	Subject : Women and decision-making Transformative leadership			**N°**
Source : Carnegie ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE	**Web Site :** http://carnegieendowment.org/2009/10/06/legislated-victory-for-moroccan-women/fbjy		**Country : Morocco**	
	Date :2009-10-06		**N° & [P] :** NEW 24	

A Legislated Victory for Moroccan Women

In the June 2009 local elections, women entered the municipal councils in force for the first time in Moroccan history. Some 3,406 women were elected, making up over 12 percent of the total winning candidates, compared to less than 1 percent in 2003. Women made up 16 percent of the overall candidates, compared to less than 5 percent in the last elections in 2003.

These results reflect a strong desire on the part of the political elite to correct the huge gender imbalance within elected institutions more than a social and cultural development in Moroccan society at large. Nearly all (98 percent) of the women elected won within the districts set aside for women, in accordance with a change in law that took effect in January 2009. The number of women elected in the regular districts was a mere 71, or only 0.3 percent of the total number of winning candidates. Women still occupy a low status in the realm of Moroccan mass politics, as shown by objective measurements by international institutions; the UN Development Program Gender-related Development Index for 2008 placed Morocco in the unenviable position of 146 out of 158 countries.

Does this mean that the government decision to strengthen women's presence in the Council of Deputies in 2002, and in municipal councils in 2009, is insignificant? Certainly not. Women's visible presence in politics may well have a long-term modernizing and democratizing impact, as citizens gradually grow accustomed to seeing women managing public affairs.

Uneven Progress

Moroccans who want to change gender relations are turning to politics partly because other strategies have not worked so far. Despite the prominent role of women in pushing for Moroccan independence, whether in the nationalist movement (such as Malika al-Fassi, who struggled for Moroccan self-rule and signed the independence charter in 1944) or in the ranks of the resistance (such as Fatma al-Sakim, who played a pivotal role in the Moroccan resistance movement after the French colonial power forced Sultan Mohammed V into exile in 1953), women disappeared from political life during the first four decades after independence. Though educational and economic factors also can have a positive effect on women's status, this impact appears to be slow-acting and limited. In any case, Moroccan women's economic independence remains difficult to achieve, with their rate of integration into the labor market remains among the lowest in the world

Morocco has seen gradual improvement in the legal status of women, but that has been inadequate to make a real difference so far. Thus, despite the crucial steps realized on the level of social rights and reforms in recent years--including the reformed Family Law (2003), the granting of citizenship to children of Moroccan mothers and foreign fathers (2005), the appointment of several female ministers in the government or as governors, the launch of a national initiative incorporating the gender issue as part of its strategy (2005), and the lifting of most reservations about the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (2008)--still Morocco falls in the lowest third of countries on the level of human development and gender equality. It is clear that economic, social, and political conditions for women in Morocco are pulling the country towards the bottom of the pile.

The Moroccan elite appear to be wagering now on politics as a means to improve gender relations and equality. The idea is that a systemic approach has a higher likelihood of success, because the various elements governing women's social status (political marginalization, social dependency and submissiveness, economic discrimination, and the symbolic belittling of their value) overlap to form an integral whole. This means that if one of these elements changes noticeably, a crisis will take place within the overall system and it will accommodate and raise women's status. That is the theory, but it is also to be expected that there will be attempts to stifle change and preserve the dominant status quo.