Sociopolitical Participation of Kuwaiti Women in the Development Process: Current State and Challenges Ahead

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ABSTRACT
This study explores the sociocultural status of Kuwaiti women and examines the obstacles that may hinder them from participating in socioeconomic development of Kuwait. The study analyzes the nature of legislative, political, sociocultural, and economic challenges faced by Kuwaiti women and suggests measures to overcome these obstacles to help women in attaining a prime role in the development process. The survey sample included 300 Kuwaiti citizens of both genders selected randomly from different social and professional backgrounds. Statistical analyses including mean values and covariance analysis revealed the awareness of gender-based differences in attitudes on the nature of constraints faced in moving toward the progress of Kuwaiti women. Discussed are social, economic, and knowledge-based constraints that restrain women from playing an active role in the socioeconomic development of Kuwait. Future directions include the acknowledgement of increased levels of education among Kuwaiti women and the available talent pool that will remain underutilized if Kuwaiti women are not raised to leadership levels. Further research is needed on the scope and challenges in implementing strategies for the empowerment of women as a part of legislation.

KEYWORDS
Development; Kuwait; participation; women

Introduction
Women’s issues, including women’s diverse roles in society, have steadily grown in prominence at global, regional, and local levels (Hamdan, 2005). Kuwaiti women are thought to be moving toward modernization at a greater speed than other women in the Gulf States. With the establishment of Kuwait University in 1965, the pace of social and economic development of Kuwait was accelerated. A great number of females who did not have a chance to go abroad for higher education were able to pursue their education in Kuwait (Fakhro, 2009). The available talent pool will remain underutilized if Kuwaiti women are not raised to leadership levels where they can utilize their expertise in social, economic, and political arena.

Many Arab countries have expanded women’s legal and political rights and increased their access to education and health care, but a significant gender gap persists. One of the most glaring lags is in the workforce participation rate. Despite substantial gains in education, women’s labor force participation has remained flat over the past few decades. The small Gulf States like Kuwait boast the highest rate of female workforce participation at 43% (Coleman & Abdelgadir, 2014). This highlights the fact that Kuwait’s workforce consists of a decent percentage of women. However, further analysis of the status and level of participation of Kuwaiti women in leadership roles is necessary to ensure the effective utilization of women’s talents at a higher level. This will further lead to their active role in the sociopolitical development of Kuwait.

Article 7 of Kuwait’s constitution recognizes the principle of equality among its citizens regardless of “race, origin, language or religion.” It does not mention gender as a specific category for equality. Moreover, Kuwaiti laws still treat women as dependents of men rather than as individuals with equal rights and responsibilities (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 51). However, “Kuwait allowed women to vote and seek public office for the first time in 2005” (Schmidt, Shelley, Bardes, & Ford, 2014, p. 155). Gaining of political right was a stepping-stone in the progress of Kuwaiti women. It set the stage for them to prove their capability and utilize their talents toward nation building. However, a small percentage of women came forward
to accept the leadership roles, and their contribution in the sociopolitical development of Kuwait was less compared to their male counterparts.

The relatively lower level of women who participate in political and administrative positions in Kuwait, and the proven capabilities of women representatives in regional and social development, make increasing ways to invite women into leadership positions an important first step toward success. Not utilizing women in leadership roles has become a contemporary issue of global importance with a potential to influence the socioeconomic development of the country. In this context, the current study analyzes the sociopolitical status of Kuwaiti women and examines various challenges that hinder their roles and levels of participation in the overall development of Kuwait. To study this issue further, data were captured through a survey questionnaire analyzing perceptions of the challenges women face in attaining a more prominent position in the social and political context.

**Literature Review**

Empowerment of women and gender equality are topics of interest that need further exploration in countries like Kuwait. Analysis of past studies brings light to many interesting facts that give way to further research in this area. According to Shvedova (2005), “geographical, socio-economic and cultural factors influence women participation in political system and development processes of the region which has a direct impact on gender equality, women empowerment and economic development of the country” (p. 34). “The Arab regions still lag far behind than other regions in the world when it comes to the political status of its women. Women’s participation in the labor force in the region is generally low. A combination of patriarchy, conservative religious interpretations and cultural stereotyping has built a very strong psychological barrier among Arab populations regarding women’s participation in the public sphere” (Ballington & Karam, 2005, p. 5).

During the 1960s, only three women in the world (Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka, Indira Gandhi of India, and Golda Meir of Israel) served as prime ministers of their country. There were six in the 1970s, and seven in the 1980s. The 1990s witnessed a giant step forward with women serving as presidents or prime ministers. The number increased in the first decade of the 21st century to 29. In mid-2010, the average lower or single house of parliament was 19% women, and more than 26 countries had single or lower houses of parliament composed of more than 30% women (Bauer & Manon, 2011). As of January 2014, nine women served as head of state and 15 served as head of government. Similarly, 21.8% of national parliamentarians were women as of July 1, 2013, an improvement from 11.3% in 1995. Overall, 17% of government ministers are women across the world. These figures, though small, represent a significant increase in women’s presence in executive positions during the past 50 years. However, as of 2014, there are 38 states (including Kuwait) globally in which women account for less than 10% of parliamentarians in single or lower houses. Kuwait ranks 81 with 6.7% women in ministerial positions and ranks 135 in terms of women in parliament with 4.6% women in lower or single house, far behind the global status (UN Women, 2014). This lower level of participation by women in Kuwait warrants a situation analysis to identify and address the challenges to achieving global levels.

The 2013 Global Gender Gap Index data also supports the lower level of women’s involvement in sociopolitical affairs of Kuwait. Accordingly, Kuwait is among the few countries (15 out of 110 countries) that have regressed relative to their own scores (World Economic Forum, 2013). The highest-ranking economies of the region have made vast investments in increasing women’s education levels in the last decades. In Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Algeria, Oman, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia, the tertiary education enrolment rates for women are higher than those of men. However, these countries have had varying degrees of success at integrating women into the economy and in decision making in order to reap the benefits of this investment. Six of the ten high-income countries that rank the lowest on the overall index are from this region (World Economic Forum, 2013).

Many scholars uncovered the importance of gender equality in nation building through their studies. According to Metle (2002) and Mostafa (2003), integrating women into society building requires the creation of conditions that enable them to reach their maximum potential in working towards the socioeconomic development of the country. This approach, in turn, increases their self-confidence, thereby enhancing their presence and pivotal role in various
Aspects of life. Al-Ayyar (1995) and Al-Ghanim (1999) argue that this integration will become a reality only by helping women to discover their skills and ensure their participation in all areas of society building. In addition to these factors, Khader (2011) emphasizes the importance of raising women’s self-awareness of their roles, which will benefit both society and themselves. He argues that many women have limiting views of their own capabilities.

