

## **Afro-Arab cooperation on the enhancement of women empowerment**

### **Introduction**

Like women worldwide, Arab and African women are encountering several challenges, including exclusion from decision-making and effective participation in political life, and deprivation of adequate support in terms of providing educational, cultural and material instruments, and tight control over the resources that help them carry out their development activities that focus on the mobilization of available manpower in society.

Undoubtedly, qualified, well-trained and efficient manpower, which is capable of adapting to everything new, constitutes the veritable wealth of any country.

The term “empowerment of women” gained prominence during the Beijing conference of 1995, as it constituted a vital part in the millennium development goals as well as those of the new partnership of African Development (NEPAD), which were indicative of the fact that there is conclusive evidence that the empowerment of women is a key factor in fighting corruption, disease, epidemics, infant and maternal mortality, provision of equal opportunity, and representation of women.

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It has become oblivious that the achievement of the millennium second development goal would heavily rely on the attainment

of the first and third objectives of eliminating poverty and ensuring gender equality respectively, especially as gender quality and economic development are inextricably related.

### **Referential background-legal basis**

At the international level, the empowerment of women and enhancement of their role in all aspects of life were based on the following:

- The UN Charter of 1945 that provided for equality between men and women.
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 that affirmed the same principle.
- The establishment of the United Nations Female fund in 1976, and the conferences of 1975,1985 and 1995 and the launch of international women's contract.

**-At the Afro-Arab level, the Afro-Arab summit focused on the following:**

**First: the first Afro-Arab summit in Cairo, Egypt, 1977, confirmed the UN's, principles as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The summit's documents provided for socio-economic and cultural cooperation, as well as the enhancement of the role of women in all aspects of life.**

**Second: the second Afro-Arab summit, Serte, Libya, October 2010:**

The summit documents provided for the significance of coordination and cooperation on the empowerment of women, including by uplifting their socio-economic and legal status, providing them with job opportunities , and enabling them to get involved in the political, economic and social aspects of life. It also provided that efforts should be pursued to eliminate discrimination against women, launching initiatives guaranteeing their rights, and enacting the legislation necessary for safeguarding their status in society.

**Third-Afro-Arab summit, Kuwait, November, 2013:**

The third Afro-Arab summit didn't ignore the importance of women's role. The 2011-2016 partnership action plan provided for the empowerment of women in the fields of education, employment, socio-economic and political involvement and full integration into sustainable development.

Item 24 of Kuwait declaration stipulated that strategies and initiatives meant to eliminate discrimination against women should be supported in order to achieve equality and equity, and raise public awareness of humanitarian principles and values ensuring women's rights and their role in society.

Item 25 of the same declaration stated that the summit called upon all governments to enact the necessary laws for protecting women and youth , enhancing their economic

empowerment, and ensuring their participation in decision-making on equal footing with men, as well as their involvement in all political, economic and social aspects of life.

**Obstacles to women empowerment in the two regions:**

1-Right to education: illiteracy remains the key obstacle to the empowerment of women.

2-Right to health: the spread of disease, increasing rates of maternal mortality, and lack of access to convenient healthcare.

**3-Culture of Social exclusion:**

There spread in Afro-Arab society the culture of early marriage and olden days habits, such as female circumcision, and the fact that women are the vulnerable partner who should shoulder the responsibility of improving household living conditions.

**4-Political Marginalization**

Male-dominated structures are boosted, while women are marginalized from political participation through maintaining the rate of their involvement in leadership positions in parliamentary and legislative chambers.

**5-Economic Marginalization**

Though women are regarded as the backbone of unorganized economic, particularly the agricultural sector, they are unable to access production resources, including

loans, lands, technical support, and support services, in addition to the spread of famine, poverty, deprivation, and violence in war zones.

### **The Way Forward:**

**1-Setting up an Afro-Arab mechanism for discussing the status of women and coordination of Afro-Arab efforts for the purpose of empowering women through the following:**

1-Adherence to the principle of gender equality in rights and duties and evaluation of countries' abidance by regional and international conventions on gender equality and women's empowerment.

B-Commitment to ensuring the efforts at the expansion of women's participation and empowerment in all fields.

C- Elimination of key challenges to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment.

d-Speeding up the legal, social and economic measures ensuring equality and women's empowerment.

E-Initiation of launching sustained local, regional and international campaigns on women's empowerment in all aspects of life, while sticking to the ratification of all conventions and protocols on gender equality and women's empowerment.