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# THE REALITY OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN ALGERIAN SOCIETY. A STUDY OF FACTORS, STRATEGIES AND LEVELS

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#### ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment is crucial for human development, and its promotion, particularly in community development, is a key contemporary Arab issue. Recognised as a fundamental development indicator, comprehensive progress is linked to the participation of both sexes at all levels.

This study evaluates Algeria's experience with policies and legislation concerning women's education and employment, examining their impact on women's status and societal roles. Using statistical data, the research explores the levels of women's empowerment in Algeria and discusses the challenges women face within this context.

#### KEYWORDS

Social Responsibility, Service Organization, Customer Satisfaction, Mobile Users in Algeria

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#### Introduction.

Throughout history, gender inequality has been pervasive, stemming from various restrictive factors, particularly discriminatory legislation, societal values, and prevailing ideologies. Despite these constraints, some women have attained positions of significant power, authority, and prestige. Empowerment is fundamentally linked to transformative change. Women's access to previously denied resources, such as education and employment, is a crucial step toward achieving true empowerment, enabling them to act and achieve their full potential. However, access to resources alone is insufficient. Genuine empowerment requires a confluence of factors. The absence of any one of these essential elements does not signify empowerment; rather, it merely represents potential strategies or factors that may or may not, contribute to its realization.

Naila Kabeer's framework for understanding women's empowerment comprises three interconnected domains: resource ownership, individual agency, and achievements. She defines empowerment as the capacity to exercise choice in contexts where women were previously denied that right, or lacked the ability to choose, or both. Kabeer's work is widely recognized for its analytical clarity, particularly its distinction between the resources women possess, their individual agency (the ability to access and utilize those resources), and their resulting achievements. This framework highlights that empowerment is specifically relevant to situations of prior deprivation (Shalqami & Suhaim Saniya , 2015). Therefore, it is inaccurate to suggest that men are not empowered simply because they have not experienced the same systemic denial of resources as women.

Building on the aforementioned points, women's empowerment within any society is fundamentally achieved through women's capacity to own and control resources, encompassing material, social, and human capital. This includes, but is not limited to, access to capital, knowledge, skills, rights, and responsibilities – essentially, all factors that improve conditions, expand opportunities, and grant the freedom to determine outcomes and realize achievements.

#### The Deeper Levels of Women's Empowerment in Algeria:

"The deeper levels of empowerment represent the nature of the structural relations between men and women in the family, work, and institutions of society as a whole." (Ibtisam, 2010), which means the necessity of confronting and addressing outdated mentalities. The French philosopher and feminist S. DE BEAUVOIR confirmed in her book "The Second Sex" that feminine characteristics are not related to a woman's gender as much as they are related to the social and cultural life she lives, and she said her famous phrase "A woman is not born a woman, but she later becomes a woman," meaning that the determinants of a woman's role as a social, political, and economic actor are not a biological issue, but rather a societal issue related to upbringing, education, and the beliefs she acquires (Kabir, 2015).

Societal structures often construct women's familial roles as subordinate, even in female-headed households. This construction positions women primarily as caregivers for both children and men, while men are assigned the role of representing and protecting the family within the public sphere. This division of labor grants men greater social power, leading to the devaluation of women's activities, such as childbirth, caregiving, and socialization. Consequently, despite their essential contribution to social reproduction, the domestic sphere and associated female activities are relegated to a position of lesser social and cultural significance.

The Algerian state acts as an intermediary between women and the forces that influence their societal empowerment. This mediation places a dual burden on women: they are tasked with implementing statemandated empowerment strategies while simultaneously navigating and challenging persistent male dominance by leveraging their access to resources.

"Women's apparent independence from men can be misleading, for while women may not be directly inferior to a particular male relative, they are subject to a general culture dominated by men." (Elson & Pearson, 2015).

Amartya Sen's bargaining model, which utilizes game theory to conceptualize the family as a locus of cooperative conflict, offers a more nuanced understanding of familial dynamics. This model diverges from traditional conflict theories, such as those addressing class disparities, by emphasizing the unique interplay of interests between men and women. Sen's work illuminates how gender-based differences in bargaining power shape the potential for both cooperation and conflict within families. Furthermore, it identifies factors that can enhance women's agency and negotiation capabilities (Lourdes, 2015). Building upon this framework, Nayla Kabir employed a bargaining-based approach to examine women's strategic choices and negotiations within patriarchal marital contracts, highlighting the geographically variable renegotiation of needs.

