

MEDNET 2 – Innovation, exchange, networking for a new
leading class in the Mediterranean

Second COUNTRY REPORT: Lebanon

Update Thematic Dossier #2:

Youth Participation in Politics

Topic to be explored:

Youth participation in the Elections

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**“Youth should be given a chance to take an active part in the
decision-making at local, national and global levels.”**

— Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General

INTRODUCTION

Lebanon is considered a demographically young country having 17.3% of its population being youth (according to undp nhdr report). Youth in Lebanon have been involved in civic and political life even prior to the independence in 1943. Youth were the main drivers in the popular upheaval opposing the French. They participated actively using demonstrations and other means when the Lebanese University was created. They were responding for all calls for upheaval. Youth are an essential part of NGOs working in humanitarian assistance and psychosocial support as well as various fields of human development.

Youth have had their roles throughout the years whether it was as fighters or healers. They have been the main beneficiaries of developmental activities, they have been building their capacities and seeking to contribute to the benefit of themselves and the country as a whole.

After the civil war, a temporary setback has occurred but it didn't dampen the enthusiasm, initiative and resourcefulness of the young people of Lebanon. Lebanese youth are indeed powerful agents of change and truly hold the future.

The declaration on youth policies and programs states: Encourage youth and ensuring the effective participation of youth in all societies' domains and the decision making process on all levels: locally, regionally and internationally and ensure the implementation of the necessary gender-sensitive measures in order to achieve equal access of young women and men by paving their way to deliver their civic duties.

Part IV of Sector V in a document of youth policy in Lebanon (2012) deals with social integration and political participation. It states that: Activating the role of youth in public life is essential and crucial to design a successful youth policy. Particularly with regards to promoting social integration. Thus, it is necessary to ensure the rights of youth to participate in forms of civic action and all aspects of political activism.

Although the parliamentary democratic republic of Lebanon is based on respect of public freedoms, especially the freedom of opinion and belief, social justice and equality in rights and duties among all citizens without discrimination, although 17.3% of Lebanese population are youth but the percentage of youth participation in politics is considered rare due to the political and social situation in the country as well as the pre-existence of sectarian political parties.

REALITY OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS AND ELECTIONS

Youth, throughout history has had a high degree of participation in politics and social life. Even after the war, they have been involved with several organizations in the civil society, youth organizations that aim to promote different values of human development-environment, human rights, return of

the displaced and conflict resolution. Youth should be encouraged to fully participate in the political and social life in Lebanon. They constitute a priority to government and civil society and are considered as main drivers and actors of change particularly in view of the positive attitude prevailing among youth for such participation.

Youth have a disadvantage concerning elections and participation in elections and politics. The voting age in the country is 21 years and a citizen must be at least 25 years old running for any politics related governmental position. This eliminated the majority of youth age from voting leading to exclude them from the decision making process.

The electoral laws that Lebanon has been following after Al Ta'ef convention has limited from youth's freedom to participate in the political life:

- 1- Voting age remains 21 and running age is 25
- 2- Running fee is 8,000,000 L.L. which limits youth capacity to run for elections not mentioning the high ceiling of electoral campaigns spending not leaving room for youth to participate
- 3- Seats are divided according to sectarian levels which makes youth follow a certain sect or party in order for them to be able to participate in the political life.

3% of current parliament members are youth and they all descend from political families. Mid age of parliament members is 50 year and these numbers has not changed since the elections in 1992 (according to UNDP Role of Parliament in Promoting Youth Participation in Elections and Political Parties in Lebanon report).

Most political parties in Lebanon don't rely on capacity building tools that would encourage active challenging political life participation and does not include youth in discussions on setting priorities which marginalize them.

Lebanon does not abide by the law that is used by 93 country and keeps all committees meetings secret as well as ballot secretly which is not open for youth and limit their participation.

It is easier for youth to meet ministers and parliamentary members by volunteering and working in the civil society than being in a political party. Adding to that youth lack training from parliament members and they are not introduced to the nature of political work and involvement.

EFFECTS OF DIFFERENCES IN BETWEEN TOUTH ON THEIR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Youth in Lebanon are considered vulnerable in general since they usually have no power and get affected by the others.

Normally throughout high school and university years youth should be prepared to participate in the political and social life. Unfortunately the case is different in Lebanon. In some universities student elections are prohibited in order to prevent violent conflicts in between the student body which results with gaps on the civic engagement level.

Adding to that, youth in Lebanon are put under pressure from several factors whether it was sectarianism, economic or peer pressure. Especially after the civil war, elections became more sect oriented in order to ensure the sustainability of ones “sect power” and youth were the main targets of those political parties since they can manipulated more easily. Youth are voting according to sects partitions disregarding the actual plan of candidates which also results with the un-transparency of elections.

