

Report on Income-Generating Projects to Assist War-Affected Women

Because of the duration, depth and devastation of the Lebanese conflict, Lebanese women's roles changed drastically during the war. Many women lost their husbands, while others were abandoned and left to fend for themselves as the social order disintegrated. Women's traditional sources of income and other means of subsistence in their villages of origin were lost. Displaced from their homes, many families faced poverty of a severity surpassing anything they had experienced before the war. Consequently, the IWSAW, in an effort to address these needs, evolved from a strictly academic institution during the war years to become a provider of outreach and assistance programs for women. Our research revealed that most of the women surveyed had no formal education or skills with which to earn a living or support their families. Furthermore, we found that these women were struggling with interrelated economic, educational, and social and emotional problems which needed to be addressed in the context of a long-term, integrated community development project. IWSAW was convinced that the most humane and effective form of intervention would be through the implementation of income-generating projects. Not only can these projects empower the individual women economically, they also provide opportunities for social and economic benefits to women and their communities as a whole.

The fundamental principle underlying the income-generating projects is that women can earn a living in a manner that promotes dignity and fosters self-respect. Because the program brought together women from East and West Beirut (Christians and Muslims), the program also facilitated understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and friendships among the different sects. This is a momentous accomplishment in and of itself, given the long years of internecine conflict. The solidarity among the women not only encouraged self-reliance and self-confidence, it also strengthened their income-earning potential while reducing their feelings of exploitation and isolation, thus enabling them to contribute to social and economic development.

The first population group we targeted was displaced women, particularly those who were housed in various settlement areas throughout Beirut and its suburbs. The precarious circumstances forced these women to become heads of households for the first time. They confronted insurmountable economic hardships on a daily basis, and felt quite powerless to change their situations. In their crowded and unsanitary lodgings, women were left to care for their

children and in many cases for their disabled or aging parents. Although the women were keen to find a solution to their economic problem, the majority reported that they could not leave their families for any length of time. Thus, we made every effort to devise a program that would address these issues while accommodating their needs. Some women with embroidery or knitting skills were already working within their homes. Unfortunately, the income derived from their work usually could not sustain their families.

A preliminary study was undertaken by the Business Department of BUC (now LAU) to ascertain the skills required in the market place in order to ensure employment for these women. Knitting was targeted initially, given the demand for clothing and the fact that many of these women already possessed some basic knitting skills. By 1988, the IWSAW was implementing income-generating programs in this domain. Training sessions were provided and women were supplied with the necessary raw materials and patterns to produce the goods in their own homes, thereby enabling them to generate income without neglecting their families. Women received payment from IWSAW upon the completion of each product. It was then the responsibility of IWSAW to market and sell the finished products. The women were also provided with basic economic and marketing principles, thereby encouraging them to participate more fully in the labor force.

By 1990-91, the income-generating projects had expanded to include another segment of the population which had been neglected: a whole new generation of young displaced females between the ages of 15-21 who, due to their lack of skills and education, were unable to find jobs. These girls were not only forced to leave school at an early age due to the war and their displacement, they were also viewed as a burden to their own impoverished families. Many of these young girls have come to accept their circumstances as their "lot in life". Of course, this fatalistic approach cannot be considered as an attitude which fosters human dignity. Upon speaking to many of these young women, they revealed their interest in participating in a vocational training program. As one would expect, their interests and skills varied from that of their mothers and grandmothers. Therefore, IWSAW was able to provide them with specialized training in some of the following areas: hair-dressing, secretarial skills, flower arrangement and factory sewing. IWSAW organizes between nine to twelve courses in these fields each year; as a result, we have been able to reach

approximately 270-360 women annually. To avoid training women for non-marketable skills, the IWSAW regularly researches and identifies the needs of the market place. In the event that a particular skill is no longer deemed marketable, the particular course is eliminated from the training program and replaced with a more appropriate course. All of the candidates who successfully complete the training program are issued a vocational diploma from the Lebanese Government.

As an integral component of the income-generating projects, all of the trainees received assistance with job placements, combined with the Basic Living Skills Program (BLSP). The BLSP introduces women to important topics such as family planning, health, child care, home management, civic education, nutrition, environmental awareness and legal rights. The incorporation of the BLSP is a unique feature of our income generating projects. Women were also encouraged to attend literacy classes since education plays a crucial role in the socio-economic development process.

More recently, IWSAW has implemented the sequin embroidery program in the Baabda Prison for Women. Most of the women in this prison have been the victims of degrading social and economic conditions and have been negatively stigmatized. Working with this population was particularly challenging, given the fact that so many of them felt discarded by society and had no hope of improving their situation. Feelings of personal worthlessness and a sense of failure were common among these women. One of the major obstacles that the women had to overcome was their own deeply rooted feelings of inferiority and powerlessness. Clearly, they needed to feel a sense of accomplishment and belonging. The income generating program, combined with the knowledge gained from the BLSP, provided these women with the opportunity to promote their own personal and economic development. This was further enhanced through the utilization of the mobile library, also developed and distributed by IWSAW.

