulhadi	Academic and Educator
Hadeel Abdul Aziz	Executive Director of Justice Center for Legal Aid (JCLA)
Haifa’ Bashir	Director general of Muntda Alrewad Alkebar
Laila Naffa’	Activist and Founding member of Arab Women Organization (AWO)
Mai Mansour	Activist and member of Sadaqa Organization
Nawal Hashisho	Educator and President of Women for Jerusalem Association
Rana Husseini	Journalist and Activist
Randa Naffa’	Activist and Founding member of Sadaqa Organization
Randa Qsous	President of Arab Women Organization (AWO)
Dr. Salma Nims	Secretary General of the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW)
Dr. Sara Ababneh	Academic; Researcher at the Center for Strategic Studies - University of Jordan
Sahar Aloul	Activist and Founding Member of Sadaqa Organization
Shadia Rousan	President of جمعية نساء الساحل
Stella Halasa	Activist and member of Arab Women Organization (AWO)
Suhaila Bahlawan	Activist and Founding member of Arab Women Organization (AWO)
Wafaa Bani Mustafa	Lawyer and Former Parliament

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