According to Atal and Portes (2012), many factors such as economic growth, contemporaneous and intergenerational spillovers in human capital accumulation, better nutrition, enhanced international competitiveness, and a better balanced market have led to the increased empowerment of women. Institutional and social norms that support equal development of all individuals also contributed to this. Furthermore, societies with sustainable development policies empower women in greater numbers because these policies require the utilization of all prospective talents regardless of gender as a tool for growth and progress. Maintaining discriminatory trends towards women is counter-productive for sustainable development (Al-Awadi, 2006; Lindley et al., 2006).

Many studies on contemporary Arab societies reveal the prevalence of the advancement of women, enhancement of their capabilities, and their increased access to education, employment, and public participation (Al-Mughni, 2010; Economic & Social Commission for Western Asia, 2004; Fayeq, 2001). These studies also reveal the obstacles faced by women in their advancement. Organizations such as UN Women and World Economic Forum aim to develop and strengthen the educational and professional capabilities of women to enhance their incorporation into various community development processes. These organizations also demonstrate that Arab women are dynamic players in the development of policies and programs, and their role in society is as valuable as that of men (Al-Faraj, 2008; Al-Farizi & Al-Iz, 2006; Rahal, 2009). The World Bank Policy Research Report (2001) recommends that “the implementation of community development strategies should include both genders without any discrimination as gender inequalities are a strong platform which undermines social development” (p. 2). This report urges nations to make women an integral part of society-building processes.

Various studies demonstrate the status of Arab women and explain the level of participation in various aspects. However, a specific analysis of the challenges faced by Kuwaiti women will better highlight the current status of Kuwaiti women and thereby help them to become part of the sociopolitical development of Kuwait.

**Status of Women in Kuwait**

After the discovery of oil resources in the country, Kuwait’s economy improved and opportunities increased. As a result, Kuwaiti women joined schools, worked side by side with men, and proved themselves at all levels. Kuwaiti women held numerous leadership positions including undersecretary to president of Kuwait University, national ambassadors, and editors in chief of major newspapers. Official data reveal that women are advancing quickly in Kuwait. Data revealed that women occupied 8.55% of leadership positions in the public sector in 2009 and 6.57% in 2010. This figure increased to 10.3% in 2011, which indeed is a positive sign. In 2011, woman’s employment comprised 54.24% of the overall workforce in the public sector. In addition, 69.8% of college undergraduate students were female, which indicates a pronounced positive change in women’s role in society (Central Statistical Office, 2012). Kuwaiti women played a remarkable role during Iraq’s invasion in 1990. Women took part in resisting the occupying forces, and many of them sacrificed their lives for the country. In recognition of this, the Jeddah Conference unanimously voted in October 1990 to grant women the constitutional right of equality in the decision-making process and equal powers at the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government (Fayeq, 2001).

Parliament tribal representatives and Islamists started their opposition to the rights of Kuwaiti women in 1971. At that time Parliamentary Member Salim Khalid Al-Marzouq submitted a bill granting Kuwaiti educated women the right to vote, but only 12 members joined him in backing the initiative. The battle culminated in 1999, and the Council of Ministers reviewed the draft decree amending the first article of the election law to allow women’s political rights and took the matter to His Highness the Amir. As a result, the Kuwait Council of Ministers approved
the draft law allowing women to vote and to run the National Assembly on May 18, 2004 (Is’haq, 2005).

The entry of Kuwaiti women into the labor market and their participation in economic activities during the past 50 years has contributed to their increased integration in the political process (Al-zuabi, 2007). However, many constraints continue to curb and even disable their role in society. Women’s problems and challenges are an integral part of the social structure. As several researchers have argued, a comprehensive vision that places women’s issues in the wider context of the social, economic, and cultural structure of the society is essential to raise the status of women (Bin Sultan & Al-Sahra, 1990; Faraj, 1991; Moghadam, 2002).

Consequently, this study attempts to reveal the reality of Kuwaiti women’s socioeconomic status and to explore the causes that hinder their participation in the development process of Kuwait. In addition, this article suggests practical solutions for addressing these challenges.

This study seeks to delineate the sociocultural status of women and examine the various challenges that hinder their roles and levels of participation in the sociopolitical development of Kuwait. The major objectives of the study are to address the obstacles faced by women in entering parliament and in turn in becoming a part of the developmental process of the country and suggest ways that will enable women to cope with these obstacles. More specifically, the study will focus on the following issues: (a) the importance of women’s role in the development process of the nation; (b) causes of women’s lack of participation in the development process; (c) societal problems hindering women’s role in society; (d) challenges precluding women from obtaining benefits from the state service system; (e) factors preventing women’s economic empowerment; (f) challenges hindering women’s contribution to civil and volunteer work; and (g) the optimal mechanisms for empowerment of women.

Methodology

Sample

The study was conducted on a sample of 300 Kuwaiti citizens that included 146 women and 154 men from various age groups from 25 years to above 55 years. The survey covered respondents from different social and professional backgrounds in public, private, and academic sectors. Various organizations in private and public sectors were visited with the questionnaire. Kuwaiti politicians, policy makers, and academicians were included in the survey. The study was conducted in Kuwait between November 2013 and March 2014.

Instrument and Materials

A survey was conducted using a questionnaire with eight items. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher and was designed to address the various constraints faced by women and the factors hindering women’s empowerment. Questions were also designed to explore the views from various sectors on women’s empowerment and to reveal their views on challenges faced by women and ways to overcome those hindrances.

Procedure

The study is based on a cross-sectional research design where questionnaires were used as the main procedures for gathering data. The study was explained to participants and they were assured that their identity would be anonymous and that completion of the survey was voluntary. Data collection, analysis, and interviews were approved by the consultant of the Statistics Division in the College of Social Sciences of Kuwait University. The questionnaire data were analyzed through descriptive statistical analyses. Chi-square test was used to examine the significant difference between men and women, and Cramer’s V was used to assess the strength of association between gender and each item in the studied issues related to the role of women in social development.