An analysis of women's empowerment in Algerian society reveals that the bargaining model, rather than a comprehensive empowerment framework, predominates. Women's feminist activities are consistently constrained by male authority, which continues to restrict their access to leadership roles, decision-making centers, and impose prescriptive behavioral norms, including limitations on social interaction, dress codes, and work schedules. Consequently, women engage in a perpetual negotiation process with men, irrespective of their social standing, and with broader societal expectations. This negotiation dynamic contributes to observable trends such as increased spinsterhood, divorce rates, altered marriage patterns, and conditional employment, all of which are employed as strategies to mitigate familial conflict.

#### Intermediate Levels of Women's Empowerment in Algerian Society:

Intermediate levels of empowerment in Algerian society are characterized by the institutional rules and resources established through legislative reforms. These reforms have expanded Algerian women's professional, economic, and political opportunities. Notably, Algeria pioneered compulsory, free, and democratic education within the Arab region. Subsequent legislation and international agreements have further reinforced gender equality, addressing issues such as equal opportunity, resource access, discrimination, and gender-based violence.

#### Women's Education as a Factor of Women's Empowerment:

Education functions as an indicator, but not definitive proof, of women's empowerment, a distinction less pronounced in the context of male achievement. The Algerian state has prioritized universal, free education since independence, consistently promoting women's educational advancement. This policy builds upon the foundational work of Abdelhamid Ben Badis, who addressed women's education within a deeply patriarchal and socially conservative context. However, the efficacy of national educational and labor legislation in translating educational attainment into tangible empowerment for Algerian women remains a critical inquiry. Specifically, it is essential to examine how cultural factors mediate women's ability to leverage these opportunities and to identify concrete manifestations of societal change.

"We find Article 28 of the 1989 Constitution: All citizens are equal before the law, and no discrimination may be made on the basis of birth, race, sex, opinion, or any other condition or circumstance, personal or social." (Algerian Constitution of 1989).

The issue of protecting women from violence is also enshrined in the provisions of the Constitution, particularly Articles 32-33-34, as well as in the Penal Code, where Articles 264 to 267 punish voluntary acts of violence with appropriate penalties.

Law No. 04-08, enacted on January 23, 2008, serves as the foundational legislation for national education in Algeria, enshrining the right and obligation of education for both sexes without discrimination. Specifically, Articles 10, 11, and 12 guarantee equal educational opportunities: Article 10 prohibits discrimination based on gender, social, or geographical status; Article 11 mandates the generalization of basic education and ensures equal access to schooling and further studies; and Article 12 establishes compulsory education for children aged 6 to 16 (Official journal of the Algerian Republic, 2008).

Following the theoretical framework of scholars like Pierre Bourdieu, who posit that political action can challenge institutions perpetuating subordination, an analysis of the Algerian context reveals a multifaceted approach to improving women's status. Notably, state-driven constitutional and legal support has been pivotal. Early research predominantly focused on legislative frameworks, particularly family law amendments. Subsequently, attention shifted towards gender-based approaches and international reports on human development. Furthermore, access to education has demonstrably impacted women's agency, fostering awareness of rights and duties across domains such as childcare, health, and socio-economic participation. Algeria has witnessed a significant increase in female enrollment across all educational levels, including vocational training and higher education.

Registered students	17/2016	18/2017	19/2018
Primary education	mary education 4 231 556		4 513 749
Of which: Girls %	47.65	47.76	47.84
Middle education	2 685 827	2 811 648	2 979 737
Of them: girls %	48.00	48.05	47.95
Total number of students in primary and middle school	6 917 383	7 185 107	7 493 468
Of them: girls %	47.78	47.87	47.88
Total number of secondary school students	1 286 586	1 227 055	1 222 673
Of them: girls %	56.64	56.84	54.82

**Source**: National Office of Statistics, Algeria in Figures, Results for the Year 2016-2018, No. 49, Bulletin 2021, Results for the Year 2016-2018, pp. 25-26

Enrollment figures from 2016 to 2018 demonstrate a consistent increase in female participation across all educational levels. This trend reflects the strengthening of equal opportunity principles, which have elevated the importance of education within Algerian society and families. Notably, female students have consistently achieved academic superiority over their male counterparts. Researcher Raghda Ghanem attributes this phenomenon to a confluence of social, political, economic, and psychological factors. Socially, females' predominantly home-based environment provides focused study time. Furthermore, evolving cultural attitudes have fostered a desire for equality and educational attainment among girls, challenging traditional domestic roles (Ben Seddik , 2020).

