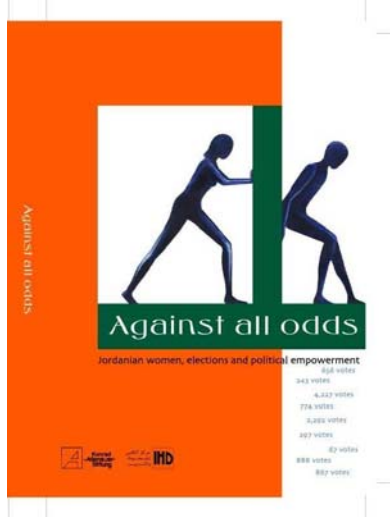


PREFACE

“Against all odds – Jordanian women, elections and political empowerment”



Working “against all odds” is a feature that has accompanied the production of this book in hand, from the conception of its basic idea in 1997 to its final publication in 2001. Inspired by the impetus of the 17 women candidates for the Parliamentary elections in 1997 to establish a firm ground for women in the male – governed highest circles of legislative power in Jordan, and equally affected by the failure of all to reach this goal, the Al Kutba Institute for Human Development proposed to conduct a careful analysis of the election experience together with the women candidates. The aim of this undertaking was to document the elections carefully, analyze the influences that determined the course of its events in general and women’s achievements in particular, and draw conclusions for women’s future endeavors to conquer positions of political representation.

The idea was also to inform the general public about the diverse backgrounds, personalities, aspirations and actions of the 17 women candidates, and to identify the momentum that made all of them decide to take on the challenge of stepping into political competition against a nearly overwhelming male dominance - in spite of the fact that many of the women faced only limited chances for success from the very beginning.

Based on several years of successful cooperation in the field of women’s political education, Konrad Adenauer Foundation agreed to cooperate in this project and secured the necessary material support

for it. The majority of the women candidates supported the idea of gathering for three evaluation workshops, the format of which was decided upon in a preparatory meeting with all candidates in February 1998.

The workshops took place as two-day retreats between March and June 1998, during which the women candidates reconstructed and discussed systematically all aspects of their election experience. The first workshop dealt with the political and legal situation at the time of the elections, the features of the various constituencies in which the women ran, the women's personal background and motivation to run for Parliament, as well as their election platforms and programs. The second workshop focused on the candidates' election campaigns and a critical evaluation of their campaigning strategies in the light of the given character of their constituencies and the general political and economic determinants of the situation at the time of the elections. The third workshop served as thorough analysis of the election results and a comprehensive evaluation of the whole experience of the Parliamentary elections. It was concluded with a debate about future chances for women in politics in Jordan.

The process of all workshops was facilitated by occasional expert input and an in-depth documentation of each individual woman's experience through questionnaires and other written evaluations. The discussions were characterized by rather diverse perceptions and analytical approaches, yet conducted in a spirit of mutual respect.

Documenting the women candidates' election experience in a balanced way that would be approved by all of them, in combination with a scientific analysis of the background factors that led to their failure, and to shape all of this into a handy and easily legible book proved, however, to be a near-to-impossible project. The process of creating this book in its final form has taken three years. Dr. Abla Amawi was finally the one whose personal enthusiasm for the subject and professional background as a political economist and an experienced writer qualified her to head this courageous enterprise. She has worked patiently in close cooperation with the editors and publishers on various versions of the original book idea. The idea of documenting the proceedings of the evaluation workshops with the women candidates had to be finally abandoned, after it became obvious in the end of 2000 that it was impossible to present their personal experience through the book in a way that would have been approved by all of them. The book was consequently completely re-conceptualized. It is now exclusively based on the author's own research of primary and secondary public documents and does no longer, as initially planned,

include the candidates' personal accounts.

We as publishers believe nevertheless that the book is a valuable source of information and analysis about Jordanian women's experiences in elections and the determinants of their present status in the field of politics. It also provides proposals for future strategies to promote and consolidate women's role and influence in public and political life. We hope that the latter will be tested in practice by all those women who are ready, through their individual or collective actions, to claim their right to equality and equal participation in all areas of life, including the highest echelons of political power. The women candidates in the previous Parliamentary elections were among the most prominent pioneers in this endeavor. We dedicate this book to them and all those who will follow.

Amman, September 2001