Results

Table 1 shows a descriptive summary of the demographic characteristics of the 300 selected respondents. The sample included a proportionate distribution of men (48.7%) and women (51.3%). The average age of respondents varied from 25 to 55 years; 44.3% of the sample was in the age category of 36–45 years. The majority of respondents served in the public sector (40.0%), and a high proportion of respondents (28.3%) occupied positions in the academic sector. Table 1 shows that 51.7% were generally engaged in
sociopolitical activities such as civil associations, parliament, or journalism.

Respondents were requested to express their views on the importance of women’s role in development by marking “Yes,” “To a certain extent,” or “No.” Data revealed (Table 2) that the majority of respondents (69.3%), both men and women, considered women's role as important; 25% of the respondents felt their role is somewhat important; only 5.7% did not consider it relevant. This shows that the studied sample is fully aware of the role that women can play in society in general, and in the process of sociodevelopment, in particular.

A chi-square test was applied to the relationship between gender and the importance of women’s role in development and the result was not statistically significant, \( \chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 3.513, p = .173 \), using an alpha level of .05.

The questionnaire listed eight reasons that might explain the inadequate participation of women in the development process of Kuwait and asked participants to indicate “Yes” or “No” for each statement. Table 3 shows a ranked order of the perceived importance of each statement by respondents. Chi-square and Cramer’s V were used to test the level of statistical significance as well as the strength of association between gender and each statement in this component.

According to 70.3% of the respondents, society’s lack of awareness of the role of women is the reason for inadequate participation of women in the development process. A small disproportionate difference in opinion was found between men and women on this point (women, 71.1%; men, 68.5%), and the difference was not statistically significant. The second-most selected reason was decision maker’s lack of vision about policies designed to advance the role of women, with an agreement of 66.3% of respondents. Here the male-female gap widened, with 69.8% of women and only 63.0% of men selecting the reason. The difference was not statistically significant. The third-most selected reason for women’s lack of involvement in development was the delayed attainment of women’s full political rights (60.0% of respondents; 61.7% of women; 58.2% of men).

The weak role of women’s community organizations was indicated by 53.0% of respondents. The majority of respondents realized that women’s organizations in Kuwait are not powerful enough to have a societal effect and be considered important. Here the gender gap was very wide, with 65.6% of women and only 39.7% of males selecting this reason. Although this statement ranked fourth in the list, the relationship between gender and this cause was statistically significant \( \chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 20.1, p = .001 \), with a moderately strong association between gender and this cause (Cramer’s V = .26). This indicates that women were more frustrated by the poor performance of women’s community organizations compared to men.

The sample ranked the National Assembly’s failure to give priority to women’s issues with 46.7% of the total sample. More women respondents (51.3%) than men (41.8%) considered legislator’s inaction as an important cause. Men and women equally (46.0%) recognized the weak initiatives and low turnout of women’s participation in public activities. The relationships between gender and the fifth and sixth causes were not statistically significant.

The seventh and eighth factors were deficiencies in some legal frameworks and legislation concerning women (37.3%) and absence of women’s economic

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Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample (N = 300).

| Variable                  | N   | %   |
|---------------------------|-----|-----|
| Gender                    |     |     |
| Men                       | 146 | 48.7|
| Women                     | 154 | 51.3|
| Age                       |     |     |
| 25–35 years               | 53  | 17.6|
| 36–45 years               | 133 | 44.3|
| 46–55 years               | 82  | 27.3|
| 56–65 years               | 32  | 10.6|
| Occupation                |     |     |
| Public sector             | 120 | 40.0|
| Private sector            | 50  | 16.7|
| Academic sector           | 85  | 28.3|
| Others                    | 45  | 15.0|
| Civic engagement          |     |     |
| Not engaged               | 145 | 48.3|
| Civic society associations | 55  | 18.3|
| Member of Parliament      | 15  | 5.0 |
| Journalist                | 15  | 5.0 |
| Literary figure, media specialist, clergy, diplomat | 6  | 2.0 |
| Political activist        | 4   | 1.3 |
| Multiactivity participant  | 60  | 20.0|

Table 2. Respondent’s views about the importance of women’s role in development.

| Variable                      | Men   |       | Women  |       | Total  |       |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|
|                               | N     | %     | N      | %     | N      | %     |
| Yes                           | 104   | 71.2  | 104    | 67.6  | 208    | 69.3  |
| To a certain extent           | 31    | 21.2  | 44     | 28.6  | 75     | 25.0  |
| No                            | 11    | 7.6   | 6      | 3.8   | 17     | 5.7   |
| Total                         | 146   | 100   | 154    | 100   | 300    | 100   |

Note. \( \chi^2 = 3.513; p = .173; \text{Cramer’s} V = .11. \)
independence (32.3%). More women than men selected these factors. The data suggest that Kuwaiti women recognize the obstacles that deter them from actively participating in the development process compared to men. Again, the relationships between gender and these two factors were not statistically significant.

Undoubtedly, Kuwaiti women, like other Arab women, face many challenges at political, social, and cultural levels. These obstacles hinder the realization of their full potential in society. Recognizing these challenges is the primary objective of this study.

The next component in the questionnaire was to evaluate the general challenges faced by women. Participants were encouraged to make as many choices as they wanted from the list of challenges. Respondents identified eight key challenges. Data in Table 4 revealed agreement between men and women that mainly eight societal challenges limit the effective participation of women in the development process. The largest number of respondents (68.0%) indicated the increasing number of divorces as a key challenge.

Table 4 also shows that 64.7% of respondents recognized family problems and domestic violence as the second challenge. Problems of delinquency came in third place with the support of 55.6% of respondents. This reason was identified by more women (63.6%) than men (47.3%). The difference between men and women was statistically significant \(\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 8.14, p = .004\), with a weak association in their opinion and this cause (Cramer’s \(V = .17\)). The delayed age of marriage and marrying non-Kuwaitis ranked fourth and fifth in the order of importance. More

