

Unlocking Economic Progress Addressing Women's Neglect in Global Development through Omani Constitutional Reform

Dr. (Ms.) Shivanjali Bhoite¹, Reza Khodabandehlouei²

^{1,2} *Pes Modern Law College Pune*

Abstract—While many nations strive for sustainable economic growth, the systematic neglect of women's role remains a significant barrier to true progress. Recognizing that overlooking women equates to underutilizing half of the human capital crucial for national and global development, this paper examines the Omani constitutional context as both a cause and reflection of this neglect. Despite global advances, research on the impact of constitutional provisions on women's economic inclusion in Oman is limited. The main objective of this study is to analyze how Oman's constitutional laws shape and constrain women's participation in economic development, drawing on a qualitative review of legal texts, policy analyses, and comparative studies. Data were gathered from constitutional articles, legislative records, and expert commentary, then analyzed through the lens of gender equality and economic empowerment frameworks. The analysis reveals persistent legal and cultural barriers that hinder women's education, employment, and leadership, despite recognition of their critical role in development. Findings suggest that meaningful constitutional reform. ensuring rights, removing discrimination, and promoting policy accountability. is essential for unlocking women's economic potential. Policymakers are urged to revise foundational legal principles and cultivate inclusive practices, positioning women not as bystanders but as key contributors to Oman's economic future and the broader global economy

Index Terms—constitutional law, economic development, Oman, woman

I. INTRODUCTION

Overlooking the capabilities and contributions of women poses a serious barrier to economic growth around the world. This issue is especially relevant in countries like Oman, where a closer look can reveal what's holding women back from fully participating in

development. When women are left out of the progress equation, entire societies lose out. not just in fairness, but in real opportunities for prosperity.

Every nation's approach to this challenge is deeply rooted in its fundamental laws, especially its constitution. The way a country's legal framework addresses (or ignores) gender equality rarely goes unnoticed. In fact, when laws fail to support women's involvement, they effectively shut off the enormous potential of half the population.

To remove this barrier, action must go beyond superficial changes. It requires genuine reforms at the constitutional and legal levels, targeting the regulations and attitudes that prevent women from contributing as equals. These changes are not only about justice. they're essential for generating economic growth, tackling poverty, and creating a future where everyone has a chance to thrive.

This article explores why women are so important to economic progress, the ways laws and constitutions shape their opportunities, and the current legal obstacles standing in their way. Drawing on examples from Oman and similar regions, it underscores that this is a global challenge, with even greater urgency in places most in need of development and poverty relief. The way forward is clear: constitutions and basic laws must guarantee human rights for everyone and eliminate discrimination at its root. Societies need to recognize women as vital to their future. not as supporting characters, but as key players with the power to shape economic and human advancement. Valuing and engaging women fully isn't just the right thing to do; it's the smart way to unlock prosperity for all.

1. Women's Empowerment and Its Structural Impact on Economic Systems

Economic development is not just about increasing numbers or growth rates it's a broad, strategic process that transforms societies and sparks progress across every area of life. The first step in this journey often involves reassessing and improving multiple sectors at once.

As Azadi and Gaberi (2016) point out, many developing nations now understand that true national progress starts with expanding education both in quantity and quality. By improving access to learning and skills training, countries can build stronger human capital, which in turn fuels economic growth.

Globalization the growing interconnectedness of nations can be a powerful driver of prosperity. When countries work more closely together and exchange knowledge, goods, and ideas, they often see living standards rise (Brandon, 2012). In this global setting, the combined talent and capability of the world's people form the backbone of economic progress.

Economic growth and human development go hand in hand. Growth is about expanding capacity not just in physical infrastructure, but also in social well-being, knowledge, and creativity without being held back by unnecessary barriers. Human development is a clear measure of a society's advancement, representing the journey toward a fairer, more sustainable, and more fulfilling life for all. Intellectual, material, and cultural progress within a nation all play crucial roles in pushing economic development forward.

In today's interconnected world, harnessing the full potential of human resources is essential for sustainable growth. Yet in many countries, women who make up half the population are still undervalued or excluded from contributing fully. This is more than a social injustice; it is a significant obstacle to global economic progress.

If the economic future is to be bright and inclusive, we must remove the barriers that limit women's participation. A strong, diverse, and fully engaged workforce is not just a goal it is the foundation for speeding up global growth and ensuring prosperity for generations to come.

2. Unlocking The Economic Potential Of Gender Inclusion

The progress of any society depends on the participation of every segment, especially women. As half the world's population and a vital part of its human resources, women play a crucial role. not only

by nurturing future generations but by actively shaping economic and social development. When societies tap into women's potential, we see real strides toward greater prosperity and lower rates of poverty. As countries develop, the gap between men and women narrows. proof that true progress means empowering everyone equally.