We also find the principle of equal opportunities between the sexes embodied in higher education in universities and graduate schools, "and Algeria has been able to make great strides in this field, and these achievements were translated into the Global Gender Gap Report 2016 through the gender ratio in university education, as Algeria obtained (1.61) as a value for the gender parity index in university education, ahead of some countries, including: Morocco (0.96), Egypt (0.90), Japan (0.91), Turkey (0.86), and Yemen (0.44) (Ben Seddik , 2020, p. 202).

Vocational training, encompassing residential, apprenticeship, evening, and distance learning programs, experiences significant demand from both male and female participants, as evidenced by the following table:

Year	Residential formation	Formation by professionalization	Formation through evening classes	Distance learning
2016	991 883	343 523	32 291	39 740
girls Of them:	741	97 533	13 690	
%	45.01	28.39	42.40	-
2017	200 665	352 392	27 649	43 156
girls Of them:	86 485	108 000	11 335	
%	43.10	30.65	41.99	-
2018	188 251	338 876	32 238	28 326
girls Of them:	79 008	98 678	14 019	
%	41.97	29.12	43.48	-

Table 2. Number of registered students in vocational training

**Source**: National Office of Statistics, Algeria in Figures, Results for the Year 2016-2018, No. 49, Bulletin 2021, Results for the Year 2016-2018, p. 28

In addition to the efforts made by the state, which contributed to the increase in the percentage of female students in various educational levels, we also find some distinctive experiences that supported the state in strengthening the status of women with science and knowledge, including the following according to the field:

- The field of female literacy: through the experiences of "Read" and the National Center for Literacy

- The field of vocational and economic training and the development of life skills for women: through the experience of the Project Management Unit affiliated with the Center for Research in Social and Cultural Anthropology (a project funded by the European Commission) on the one hand, and the training programs developed by the Ministry of Vocational Training, on the other hand.

- The field of continuous training: through the important experience of training in trade union practice carried out by the women's branch of the National Union of Algerian Workers.

- The field of social training through the experience of the People's Council of the Central City of Algiers in cooperation with the Higher Institute of Planning (Tafiani).

These projects have contributed to the development of life skills for women through the activity of the training sector in supporting young girls in the rural sector and deprived and marginalized groups, eradicating

illiteracy among females, and deepened its efforts by concluding international agreements with international organizations accredited in Algeria (UNICEF, UNFPA, UNESCO). National legislation on education has succeeded in promoting and strengthening women's rights, expanding their horizons and awareness of themselves and the social environment surrounding them. This was evident through the increase in the number of students in various educational levels and the superiority of females over males on the one hand, and on the other hand, the changes affected all women's groups in the city and the countryside, as well as deprived and marginalized groups, thanks to the national and international agreements adopted by Algeria. Thus, we can say that education is a fundamental factor in women's empowerment in Algeria, allowing them to expand their social, professional, economic and even political options.

## Expanding The Professional and Economic Options of Algerian Women as a Strategy for Women's Empowerment:

For the past sixty years, the Algerian state's slogan has been to involve women in development and integrate them into economic and political life. "Beginning with the text of the Tripoli Program, which stipulated the full and complete involvement of women in the management of public affairs and in the development of the country, the program adopted a policy calling for the end of all obstacles that prevent women's development, especially the outdated mentalities that were also entrenched among women." Furthermore, the Algiers Charter (1964) represented an explicit call for Algerian women to participate effectively in political work and to contribute their energy to the service of their country by participating in economic life, asserting that work is the true path to their advancement (Ben Zenin, 2012). These slogans and encouragements soon began to be realized in Algerian society, and women began to establish a presence in all sectors, albeit in varying proportions, with the national education and higher education sectors being the most prominent.