### Table 3. Views on possible causes of inadequate participation of women in the development process.

| Statement | Variable | Men (N = 146) | Women (N = 154) | Total (N = 300) | \(\chi^2\) | Sig (p) | Cramer’s V |
|-----------|----------|--------------|----------------|----------------|---------|---------|-----------|
| Society’s lack of awareness about the role of women | Yes | 100 | 68.5 | 111 | 71.1 | 211 | 70.3 | 0.46 | .497 | .04 |
| | No | 46 | 31.5 | 43 | 29.9 | 89 | 29.7 |    |    |    |
| Decision maker’s vision on special women’s policies | Yes | 92 | 63.0 | 107 | 69.5 | 199 | 66.3 | 1.40 | .236 | .07 |
| | No | 54 | 37.0 | 47 | 30.5 | 101 | 33.7 |    |    |    |
| Delayed attainment of women’s full political rights | Yes | 85 | 58.2 | 95 | 61.7 | 180 | 60.0 | 0.38 | .540 | .04 |
| | No | 61 | 41.8 | 59 | 38.3 | 120 | 40.0 |    |    |    |
| Weak role of women’s community organization | Yes | 58 | 39.7 | 101 | 65.6 | 159 | 53.0 | 20.1 | .001 | .26 |
| | No | 88 | 60.3 | 53 | 34.4 | 141 | 47.0 |    |    |    |
| Women’s issues are not priority in the National Assembly | Yes | 61 | 41.8 | 79 | 51.3 | 140 | 46.7 | 2.73 | .099 | .10 |
| | No | 85 | 58.2 | 75 | 48.7 | 160 | 53.3 |    |    |    |
| Weak initiatives and low turnout of women’s participation in public activities | Yes | 68 | 46.6 | 70 | 45.5 | 138 | 46.0 | 0.04 | .846 | .01 |
| | No | 52 | 35.6 | 44 | 28.6 | 96 | 32.0 |    |    |    |
| Deficiencies in some legal frameworks and legislation akin to women | Yes | 50 | 34.2 | 62 | 40.3 | 112 | 37.3 | 1.16 | .282 | .06 |
| | No | 85 | 65.8 | 53 | 59.7 | 138 | 62.7 |    |    |    |
| Absence of women’s economic independence | Yes | 42 | 28.8 | 56 | 36.4 | 98 | 32.7 | 1.97 | .161 | .08 |
| | No | 104 | 71.2 | 98 | 63.6 | 202 | 67.3 |    |    |    |

Note. Sig = significance.

### Table 4. Societal challenges faced by Kuwaiti women.

| Statement | Variable | Men (N = 146) | Women (N = 154) | Total (N = 300) | \(\chi^2\) | Sig (p) | Cramer’s V |
|-----------|----------|--------------|----------------|----------------|---------|---------|-----------|
| Divorce | Yes | 94 | 64.4 | 110 | 71.4 | 204 | 68.0 | 1.71 | .191 | .08 |
| | No | 52 | 35.6 | 44 | 28.6 | 96 | 32.0 |    |    |    |
| Family problems and domestic violence | Yes | 92 | 63.0 | 102 | 66.2 | 194 | 64.7 | 0.34 | .560 | .03 |
| | No | 54 | 37.0 | 52 | 33.8 | 106 | 35.3 |    |    |    |
| Delinquency problems of juveniles and youth | Yes | 69 | 47.3 | 98 | 63.6 | 167 | 55.6 | 8.14 | .004 | .17 |
| | No | 77 | 52.7 | 56 | 36.4 | 133 | 44.3 |    |    |    |
| Delayed marriage age | Yes | 61 | 41.8 | 91 | 59.1 | 152 | 50.7 | 8.98 | .003 | .17 |
| | No | 85 | 58.2 | 63 | 40.9 | 148 | 49.3 |    |    |    |
| Marrying non-Kuwaitis | Yes | 52 | 35.6 | 88 | 57.1 | 140 | 46.7 | 13.95 | .001 | .22 |
| | No | 94 | 64.4 | 66 | 42.9 | 160 | 53.3 |    |    |    |
| The negative effect of domestic servants on child rearing | Yes | 43 | 29.5 | 55 | 35.7 | 98 | 32.7 | 1.34 | .248 | .07 |
| | No | 103 | 70.5 | 99 | 64.3 | 202 | 67.3 |    |    |    |
| Diffusion of values of consumerism in society and their negative social and humanitarian implications | Yes | 35 | 24.0 | 42 | 27.3 | 77 | 25.7 | 0.43 | .513 | .04 |
| | No | 111 | 76.0 | 112 | 72.7 | 223 | 74.3 |    |    |    |
| Need to improve Family and Conjugal Status Law | Yes | 12 | 8.2 | 32 | 20.8 | 44 | 14.7 | 9.45 | .002 | .18 |
| | No | 134 | 91.8 | 122 | 79.2 | 256 | 85.3 |    |    |    |

Note. Sig = significance.
women than men, in both items, believed this affects their social position. This wide gender gap is statistically significant for both reasons, delayed age of marriage ($x^2 (1, N = 300) = 8.98, p = .003$), with weak association between gender and their opinion of this cause (Cramer’s $V = .17$), and marrying non-Kuwaitis ($x^2 (1, N = 300) = 13.95, p = .001$), with a moderate association between gender and their opinion of this cause (Cramer’s $V = .22$). These results suggest that women are more concerned than men about the age and nature of marriage.

The negative influence of the use of domestic helpers on child rearing and the diffusion of values of consumerism in society and their negative social and humanitarian implications ranked the sixth and seventh societal challenges. More women (35.7%) than men (29.5%) found the use of domestic workers to be negative. This could be because women have more direct contact with the domestic workers than men. With regard to the eighth challenge, men and women had statistically significant different opinions on the need to improve the Family and Conjugal Status Law ($x^2 (1, N = 300) = 9.45, p = .002$), with a relatively weak association between gender and this cause (Cramer’s $V = .18$). Again, women expressed more concern than men about these factors.

The next question asked respondents to indicate the obstacles preventing women from benefitting from the state’s safety net. Table 5 lists seven obstacles and the number of respondents that selected each obstacle. According to 86.7% of the respondents, the main constraint faced by Kuwaiti women is the shortage of gender-sensitive institutions to help women make use of leisure time. Here 94.5% of women selected this as an obstacle while only 78.8% of men selected this as an obstacle. The difference of opinion between men and women was statistically significant, $x^2 (1, N = 300) = 15.36, p = .001$, with moderate association between the two variables (Cramer’s $V = .23$).

The second challenge as identified by the respondents (85.7%) was the lack of coordination among government agencies, civil society, and the private sector. Almost all of the women respondents (95.5%) found this as an obstacle while 75.3% of men also supported this fact. The difference of opinion between men and women was statistically significant, $x^2 (1, N = 300) = 24.69, p = .001$, with a moderately strong association between gender and this cause (Cramer’s $V = .29$).

The third challenge, which 77.7% respondents selected, was the paucity of financial allocations in support of women’s participation in development. Slight difference between the genders was noted in their opinions toward this obstacle. The virtual absence of small projects dedicated to assisting women and families in generating sustainable incomes was ranked fourth, with 70.7% of the respondents. More women (74.7%) than men (66.4%) were aware of this challenge, but the difference was not significant.