The IWSAW attempts to change self-defeating attitudes which may have impeded women's participation in the development process. Most of these women have been exposed to a hostile environment which has dehumanized them while devaluing their contributions. In contrast, our programs not only train women in an environment which promotes support and solidarity, the programs also help them to cultivate their skills and develop their capacities as whole, integrated human beings. We believe that any program focusing on marginalized women that does not combine skill acquisition, personal development, and cognitive reformation is futile. This holistic approach may account for our less than three percent drop-out rate. The positive feedback from the women themselves also tends to support

this position.

A questionnaire was administered in August 1995 to 317 women who had been trained in our income-generating programs during 1993-94 and 1994-95. The purpose of the survey was twofold: first, to evaluate the quality of the training programs, and second, to follow-up on each woman's progress. A summary of some of our findings follows: 84.76 percent of the women who responded reported that the duration of training was adequate; 50.09% of the women were also found to be employed, while 42.33% worked within their homes on a regular basis. An overwhelming 93.10% of the women reported an improvement in their standard of living. Overall, we have observed positive changes in women's presentation, levels of confidence, the way they perceived their world and their place in it. The peripheral roles which many had previously accepted were now being questioned and redefined. Our belief in these women, and our efforts to get them to believe in themselves, has enabled many of them to acquire a sense of optimism and control over their own lives. This is best illustrated in the following brief testimonies from two of our trainees. A widow who lost her eldest son during the war had this to say about the program: "I lived in a pool of misery and poverty. This program has helped me to regain faith in life again. I can now smile with hope and faith". A mother of three, whose son was suffering from a heart disease, had the following to say: "You spared me the long hours I used to spend wrapping chocolate, with very little income. Now I don't have to worry about the income to pay for my son's medication".

It is a well-documented fact that women lack equal opportunities and access to basic resources, thus contributing to their marginalized status. How can any government devise an effective development plan when more than half of the population — women — have not even been accounted for?

IWSAW believes that Lebanon's most valuable resource is its own human resources. Evaluating women's share in the development process should not be restricted solely to their economic participation, but should also include their development as individuals. The whole of society is deprived of human and economic resources when women are not encouraged to participate in the development process. Development should be understood as a qualitative change in the way people think, act and relate to their environment, not simply a quantitative economic change. In order to achieve sustainable development, society must regard women as foci, as well as agents, of change. Acknowledging women's actual and potential contribution is of vital importance for any integrative development planning.

Melkie Joseph
IWSAW Staffer

Utilizing Puppets in the Classroom

As a component of its outreach work in Lebanese schools, the IWSAW offered an original workshop for school teachers on March 22 and 23 which focused on the use of puppets as creative educational aides in the classroom setting. The workshop, presented by a young Canadian woman, Nathalie Sirois, began with a brief but comprehensive presentation of the history of puppetry in various cultures

and an examination of the theoretical foundations for using puppets as educational instruments. Workshop participants gained a better understanding of the many educational uses of puppetry and its traditional links with creative self-expression. The teachers also had the opportunity to exercise their own creativity, both with their hands and with their minds. The two-day session culminated with a fruitful exchange of ideas and experiences. At the conclusion, participants had gained new and concrete ideas for introducing puppets into their own classrooms, thereby ensuring the enrichment of their students' educational experience.

Two more workshop sessions are to be presented, one in English and another in French, and all available spaces have already been filled. The enthusiastic response received, and the productive exchanges during the workshop, reflect the extent of the dedication of many Lebanese teachers to their profes-

sion. All participants displayed curiosity, creativity, and a desire to improve the quality of their pupil's learning environment. The Institute will continue its efforts to provide opportunities and resources to help them realize this desire.



As part of its week of events in honor of International Women's Day, the IWSAW honored women artists. Pictured are some of the participants at this event. Seated are artists Yvette Achkar-Hampartzoumian and Helen Khal.

Research on Lebanese War Widows and Wives of Kidnap Victims Completed

A comprehensive research project by Dr. Samia Seifeddine, "Material, Personal, Social and Family Well-Being of War Widows and Wives of the Kidnapped with Children in Beirut" has recently been completed. The project, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency's Awards Program and the Canadian Bureau for International Education, employed quantitative and qualitative research methods to assess the overall material and psychological well-being and financial needs of war widows and wives of men who were

kidnapped during the Lebanese war. The overall aim of the project was to develop culturally relevant responses to the needs of these women and their dependent children, and to generate data that may be of help to professionals working with women war victims in Lebanon and other countries afflicted by violence. The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World was honored to assist Dr. Seifeddine

behaviorally and emotionally troubled children. For further information, contact Miss Melikie Joseph at the Institute.

Image of Women in Popular Proverbs Examined

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World organized a lecture about "Women in Popular Proverbs" by Dr. Nader Sraj, a Professor at the Lebanese University specializing in Linguistics. Dr. Sraj began by explaining that language is one of the most important tools for revealing the hidden side of human thought. A proverb, being brief yet profound, provides the linguistic social researcher with rich material for examination and analysis from which to derive conclusions.