#### Women in The Services and Economic Field:

Algeria has sought to integrate women into professional and economic life, aiming to establish them as an economic and political force. This has been pursued through the development of the legal system related to women and labor laws, which prohibit all forms of discrimination between the sexes, as stipulated in Algerian labor legislation. Consequently, opportunities have gradually expanded for women to enter various sectors, particularly those previously dominated by men. The percentage of female leaders holding leadership positions in the economic and political fields has increased, and the security services have seen greater female representation, reversing their historically male-dominated composition. The percentage of women in certain professional sectors has also risen, including: education (49.29%), healthcare (54% in specialized fields and 73% in pharmacy), and the judiciary (30.75% in 2000). "Participation rates in the service and economic sectors began to rise; for example, the statistics for 2019 are shown in the following table:

2019	Males	%	Females	%
Agriculture	1006	10.9	77	3.7
<b>Extractive Industries</b>	141	1,5	13	0.6
Manufacturing	908	9.9	389	18.9
Construction	1862	20.2	28	1.4
Trade	1684	18.3	91	4.4
Transportation	690	7.5	39	1.9
<b>Public Administration</b>	1525	16.5	287	13.9
Health and Social Work	746	8.1	931	45.1
Other Services	658	7.1	207	10.1
Total	9219	100	2062	100

**Table 3.** Employed population by type of activity sector and gender in 2019

**Source:** Adel, Imran Salah El-Din, Women's Work in Algeria, Arab Women Organization, Arab World Investor Forum, p. 4.

We notice from this table clear differences between the sexes in participation rates, but what matters is the presence of women in all sectors, which confirms their participation, and that there are sectors that serve them more than others, such as the health sector, social work, and public administration.

Furthermore, there was a significant increase in women requesting micro-loans to establish private companies. The percentage of these requests grew annually, rising from 19.99% in 1999 to 26.59% in 2001, and finally to 33% in 2002. "Interest in women's entry into entrepreneurial activity rapidly increased, driven by the creation of numerous measures and incentives to stimulate the establishment of small and medium enterprises. Several programs were also implemented to support employment, including the 'Collective Needs Activities Program' and 'Funded Micro-loan Programs for Various Projects', administered through the National Agency for Microcredit Management (ANGEM), the National Unemployment Insurance Fund (CNAC), and the National Agency for the Support of Youth Employment (ANSEG). Additionally, the 'Social Integration Program for Degree Holders' and other initiatives aimed to encourage women's employment and combat unemployment." Numerically, the rate of women's entrepreneurial activity in Algeria doubled, increasing from 2.6% in 2006 to 5.0% in 2017. A study conducted by the General Union of Algerian Workers revealed that women entrepreneurs and business owners of active institutions in Algeria contribute to the creation of at least 10,000 jobs in the country. " (Qada Ali , 2021)

Women entrepreneurs are exemplary models of women's empowerment in Algerian society, embodying the association of entrepreneurial work with initiative, risk-taking, responsibility, and confident resource management." Although women's participation rate remains lower than men's due to societal stereotypes, the growth of this activity strongly indicates women's capabilities and potential for future excellence. Craft and service activities are the most prominent sectors where women have established themselves, compared to sectors like agriculture, transportation, and construction.

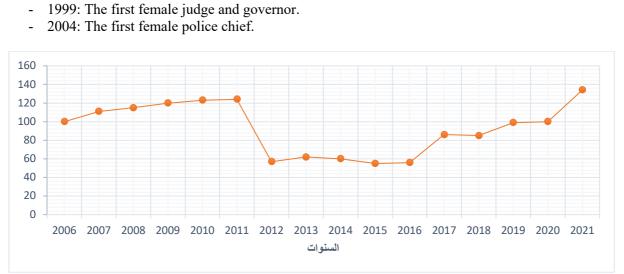
#### Direct Levels of Women's Empowerment in Algerian Society:

Intermediate levels have empowered women to acquire resources such as capital, employment, education, skills, knowledge, and agency. Direct levels, conversely, involve the ownership and control of resources, coupled with the ability to act and achieve collectively through freely chosen, unexploited, and nondiscriminatory decision-making. This is crucial because gender disparity and women's internalized sense of lower status hinder their achievements. These direct levels are most evident in women's occupation of leadership positions in political, administrative, and other domains, as well as in their leadership of entrepreneurial ventures.