Both genders supported the fifth-ranked factor with 68.0% of respondents indicating the scarcity and poor quality of services related to women’s health. No statistically significant gender differences were apparent regarding the importance and effect of this factor. As the sixth challenge, 59.3% of the respondents indicated the failure to extend support to some age groups. The gender gap was small on this point. Finally, only 48% of the sample reported that the small number of nursery

Table 5. Challenges faced in getting benefits from the state’s services and social safety-net system.

| Statement | Men ($N = 146$) | Women ($N = 154$) | Total ($N = 300$) | Variable | $n$ | % | $n$ | % | $n$ | % | $x^2$ | Sig ($p$) | Cramer’s $V$ |
|-----------|----------------|------------------|------------------|----------|----|----|----|----|-----|----|-------|-------------|-------------|
| Shortage in the number of gender-sensitive institutions that help women to make use of leisure time in Kuwait | Yes | 115 | 78.8 | 145 | 94.2 | 260 | 86.7 | 15.36 | .001 | .23 |
|                      | No | 31 | 21.2 | 9 | 5.8 | 40 | 13.3 |            |         |         |
| Lack of coordination among government agencies, civil society, and the private sector | Yes | 110 | 75.3 | 147 | 95.5 | 257 | 85.7 | 24.69 | .001 | .29 |
|                      | No | 36 | 24.7 | 7 | 4.5 | 43 | 14.3 |            |         |         |
| Paucity of financial allocation to support some groups of women | Yes | 112 | 76.7 | 121 | 78.6 | 233 | 77.7 | 0.15 | .699 | .02 |
|                      | No | 34 | 23.3 | 33 | 21.4 | 67 | 22.3 |            |         |         |
| Near absence of small projects dedicated to assisting women and families in generating sustainable income | Yes | 97 | 66.4 | 115 | 74.7 | 212 | 70.7 | 2.45 | .117 | .09 |
|                      | No | 49 | 33.6 | 39 | 25.3 | 88 | 29.3 |            |         |         |
| Scarcity and poor quality of some services related to women’s health | Yes | 100 | 68.5 | 104 | 67.5 | 204 | 68.0 | 0.03 | .858 | .01 |
|                      | No | 46 | 31.5 | 50 | 32.5 | 96 | 32.0 |            |         |         |
| Failure to extend the system to some age groups that need support | Yes | 91 | 62.3 | 87 | 56.5 | 178 | 59.3 | 1.06 | .304 | .06 |
|                      | No | 55 | 37.7 | 67 | 43.5 | 122 | 40.7 |            |         |         |
| The small number of nursery schools and children’s clubs | Yes | 56 | 38.4 | 88 | 57.1 | 144 | 48.0 | 10.60 | .001 | .19 |
|                      | No | 90 | 61.6 | 66 | 42.9 | 156 | 52.0 |            |         |         |

Note. Sig = significance.
schools and children’s clubs was an impediment to women’s participation in societal development. However, 57.1% of women did consider this as a barrier compared to 38.4% of men. The difference between genders here is statistically significant, $x^2 (1, N = 300) = 10.60$, $p = .001$, with a weak association between opinion and gender for this item (Cramer’s $V = .19$). Overall, women showed a greater level of awareness regarding the challenges that precluded them from benefiting from the state’s services and social safety net systems.

The economic empowerment of women will undoubtedly contribute in enabling women politically, culturally, and socially as these factors are interrelated. Similarly, economic challenges will undoubtedly reflect on other fields. Analysis of the data presented in Table 6 identifies key challenges that prevent the economic empowerment of women in Kuwait. Respondents agree as to the degree of importance and magnitude ascribed to them with 90% of the respondents indicating “Weak interest of society in the economic empowerment of women” as a hurdle. More women (94.2%) than men (85.6%) considered this aspect important. The difference between men and women was statistically significant, $x^2 (1, N = 300) = 6.07$, $p = .014$, but with week association between opinions and genders on this item (Cramer’s $V = .14$).

Eighty-five percent of the respondents selected “weak role of women in trade unions and professional organizations” as a challenge to economic empowerment of women, and 78% of the respondents selected discrimination against women in leadership positions as a challenge. On this issue, a clear gender difference emerged, where 85.1% of the women considered it important in comparison with 70.5% of men. The difference was significant, $x^2 (1, N = 300) = 9.20$, $p = .002$, with weak association between opinion and gender on these variables (Cramer’s $V = .16$).

The fourth challenge as identified by the respondents was “the scarcity of benefits available to women working in the private sector.” This obstacle was supported by 72.7% of respondents with no gender gap in their opinions. Aggregate data reveal that 59.3% of the total sample indicated a lack of “customized training age programs to support the role of women in business.” Almost 9.0% more women than men named this challenge. Finally, 40.7% of the respondents identified the need to change legislation or a need to develop articles to the Civil Service Act. More than 10% more women than men indicated this factor. However, the difference was not statistically significant.

Challenges faced by Kuwaiti women in social, cultural, economic, and political arenas were the next point discussed in the questionnaire. Table 7 describes the problems women encounter in contributing to civil and volunteer work. Respondents agreed about a wide range of problems Kuwaiti women face in participating in civil work and public volunteerism. The participants indicated their perceptions of the severity and level of impact of these issues on women and society in general. According to 94.7% of respondents, the biggest problem appears to be the weak culture of community volunteerism in general. A closer look revealed a minor disagreement between men (92.5%) and women (96.8%) about the importance of this issue.