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF YOUTH BEST FRIENDS

Sect or Religion	Same sect or religion	Other sect or religion	Total
Sunni	93.7	63	100
Shi'a	93.9	61	100
Druze	97.2	2.8	100
Maronite	96.5	3.5	100
Orthodox	65.7	34.3	100
Catholic	91.6	8.4	100
Protestant	60.0	40.0	100
Armenian	81.7	18.3	100

Source: Khashan (1992)

Moreover the economic and social situation in Lebanon especially amongst youth triggers them to seek money in all possible ways. Here comes the role of political parties in controlling the major part of youth leaders into voting for them which lies down under Clintelism. Youth coming from vulnerable communities whether: poor, politicized regions... cannot be considered as independent voices reflecting the true needs and voices of youth. Therefore the socio-economic and sect situation with youth affect the transparency and authenticity of elections and political life in Lebanon in general. Despite high levels of education and participation in many aspects of public life, Lebanese women remain dramatically underrepresented politics, with access to power largely limited to women from the country's political families. More than half of all Lebanese are women, and women in Lebanon play key roles in the business, media, artistic and academic life of the country. However, Lebanese women have been largely excluded from active participation in the country's political life. Lebanon will not be fully a democracy until all of its citizens are able to

participate whether as elected officials, candidates, government leaders, election workers, or voters.

The proportion of women that held seats in the Lebanese parliament: 2.3% (1995-1999/2000) 2.3% 3.9% (2005). Two of them are Nayla Tueini (grandfather engaged in politics, Strida Geagea wife of President of the Lebanese Forces).

Access of Lebanese women to national decision-making and their participation in political life remains weak and has not witnessed any improvements since the last Lebanon MDGR. Parliamentary seats held by women did not exceed 3 out of 128 (1995/2004), i.e. 2.3 percent of total seats. In 2005, 6 women were elected to the parliament, i.e. 3.9 %, in the same year, two women held, for the first time, ministerial posts. Female participation in local political representation is also weak: out of the 18,606 number of candidates in the 2004 elections, only 552 (i.e 3%) were women. Eventually, women won 215 (or 2.4%) of the 9,032 seats. This means that 38.9% of women who stood for Municipal elections were elected (compared to 48.8% of men). At least one woman was elected in every Mohafaza and every Caza in 2004.

HOW TO MOTIVATE YOUTH TO PARTICIPATE IN POLITICS?

Several actions and measure need to be taken in order to motivate youth and ensure their re-engagement in the political life in Lebanon. This whole process can start by amending the electoral law in Lebanon and to set the voting age at 18 instead of 21. Leading automatically to include a larger number of youth in politics. Adding to that, one of the main reasons that youth has not been part of the political life in Lebanon is that they have not been able to trust political leaders due to their un-transparency, lack of integrity and reputation. In response to this, youth need to gain trust in their political leaders whether it was by amending structures of political parties in order to ensure transparency or by implementing initiatives that promote good political practices.

On the other hand, most youth are not familiar with the concept of participation in the political life. Therefore and in order to encourage those youth to take part of the decision making process, youth should be introduced to the political life and guided into knowing how to be part of the decision making as well as ensuring that their voices are being heard and they will be able to make a difference and have an impact in their society.

GOOD PRACTICES ON INVOLVING YOUTH ELECTIONS

The absence of the Lebanese government has placed the burden on the Lebanese Civil Society to work and tackle the involvement of youth in elections and political life.

Several CSOs have implemented projects and programs related to this domain such as Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) and Development for People and Nature Association (DPNA).

DPNA has developed and published three guides on:

- Guide for youth to participate in politics:
- Youth and Municipalities:
- Guide for Youth to Citizenship

Playing the role of informative guides in order to introduce youth those three concept as well as to build their capacities and reinforce their backgrounds on each domain knowing that the three are interrelated.

DPNA is certified trainer from the British Council on Active Citizens Program that has been implemented around Lebanon. The Active Citizenship Training is a 5 days interactive social leadership training program that promotes intercultural dialogue and community-led social development. Empowering participants with skills allowing them to act as leaders and change makers in their society.

DPNA has also implemented the project “Building the Capacities of New Municipal Members” during which 20 local leaders were trained and empowered with specific skills in order to ensure the active participation of community members in the municipal work with equal opportunities . As well as Youth and Municipality which prepared youth to go in the process of Municipal Elections and empowered them with skills allowing them to run for elections and win a couple of them.

FUTURE STEPS

In conclusion, youth in Lebanon have been engaged in elections and political life, leading to the country being driven by older, corrupted leaders and leading to members of political parties inheriting those political positions. Which results with a negative impact on the Lebanese society in general.

In order to encourage youth participation in the political life and elections several measures have to be taken:

- Youth interested in different fields of politics must be given opportunities to reach their objectives.
- Change the voting age from the 21 years to 18 years is required in order to widen the target of youth.
- Implement projects and program to prepare youth for political and social participation whether it was by internships in Ministries, Municipalities or NGOs or by other interactive participation methods.
- Ensure democratic elections and representation in Universities

- Develop a well-planned curriculum on participation in politics and the public concern so youth and citizens would understand their rights, freedoms and duties.
- Organization of different awareness campaigns and seminars concerning political engagement.
- Reshape the elections mechanism in a way that ensure the involvement of youth and women equally compared to men.
- Provide skills training and workshops for citizens interested in the participation in political life.