#### Algerian Women in The Political Field

Algerian women's participation in the political sphere exemplifies the direct levels of women's empowerment; specifically, a high rate of women's actual political participation strongly indicates women's empowerment in society. In Algeria, agreements and legislation have contributed to women's advancement, facilitating their occupation of positions of responsibility and opening avenues for their engagement. Furthermore, the Algerian state established the Ministry Delegate in charge of the Family and Women's Affairs in 1996, addressing critical issues such as violence, harassment, women's labor rights, and combating discrimination. This ministry subsequently integrated gender-related policies, implementing international agreements from key development conferences like the Beijing Conference, which resonated globally. Consequently, Algeria became a nation that politically encouraged women and sought to expand their political rights. In 2002, 694 women ran for office, with 27 winning seats in the National People's Assembly. A female minister has served in the Algerian government since 1962, and in 2006, women held four ministerial portfolios. Two women also lead political parties. Notably, a woman, the head of the Workers' Party, ran for president for the first time, receiving over a million votes. Since assuming power, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika has pursued a policy of reform, renewal, and modernization, impacting women's political gains in the last decade, despite their historically symbolic and weak political participation since 1962. In the House of Representatives from 2002 to 2007, 24 out of 389 representatives were women, constituting 6.42%. Key milestones in Algerian women's history include:

- 1964: The first Algerian women's movement.
- 1964: Women gained suffrage and parliamentary eligibility.
- 1972: The first women's magazine in Algeria, "Al-Jazaerya."
- 1984: The first female minister (Ministry of Social Development).
- 1997: The first female presidential candidate (Louisa Hanoune).



**Source:** Algeria's global ranking in the Gender Equality Index in Political Empowerment from 2006 to 2021 https://tcdata360.worldbank.org/indicators/846d20f8?country=DZA&indicator=27960&viz=line\_chart&year s=2013,2022

Algeria's global ranking in political empowerment indicates that 2012 marked a pivotal moment. The issuance of Organic Law 02-2012, which outlined methods for increasing women's representation in elected councils, significantly boosted women's representation in both local councils and the National People's Assembly. This propelled Algeria to advanced global rankings from 2012 to 2016, followed by a gradual decline. This trend reflects persistent challenges hindering women's political participation, necessitating the adoption and implementation of mechanisms to further empower them. Clearly, direct levels of women's empowerment require sustained support and encouragement, alongside the enactment and enforcement of laws and strategies to prevent setbacks in women's status. This includes modernizing the socialization process across social institutions and reinstating a quota system in national and local elected councils. Furthermore, activating civil society's role in expanding political and social participation and enhancing women's rights is essential. Here, direct levels of empowerment strongly intersect with deeper levels.

Since independence, the Algerian ruling regime, particularly during President Houari Boumediene's tenure, has publicly supported women and opened opportunities for them, yet failed to fully address the entrenched patriarchal values within Algerian society, effectively placing the onus of change on women alone. These values remain deeply embedded, notably in the Algerian Family Law, which reflects and reinforces them. This exemplifies the deeper levels of women's empowerment previously mentioned.

#### Conclusions

It is evident that women's empowerment in Algeria has witnessed significant developments at both the legislative and institutional levels. However, persistent cultural and social challenges continue to impede progress. Achieving genuine and sustainable women's empowerment necessitates a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including governmental bodies, civil society organizations, and community leaders. This collaborative approach should focus on several key areas:

**1. Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Enforcement:** While Algeria has made strides in enacting laws promoting gender equality, effective implementation and enforcement remain crucial. This includes addressing gaps in existing legislation and ensuring that women have access to legal recourse in cases of discrimination or violence.

**2. Promoting Women's Participation in Decision-Making:** Increasing women's representation in political and economic leadership positions is essential. This can be achieved through targeted programs that provide women with the necessary skills and resources to excel in these roles.

**3.** Challenging Societal Norms and Stereotypes: Deep-rooted cultural biases and gender stereotypes continue to limit women's opportunities. Educational initiatives, media campaigns, and community dialogues are vital in challenging these norms and promoting a more equitable society.

**4. Investing in Women's Education and Economic Empowerment:** Ensuring women's access to quality education and economic opportunities is fundamental. This includes providing vocational training, promoting entrepreneurship, and supporting women's participation in the workforce.

**5.** Enhancing Data Collection and Research: Accurate and comprehensive data on women's experiences and challenges are essential for informed policymaking. Investing in research and data collection will enable a better understanding of the barriers women face and the effectiveness of empowerment initiatives.

By adopting a holistic and multi-faceted approach, Algeria can accelerate progress towards gender equality and ensure that women fully contribute to the nation's development. Ultimately, women's empowerment is not only a matter of social justice but also a crucial driver of economic growth and sustainable development.

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