If women's needs and abilities aren't prioritized, achieving economic growth becomes much harder. Human talent is the engine of development, and sidelining women means leaving that engine running at half power. Blocking women from participating in social, political, and economic life hurts everyone. Think of a country where half the people do not allow the other half to work. immediately, a shortage of human resources becomes the main obstacle to growth.

Take Afghanistan, for example: according to recent statistics, women make up only 16% of the workforce. This imbalance. Combined with ongoing security challenges and recent political changes. has held back economic growth even further. Beyond the numbers, we know that when women are educated and empowered, they raise generations who are better prepared to build hopeful futures. Their income and advancement in the workforce drive improvements not only within their families but across the entire society. Recognizing and valuing women is one of the strongest indicators of a nation's level of development. Economic and social progress simply can't accelerate without acknowledging women as active, productive forces. Their participation is essential. fundamental to the advancement and wellbeing of any community.

Women connect and interact with all age groups in society. youth, teens, and children. who themselves form a huge and dynamic part of any nation. That's why making women's empowerment a priority is especially vital for developing countries. By revisiting policies and investing in women's opportunities, societies can unlock new paths for growth and imagine a much brighter, more prosperous future for all.

3. Differentiated Legal Systems and Their Influence on Gendered Development Outcomes

The constitution is the cornerstone of every nation's legal system. the "mother law" from which all other laws stem. Over time, these laws evolve in line with a country's beliefs, priorities, and governance structures.

Since human resources are the true foundation of development, especially economic growth, it's vital to recognize that half of these resources are women. Economic development brings production, prosperity, and wealth, and helps societies avoid poverty. But when women's potential is overlooked or undervalued, it becomes a serious obstacle to progress. A country's commitment (or lack of commitment) to women's inclusion is reflected in its constitution, whether directly or indirectly. This founding document not only declares the nation's stance on gender equality but also shapes all other domestic laws.

The family, as the core unit of society, is where future generations are nurtured and developed. Supporting women means strengthening families and, in turn, the entire social fabric. However, in some nations, men and women are still not treated equally in either private or public law. These inequalities at the constitutional or foundational level ripple outward, influencing countless other laws and creating systemic barriers.

Where a constitution reflects a view of women that differs from that in economically advanced societies, this difference permeates the legal system: executive powers enforce it, courts uphold it, and society is shaped by it. These disparities in constitutional perspectives help explain the varying contributions of women to economic life across different countries.

The truth is clear: women are not just participants in economic development; they are essential drivers of it. Any legal framework that fails to recognize this limits a nation's potential for growth and prosperity¹.

Systemic Barriers to participation of women in Economic Development

For generations, women have struggled against barriers to equality in both public and private spheres. Such ongoing disparities, coupled with the neglect of their contributions, have had a clear and negative effect on economic growth. When half the population is held back, economic growth slows, and development suffers.

Today, women across the world still encounter a wide range of challenges.

- Workplace discrimination, including unequal pay, unfair working hours, and harassment.
- Barriers to education and training, whether financial, cultural, or tied to outdated traditions.

- Limited social and institutional support for women's participation in public life.
- Cultural and patriarchal attitudes that undermine women's self-confidence, despite their heavy dual responsibilities at work and home.
- Discriminatory views that treat women as second-class citizens.
- Inconsistent maternity leave policies, with a lack of protection across insurance systems and institutions.
- Forced marriages and reproductive restrictions, along with poor maternal care before and after childbirth.
- Exclusion from top decision-making roles and gaps in property ownership rights due to inheritance laws that remain unreformed.
- Low awareness of legal rights and inadequate legal safeguards for women who face abuse or economic harm.
- Rigid labor laws and contracts that discourage women from full or part-time work.
- Tax and employment policies that fail to encourage or support women's participation in the workforce.
- A lack of empowerment initiatives, unequal access to resources, and persistent class inequalities.
- Public attitudes that fail to fully recognize women's potential or acknowledge their importance to economic development.

These issues are not confined to a single nation. They exist everywhere, though their severity varies. In less developed countries, the barriers to women's economic participation tend to be more pervasive and deeply rooted, thereby rendering their inclusion in the economy especially difficult³.

In many cases, such challenges are embedded in a country's laws, including its constitution, which sets the tone for all other legislation. In some societies, the legal framework aligns with progressive, development-focused policies, pushing women forward. In others, the law mirrors restrictive societal norms, reinforcing old barriers instead of dismantling them.

What remains clear is this: for any nation striving for true economic progress, addressing these inequalities isn't optional. It's essential.