According to 86.0% of the total sample, customs, traditions, and societal constraints limit the participation of women in civil work. In this area, there is a distinct split in perceptions: 86.0% of the women see this

### Table 6. Challenges preventing economic empowerment of women in Kuwait.

| Statement                                                                 | Variable | Men (N = 146) | Women (N = 154) | Total (N = 300) | $n$ | %  | $n$ | %  | $x^2$ | Sig (p) | Cramer’s $V$ |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----|----|-----|----|-------|---------|--------------|
| Weak interest of civil society in issues related to the economic empowerment of women | Yes      | 125           | 85.6            |                 | 145 | 94.2| 270 | 90.9| 6.07  | .014    | .14          |
|                                                                           | No       | 21            | 14.4            |                 | 9   | 5.8 | 30  | 10  |       |         |              |
| Weak role of women in trade unions and professional organizations         | Yes      | 123           | 84.2            |                 | 132 | 85.7| 255 | 85.0| 0.13  | .722    | .02          |
|                                                                           | No       | 23            | 15.8            |                 | 22  | 14.3| 45  | 15  |       |         |              |
| Discrimination against women in leadership positions                      | Yes      | 103           | 70.5            |                 | 131 | 85.1| 234 | 78.0| 9.20  | .002    | .16          |
|                                                                           | No       | 43            | 29.5            |                 | 23  | 14.9| 66  | 22  |       |         |              |
| Scarcity of benefits available to women working in the private sector     | Yes      | 105           | 71.9            |                 | 113 | 73.4| 218 | 72.7| 0.08  | .777    | .02          |
|                                                                           | No       | 41            | 28.1            |                 | 41  | 26.6| 82  | 27.3|       |         |              |
| Shortage of customized training programs to support the role of women in business | Yes   | 80            | 54.8            |                 | 98  | 63.6| 178 | 59.3| 2.43  | .119    | .09          |
|                                                                           | No       | 66            | 45.2            |                 | 56  | 36.4| 122 | 40.7|       |         |              |
| The need to develop some of the articles of the Civil Service Law         | Yes      | 25            | 35.6            |                 | 70  | 45.5| 122 | 40.7| 3.00  | .083    | .10          |
|                                                                           | No       | 94            | 64.4            |                 | 84  | 54.5| 178 | 59.3|       |         |              |

Note. Sig = significance.
as a deterrent compared to 74.7% of the men. The difference between genders was statistically significant, $x^2 (1, N = 300) = 30.4, p = .001$, with a strong association between opinion and gender on this cause (Cramer’s $V = .32$). This indicates the seriousness of the effect that customs and traditions have on hindering the participation of Kuwaiti women in civil society activities. Men, however, seem to deemphasize the role of traditions. Severe elitism in women’s volunteer work came in third place as a barrier between Kuwaiti women and civil/volunteer activities with the support of 71.7% of respondents. Men and women agreed on the degree of severity of this problem.

The weak role and impact of women’s civil society organizations was fourth in terms of importance (62.0%). Here, too, no significant disagreement distinguished the perception of men (62.3%) from that of women (61.7%). Finally, 51.30% of respondents ranked insufficient attention on the part of civil society organizations about women’s issues.

Kuwaiti women face multifaceted challenges that affect their active participation in the development process. The next question sought respondent’s views on the optimal mechanisms to empower and strengthen the role of women in their society. Table 8 presents the data. Here, men and women agreed on a set of optimal mechanisms to empower and strengthen women, elevate the situation and status of women, and increase women’s roles in the development process of the Kuwaiti society.

As shown in Table 8, 90.0% of respondents attribute prime importance to supporting and activating political education for women. They believe political orientation sessions will contribute significantly to raising political and cultural awareness among women. This will help women to understand their rights and responsibilities and thereby enable them to participate positively in the overall development process. Further observation reveals the existence of differences of opinion between the genders on the

### Table 7. Challenges faced by women in contributing to civil and volunteer work.

| Statement                                                                 | Variable                          | Men ($N = 146$) | Women ($N = 154$) | Total ($N = 300$) | $X^2$ | Sig ($p$) | Cramer’s $V$ |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| Weak culture of community volunteerism in general                          | Yes                               | 135 92.5        | 149 96.8          | 284 94.7          | 2.73  | .099      | .10          |
|                                                                         | No                                | 11 7.5          | 5 3.2             | 16 5.3            |       |           |              |
| Customs, traditions, and societal constraints limit the                    | Yes                               | 109 74.7        | 149 96.8          | 258 86.0          | 30.4  | .001      | .32          |
| participation of women in civil work in general                           | No                                | 37 25.3         | 5 3.2             | 42 14.0           |       |           |              |
| Severe elitism in women’s volunteer work                                  | Yes                               | 103 70.5        | 112 72.7          | 215 71.7          | 0.18  | .675      | .02          |
|                                                                         | No                                | 43 29.5         | 42 27.3           | 85 28.3           |       |           |              |
| Weak role and effect of women’s civil society organizations               | Yes                               | 91 62.3         | 95 61.7           | 186 62.0          | 0.01  | .909      | .01          |
|                                                                         | No                                | 55 37.7         | 59 38.3           | 114 38.0          |       |           |              |
| Insufficient attention on the part of civil society organizations         | Yes                               | 74 50.7         | 80 51.9           | 154 51.3          | 0.05  | .827      | .01          |
| about women’s issues                                                      | No                                | 72 49.3         | 74 48.1           | 146 48.7          |       |           |              |

Note. Sig = significance.

### Table 8. Optimal mechanisms for empowering and strengthening the role of women in Kuwait society.

| Statement                                                                 | Variable                          | Men ($N = 146$) | Women ($N = 154$) | Total ($N = 300$) | $X^2$ | Sig ($p$) | Cramer’s $V$ |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| Sponsor and conduct political orientation sessions for women              | Yes                               | 122 83.6        | 148 96.1          | 270 90.0          | 13.1  | .001      | .21          |
|                                                                         | No                                | 24 16.4         | 6 3.9             | 30 10.0           |       |           |              |
| Involve women’s leaders and groups in discussing issues and               | Yes                               | 108 74.0        | 111 72.1          | 219 73.0          | 0.14  | .712      | .02          |
| strategic decisions                                                       | No                                | 38 26.0         | 43 27.9           | 81 27.0           |       |           |              |
| Support and encourage women’s civil society organizations                 | Yes                               | 101 69.2        | 115 74.7          | 216 72.0          | 1.12  | .289      | .06          |
|                                                                         | No                                | 45 30.8         | 39 25.3           | 84 28.0           |       |           |              |
| Use a quota system to stipulate compulsory number of women in             | Yes                               | 75 51.4         | 95 61.7           | 170 56.7          | 3.25  | .071      | .10          |
| the National Assembly                                                     | No                                | 71 48.6         | 59 38.3           | 130 43.3          |       |           |              |
| Set up a special committee for women and children in the National         | Yes                               | 57 39.0         | 82 53.2           | 139 46.3          | 6.08  | .014      | .14          |
| Assembly                                                                  | No                                | 89 61.0         | 72 46.8           | 161 53.7          |       |           |              |
| Review all national legislation and laws to eliminate forms of            | Yes                               | 43 29.5         | 69 44.8           | 112 37.3          | 7.55  | .006      | .16          |
| discrimination against women                                              | No                                | 103 70.5        | 85 55.2           | 188 62.7          |       |           |              |
| Increase the number of women ministers                                    | Yes                               | 21 14.4         | 72 76.8           | 93 31.0           | 36.7  | .001      | .35          |
|                                                                         | No                                | 125 85.6        | 82 23.2           | 207 69.0          |       |           |              |

Note. Sig = significance.
importance and vitality of this mechanism (96.1% of women, and 83.6% of men). This difference was statistically significant, \( x^2 (1, N = 300) = 13.1, p = .001 \), with moderate association between genders and opinion on this cause (Cramer’s \( V = .21 \)).