Dr. Sraj then asserted that women's image in our popular traditions and literature is highly distorted, and that it clearly reflects our patriarchal mentality. He gave many examples of proverbs which emphasize the women's poor image, such as: "He cries like a divorced woman", "Prison is for men and tears are for women", "The honor of a girl is like a match stick: it doesn't burn except once" (*i.e.*, when she is deflowered), "A woman without a husband is like a garden without a fence", "A girl is a source of grief even if she were Mary". However, Dr. Sraj also pointed to the presence of some proverbs that are positive, such as: "If a woman is lucky, she bears girls before she bears boys", "Men are destructive while women are constructive". He also stated that certain occupations are frequently mentioned in association with women. Among them are: dancer, tailor, washer, bread seller, and cook.

Dr. Sraj explained that the importance of proverbs is not only attributed to their capacity for reflecting society's mentality, but also to the fact that they constitute an influencing factor over the development of a society's mentality. "Being able to critically examine proverbs allows us to become aware of their implications and hence to exercise control over them. Eventually, we should be able to speak



The Kuwaiti poet Suad El-Subah listens as she is introduced to a large audience before her poetry recitation on International Women's Day. Seated to her left is LAU President Dr. Riyad Nassar.

with part of her research in Beirut. A copy of the report is available for perusal in our offices.

IWSAW Organizes Training Program for Professionals Working with Emotionally Troubled Children

For the third consecutive year, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World will host a two-week training session entitled "Families Searching for Solutions," featuring the expertise of Dr. George Awad, a prominent child psychiatrist from Canada. The training sessions, to be held in May, are designed specifically for mental health professionals. Participants will gain skills and insights which will enable them to work more effectively with



Janane Mallat, Producer and Director for LBCI and C33, gives her opinion during a panel discussion on women in the media at LAU.

of a healthy social life for women, children, family and men in our contemporary Arab societies.”



Attendees at a book exhibition organized by IWSAW enjoy conversation during International Women's Week at LAU. In the center of the photo is Linda Mattar, President of the Lebanese Women's Council. To the right is Ghania Doughan, Secretary General of the Lebanese Committee for Women's Rights.

of various women writers' works. This booklet should be ready for distribution by June, 1996.

IWSAW CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY WITH A WEEK OF SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

In celebration of International Women's Day, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) organized a week-long series of events and activities.

Honoring Arab Women Writers

On Monday, March 4th, a presentation on Arab Women Writers featured the works of several women writers in Lebanon. Five outstanding writers were honored: Ms. Rose Ghorayyib, Mrs. Advik Shayboub, Dr. Najla Abu Ezzeddine, Dr. Zahia Kaddoura and Mrs. Emily Faris Ibrahim. Those who introduced and paid homage to the aforementioned artists were Dr. Nazik Yared, Mr. Henry Zghaib, Dr. Mona Amyuni, Dr. Claudia Abi Nader and Maitre Sonia Attieh respectively.

IWSAW is now preparing an annotated bibliography



A standing-room-only audience enjoys the poetry of Suad El-Subah.

Film Presentation

“*Al Sheikha*,” a compelling film portraying the seri-

ous social problems surrounding children's street gangs in Lebanon, was shown on the LAU-Beirut campus on March 5th. Due to scheduling difficulties, Filmmaker Leila Assaf, a Lebanese woman residing in Sweden, could not be present to lead a discussion and answer questions following the screening of her film. Therefore, IWSAW Program Officer Hania Osseiran presented a prerecorded interview with Ms. Assaf, after which film critic Emile Chahine led a discussion. The film elicited strong reactions and lively discussions from the audience.

Honoring of Lebanese Artists

Given the significant contributions which Lebanese artists have made on the local and international levels, the IWSAW honored three Lebanese women artists: painters Helen Khal and Yvette Achkar-Hampartzoumian, and the sculptress Salwa Rawda Choucair (who was unable to attend due to an accident that left her with a broken leg). The first two artists were honored by Ms. May Menassa and Mr. Jack Aswad respectively. In addition, slide presentations illustrating all three artists' works were shown.



Maguy Farah, popular political talk-show hostess on MTV, participates in a panel discussion on women in the media.

International Women's Day

To commemorate this historic and significant date, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World hosted a poetry recital by the esteemed Kuwaiti poet and author, Dr. Suad El-Subah. Prior to the recitation, The IWSAW hosted a reception for distinguished guests. An overwhelming number of representatives of the print and audio-visual media were in attendance. Dr. El-Subah honored the Institute with the recitation of a poem she composed especially for the event.

In conclusion, the week's events were well-received and thoroughly covered by all forms of the media, thereby serving to promote public awareness of women's issues and the work of the IWSAW. Given the favorable response from the public and media, the Institute hopes to implement this week-long celebration of International Women's Day on an annual basis.



May Kahhalé, Press Coordinator for the Office of the President of the Lebanese Republic, serves as moderator for a panel discussion on the print media at LAU.