4. Women And the Law a Worldwide Struggle for Inclusion

There are many challenges and obstacles for women to be active in societies and to play a role in development, especially in economic development, worldwide. In some countries, serious legal obstacles exist within their laws that hinder the active participation of women, and the primary expression and authority of these laws are found in the countries' constitutions, which influence domestic legislation. In general, these laws should include legal and illegal discrimination against women, insurance and pension protection laws, disability protection and support for women heads of households, inheritance laws, property laws and property creation and preservation laws, laws to improve the level of education and free education, laws to establish incentives and tax exemptions, and laws to create equal opportunities in the political and social in order to pay serious attention to women and their presence in the development and economic development and highlight their roles in the society and in order to create a suitable platform for their active presence in the society. Laws must be implemented to address the economic and cultural disadvantages faced by women, guarantee them equal participation, promote their empowerment, and eliminate both occupational and sexual discrimination, and close the gender gap in society. The big challenge of the legislators is not to be afraid of traditional and religious societies, and the legal laws with sufficient attention to the serious and prominent presence of women and their employment will move the society towards economic development and public welfare and away from poverty, which domestic laws in countries that hinder. The presence of women is crucial; they represent a significant challenge and obstacle to global economic development, as well as to achieving a better, more successful, and developed world².

II. OMAN'S CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND ITS IMPACT ON GENDER EQUITY

The constitution of a country has a powerful influence on its economy because it shapes how well nations harness the talents and potential of all their people., including women, who make up about half the population. Women play a central role in raising the next generation, too, meaning their empowerment

contributes not just to the present workforce, but also to the ongoing growth and education of society as a whole.

Oman is a striking example in the Middle East when it comes to constitutional development. With a population of around 5 million, Oman is the oldest independent Arab state on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula. Its economy relies on oil, agriculture, fishing, and tourism, and it serves as both a mediator and influencer in the region.

Oman's constitution, revised in 2021 through royal decree, sets forth the country's legal and social foundations over seven chapters and 98 articles. At its core, Oman is defined as an Arab Islamic state (Article 1), and Islam is declared the official religion (Article 2). Much of the country's legal framework draws from Islamic Sharia, especially in matters of social organization.

The monarchy in Oman is hereditary, and only men from the Sultan's male family line can ascend to its highest political office. Female members of the royal family are excluded from succession and most major political roles, reflecting a traditional approach rooted in the country's constitution (Article 6).

Still, Oman's constitution also makes important commitments to equality:

- Article 10 and Article 80 pledge respect for international laws and treaties, meaning the country incorporates globally recognized rights into its own system.
- Article 12 emphasizes fairness, justice, and equal opportunities for all citizens, using inclusive language ("compatriot") without directly specifying gender.
- In Article 17, explicit equality is laid out, stating that all citizens. men and women. are equal before the law in public rights and duties, regardless of gender, origin, language, or religion.

Oman officially forbids gender discrimination, and women have the right to vote and access equal opportunities in both public and private spheres. An important milestone was Oman's acceptance of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2005, marking a growing commitment to women's rights.

The constitution supports women's rights to property, access to social services, and guarantees fair treatment

in employment and social security. sometimes even providing additional support to women based on biological differences and their roles in the family. This is intended as legitimate protection, rather than unjust discrimination, acknowledging the unique responsibilities women often carry.

However, there remain significant gaps. For example.

- Women can be divorced without notification, and are not required to sign their own marriage certificates.
- Polygamy is permitted without informing the first wife.
- An Omani woman must seek government approval to marry a foreigner, and children from these marriages may be denied citizenship.
- Women risk losing custody of children after remarriage and cannot change residence freely without male guardian approval.

Women's participation in politics is still lower than men, and while traditional dress is maintained by many Omani women, tourists are not required to observe it. Achieving true gender equality in Oman, and the region, will require ongoing social support and acceptance, alongside legal reforms.

Still, Oman's recent efforts to expand women's rights have opened new doors and created vast potential for the country's economy. Oman's progress sets an example for its neighbors, showing how transformative change can be when a nation commits to recognizing and advancing the role of women. For both Oman and other Middle Eastern countries, further reforms will be key to unlocking greater development through the empowerment of women.

III. CONCLUSION

Across nations, the evidence is clear: no country can hope to achieve its full potential while neglecting half of its population. Women represent half of the world's human capital and are central to driving sustainable growth. Yet persistent legal, social, and cultural barriers still hold back their contribution.

From the global perspective to specific case studies like Oman, we see that constitutional principles shape the opportunities, or limitations, women face. Where the "mother law" embraces equality, the pathway to reform in other laws becomes clearer. Where it does not, change is slow and uneven.

Without a strong commitment to empowering women, rapid progress, especially in economic development, remains beyond reach. The very first and most decisive move for any government is to amend and modernize its constitution to reflect gender equality in spirit and in practice. This legal foundation makes it possible to reform all other internal laws and create a social, political, and economic environment where women can participate fully.

From a legal perspective, this means not only removing discriminatory laws, but also adopting macro-level policies that actively promote women's engagement. These legal reforms must work hand-in-hand with broader financial, educational, cultural, and political policies to unlock the immense potential of women as drivers of development.

Such transformation will not happen in a single leap. it is built step by step. Every small, deliberate reform contributes to the greater vision of a fair, inclusive, and prosperous society. The first step may be the hardest, but it marks the beginning of a remarkable journey. one that leads to stronger economies, healthier communities, and a future where progress belongs to everyone.

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