The study sample identified the second important optimal mechanism (73.0%) as involving women leaders and groups in discussing issues and strategic decisions. No clear difference emerged between men and women with regard to the relevance of this mechanism. The third-most favored mechanism, supporting women with regard to the importance of this mechanism, received attention from 72.0% of the sample. The results did not disclose much difference of opinion between men and women on this mechanism.

A small majority of participants (56.7%) feel using a quota system to allocate a mandatory number of women in the National Assembly might support women in partaking in the development of the country. A higher percentage of women (61.7%) than men (51.4%) perceived the allocation of a compulsory quota as important. This difference was not statistically significant.

For the remaining mechanism, data revealed a sharp difference between men and women. The fifth mechanism was supported by 46.3% of the sample, which suggests setting up a special committee for women and children in the National Assembly. More women (53.2%) than men (39.0%) supported this. The difference between genders was statistically significant, \( x^2 (1, N = 300) = 6.08, p = .014 \), with a weak association between gender and opinion on this item (Cramer’s \( V = .14 \)). Women felt this committee should be responsible for addressing women’s issues and problems as well as issues related to children.

A small portion of the respondents (37.3%) felt that “reviewing all national legislations and laws to eliminate forms of discrimination against women” would bring about change. Results show differences of opinion between men (29.5%) and women (44.8%) about the possible efficacy of this mechanism, indicating that women respondents are more aware and believe that discriminatory laws against women exist and need to be eradicated. The difference between men and women was statistically significant, \( x^2 (1, N = 300) = 7.55, p = .006 \), with a relatively weak association between gender and opinion on this item (Cramer’s \( V = .16 \)).

The mechanism that was considered to have the least effect was increasing the number of women ministers. The low ranking of this statement, 31.0%, can be attributed to male respondents; only 14.4% of men viewed this as a necessary change compared to 76.8% of women. The difference again was statistically significant, \( x^2 (1, N = 300) = 36.7, p = .001 \), with a very strong association between genders and opinion on this statement (Cramer’s \( V = .35 \)). This clear split indicates that women are convinced that they are underrepresented in the Council of Ministers and that there is a call for action to increase the opportunities for women to enter this realm. They believe that appointing women in such key official positions will enhance their image as positive role models in a male-dominated society like Kuwait. Overall, the data reflect women’s self-confidence and indicate their willingness to accept these top positions in the governance of the country. Apparently, the implementation of these proposed mechanisms will contribute in empowering and strengthening the role of women in society.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This study explored the challenges faced by Kuwaiti women in attaining profuse participation in the sociopolitic development of Kuwait. The findings were based on research conducted in Kuwait on a sample of 300 Kuwaiti citizens of both genders selected from different social and professional backgrounds. Findings of the current study complement previous research (Al-zuabi, 2006; Metle, 2002; Shvedova, 2005) and argue that Kuwaiti women, like other Arab women, face challenges in social, cultural, and political arenas. This argument is based on the data collected from the sample. Despite the growing achievements of Kuwaiti women, many barriers still remain. These barriers prevent their empowerment and effective participation in national development. Despite the existence of various challenges toward women’s empowerment, the majority of respondents of both genders identified the importance of the role of women in the sociopolitical development of Kuwait. Only a small percentage rejected this notion.

Past studies (Al-Ghanim, 1999; Al-Ayyar, 1995; Atal & Portes, 2012; Khader, 2011) emphasized the growing level of awareness among Kuwaiti women because of their increased level of education and their
engagement in the labor force in the past few decades. At the same time, the current study identified society’s lack of awareness about the role of women as the major reason for the inadequate participation of women in the development process. In contrast to the view of men (39.7%), women (65.6%) attributed the weak role of women in community organizations as a possible cause of their inadequate participation in the process of development. This leads to the need to raise awareness among women to come forward and become a part of the nation’s development process.

Perhaps the most significant obstacle revealed in this study is the increasing rate of divorce and the emergence of domestic and family violence and its consequences in youth. The official data show an increase of divorce rate in recent years where the number of divorce cases has jumped from 3,737 in 2008 to 4,535 in 2011 (Central Statistical Bureau, 2011). The absence of strong family relationships may lead to the spread of delinquency and domestic violence and thereby disrupt socialization. The analysis of field data as well as the Marriage and Divorce Statistics by the Central Statistical Office support the argument that the increasing divorce rate is the most challenging constraint that limits the enhancement of women. Marrying non-Kuwaitis is also a relevant issue limiting women’s empowerment at the political level. Most of the women surveyed viewed this as very important while it was hardly relevant to men.

The participants identified a shortage in the number of gender-sensitive institutions that help women to use their leisure time and utilize the social security-net system. Respondents felt that coordination among government agencies, civil society, and the private sector is lacking. They also brought other important and critical challenges to light, such as paucity of financial allocations to support some groups of women and the near absence of small projects dedicated to assist women in generating sustainable income. Economic empowerment of women is essential to raise the status of women in Kuwait. According to the sample, civil society is not taking enough interest in issues related to economic empowerment of women. Hence, their role in trade unions and professional organizations is also weak. Social studies (Al-Awadi, 2006; Lindley et al., 2006) have highlighted the negative effect of societal discrimination on the role of women. The findings of this study also proved that Kuwaiti women were more cognizant of this matter and 78% of the sample believed that there exists discrimination against women in leadership positions. More women than men identified this discrimination.

The study identified a weak culture of community volunteerism, customs, traditions, and societal constraints as major reasons for limiting women’s participation in civil activities and volunteer work, which in turn weakens women’s civil society organizations. These challenges hinder women from fully participating in the process of nation building. Most respondents considered these challenges as structurally and culturally oriented. However, data revealed that women significantly differ from men and feel that customs, traditions, and societal constraints limit their participation in civil work. This indicates the need to change traditional views of the society toward women and their reputation, role, and participation in the development process in general.

The respondents suggested several ways to help empower and strengthen the role of women in Kuwaiti society. Respondents favored conducting political orientation sessions for women, involving women leaders in discussions of issues and strategic decisions, supporting and encouraging women’s civil society organizations, and setting up a special committee for women and children in the National Assembly. This will be a step forward, and these mechanisms would help to build self-confidence and energize women to contribute in the development process. Past research and international reports also support this view (Al-zuabi, 2007; Economic & Social Commission for Western Asia, 2004; Goetz, 1998; The World Bank Policy Research Report, 2001).

The current study identifies many of the structural-cultural constraints on the social participation of Kuwaiti women in the development process. However, rapid changes have taken place in Kuwaiti society during recent years with one of the most prominent changes in Kuwait being the growing cultural and social awareness related to the importance of involvement of women. Contributions of women are vital in supporting the progress of the society and in achieving national goals.

The social participation of women in the national development process has different interrelated and interactive social, economic, cultural, and political aspects. The lack of economic empowerment of women emerged as a serious challenge for women in
contributing to the development process of Kuwait. Political empowerment or raising women to leadership levels will not be possible until women are empowered economically. The lack of coordination among government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector exacerbates this. Scarcity of specialized institutions that help women invest their leisure time and the weak role of women in trade and professional unions also discourage the economic advancement of women. Prevailing community customs and traditions also hinder Kuwaiti women from assuming their role in development. The economic empowerment of women is all the more important because once women have a solid economic base, their social status will be improved and political status and acceptance will follow automatically. Field data also support the fact that economic empowerment has an important role in women’s empowerment.

The obstacles and challenges faced by Kuwaiti women in the social, economic, and political domains need to be alleviated to make the concept of women’s empowerment a reality. This requires a serious commitment to set various effective plans, programs, and policies in place. It is vital to note that these policies and plans should aim at bringing significant changes in the status of women and solving current and potential challenges as identified in the study. This will ensure active participation of women in various realms of the development process. It should also be noted that these plans and policies must be balanced and must consider social disparities among women to ensure that they are not biased in favor of any particular segment of women. The existing situation requires a determined and unified effort from government and nongovernmental organizations.

Recommendations for the Future

An analysis of the data of the current study leads to the following recommendations to raise the status of women in Kuwait and thereby enhance their role in the sociopolitical development of Kuwait.

Enhance Kuwaiti Women’s Participation in Development Planning

- Establish a supreme entity for women in the State of Kuwait to safeguard their interests and enable their active participation in development planning.
- Establish a special unit for planning and development concerning issues of women’s empowerment. This unit should explore the global advancement of women in order to apply relevant findings for the betterment of Kuwaiti women.
- Involve active practitioners in drafting development plans and government action
- Develop programs helping women contribute to development and enriching the experience of women.
- Link women and gender issues to population policies adopted by the Development and Planning Ministry in order to ensure that social, economic, and knowledge-based development policies address the needs of women.
- Strengthen the role of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development in the State of Kuwait in adopting issues related to women and family issues to develop a strategic perspective in cooperation with relevant ministries and government entities.
- Maintain decision support systems for women and gender issues to support planners and decision makers while dealing with women’s issues in Kuwait.

Support Social Empowerment of Kuwaiti Women

- Adopt a new comprehensive community vision to deal with the problem of divorce. This should focus on two domains: prevention and treatment. Preventive measures should attempt to eliminate the causes leading to divorce and educate couples on the devastating effects of divorce on their children. Treatment measures should develop programs to care for the children of divorced couples and to support income-generating projects for these women.
- Support the National Center at the office of Social Development, which deals with violence in order to monitor the causes of domestic violence and develop plans and policies to deal with such issues.
- Expedite the legislative measures currently under review to improve children’s access to a healthy environment and improve the care and rehabilitation of juveniles into society, especially female juvenile delinquents.
- Adopt important proposals for the social empowerment of women in Kuwait as raised by
the candidates during the election campaign of the National Assembly, such as establishing a housing fund for divorced women, widows, and unmarried women and reducing the interest rates on their consumer and housing loans.

- Modify the Social Status Law No. (51) of 1984, which includes some aspects concerning discrimination against women. Other aspects of the law on the civil rights and social advancement of women in Kuwait, as approved by the Legislative Committee of the National Assembly in 2006, also require modification.

- Strengthen the coordination and integration among government agencies, civil societies, and the private sector in order to provide social welfare services to women and their participation in social development.

**Support Economic Empowerment of Kuwaiti Women**

- Assign a greater role for Kuwaiti NGOs that are directly involved in various aspects of the adoption of the Manpower and Government Restructuring Program in favor of the economic issues of women.

- Promote values of employment among Kuwaiti women through the primary educational system, higher education institutions, or trade unions in cooperation with the Women’s Development Fund.

- Introduce laws and economic legislation that enable women to start investment projects by facilitating investment loans. These goals require technical and administrative assistance in training and marketing.

- Endeavor to abolish all restrictions and obstacles that prevent women from holding leadership positions on an equal footing with men.

**Support Political Empowerment of Kuwaiti Women**

- Initiate and support sustainable efforts to educate Kuwaiti women politically in cooperation with local and specialized Arab NGOs and other relevant international and regional organizations.

- Involve women leaders and organizations in discussing women’s issues and contributing to strategic decision making.

- Reenvision the role of the Union of Kuwaiti Women’s Associations to serve as civic entities that promote social network among Kuwaiti women. The new role should encompass the efforts of all women’s civic organizations, non-profit organizations, and trade unions that enhance and strengthen women’s political awareness and participation.

- Create a closer cooperation between the women’s NGOs and the Committee on Women’s Affairs in the Kuwait National Assembly in order to determine an agenda for addressing women’s issues and to ensure the Legislative Council recognizes these priorities and makes effective decisions.

- Support Kuwaiti women in the various institutions and organizations of civil society to discover and encourage talented and creative women in all areas, whether literary, artistic, scientific, cultural, political, or recreational, in collaboration with the Ministries of Social Affairs and Labor, Trade, and Development.

Implementation of the preceding recommendations will contribute to enhancing the empowerment of women in Kuwait. Strengths of the current study are that it helps to identify the challenges faced by women and gives a broad perspective for applying the findings. This study provides a baseline analysis of the current state and provides recommendations for improvement. Future research needs to explain how to implement and politically test these recommendations. Future studies can assist in how to best develop and implement policies at a legislative level, which will make women’s empowerment and politically active women a reality in Kuwait.

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