

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA(ECWA)

The regional Preparatory Meeting for the World Conference of the U.N. Decade for Women, 1980, held in Damascus, 10-13 December, 1979, grouped besides representatives of Arab countries enrolled as members of ECWA, those of Arab League organizations, U.N. organizations and specialized agencies; also members of the Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, those of the "Secretariat of World Conference of the U.N. for Women 1980," and of the ECWA personnel.

Reports were given on 1) the activities of the ECWA in the field of the integration of women in development programmes in Western Asia. In ECWA's first regional meeting of the U.N. Decade for Women, held in Amman in 1978, the **Regional Plan of Action** which had been finalized in an earlier meeting of experts nominated by ECWA members, was unanimously adopted as a set of guidelines for women and development programmes in the region. This plan seeks to meet the needs of the region in education, employment, family services, and stresses that a sound approach to the integration of women in development must begin with assessment of the situation and resources in each country. 2) The projects of the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women (VFDW), which has been an outcome of the International Women's Year Conference in Mexico in 1975. Its aim is to finance projects proposed by the U.N. regional commissions, which fulfill certain criteria. Some of the projects for the 1979/1980 period, on the regional level, include:

A. Integrated Development and Extension Service for Women in Rural Areas (Baghdad, 3 March – 21 April, 1979)

This workshop was held in Baghdad, in cooperation with the government of Iraq. The participants asserted the importance of the role of rural women and planned a special manual for women extension workers, to help them in organizing national and local training sessions and to serve as a guide for rural extension programmes.



B. Workshop on National Development Planning for the Integration of Women in Development (Damascus, 10-13 December, 1979)

This workshop covered many subjects some of which were :

- a) preparation of samples of national planning
- b) basic research and its role in development
- c) requirements for sectoral planning
- d) role of women's organizations in planning
- e) strategies for development based on the mobilization of human resources with special emphasis on women
- f) the role of women in the balance of human resources necessary for planning.

The workshop adopted the recommendation of the Regional Plan of Action (Amman, 1978), which proposed that "training workshops should be carried out at the national and regional levels, for persons working in planning organizations. The workshops should emphasize the integration of women in development as an essential object of social and economic planning."

C. Training Workshop in Formulation, Implementation and Evaluation of Projects for the Development of Human Social Resources

This workshop will be held, in principle, in Jordan, during the first half of 1980, with participants to be invited from all ECWA members.

D. Appropriate Social Services for Women in Rural Areas

The advisory committee of the Voluntary Fund also approved the implementation of twelve new projects during the 1980/1981 period on the regional level : community self-help activities, policy formulation for developmental images of women in mass media and literature; workshops on experimental training methodologies for trainers of rural development workers; logistic support for ECWA women's development program.



The Program of Action prepared by the members of the regional Preparatory Meeting, that constitutions and laws of the State has stipulated, should ensure full equality between men and women concerning their rights and obligations in the field of political action, work and property rights.

In the section dealing with the legal field, it should follow up the recommendation that women can enjoy equality with men in all civil rights, and to secure the requirements in legislation, procedure and facilities that will guarantee their enjoyment of those rights.

2. In educational and informational measures, the RPA endorses the recommendation for the Intergration of Woman in the Development field of "The Role of Mass Media" in the countries of the region. It equally recommends emphasis on the image of equality between men and women and on the clarification of the changes that have occurred in their respective roles in contemporary society.

3. Employment:

The RPA stress the importance of formulating

strategies for increasing the rate of participation of women in the labour force; for increasing the productivity of working women through training, and providing them with the supporting services so that they can combine their family and work responsibilities; strategies should also be formulated for encouraging women to enter new occupations in addition to the traditional ones, and providing them with equal opportunities with men for promotion in employment.

4. Health Programs

The RPA emphasizes the need for a regional meeting for health statisticians in order to formulate a detailed plan for data collection on health indicators, especially the relevant health and medical data on women, from all health institutions and at all levels. Another need is the preparation of model radio and television programs based on tested material on health and nutrition relevant to the needs of women in particular.

5. Education and Training

The RPA stresses the importance of technical training and its role in the national economy; the urgent implementation of the Arab Strategy for the Eradication of Illiteracy adopted at the Third Alexandria Conference held in Baghdad, in December 1976.

6. Regional and International Cooperation

It is important to emphasize here the need for mechanisms and structures for cooperation and co-ordination on the regional and international levels, so that it can be possible to meet the increasing responsibilities of the coming five years for implementing the activities of the Program of Action. This could be secured by means of a committee created to coordinate women's programs undertaken by ECWA and the regional office of the U.N. Development Program and the Arab League.

Other means of coordination: organizing regional meetings in 1982 to follow up the Program of Action, to investigate possible sources of funding for the women's program, to call upon the ECWA members to increase their donations to the Voluntary Fund so that it can fulfill its objectives in the region and in other developing countries.

WOMEN OF THE MIDDLE EAST IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

The "Women's Program" in the Council of Churches of the Middle East held two conferences, one in Beirut, December 1-3, 1977, the other in Cairo, March 1-5, 1978. The purpose of both conferences was to discuss and evaluate the status of women in the church, civil law and development.

The conferences brought together delegates from Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Sudan and Syria. They represented the various Christian Churches in the Middle East as well as a number of social institutions and welfare societies. Religious leaders, social workers and lawyers from both sexes participated in the studies that were presented and in the discussions that followed.

A third conference on a related topic, "Woman's Role in the Church and the Question of her Ordination," was held at the Near East School of Theology, Beirut, January 23-25, 1980. Documented studies were presented by priests and ministers representing the Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Protestant churches in the Arab East, expounding opinions of the early Church Fathers regarding woman's role in the Church. No definite resolutions were adopted but the conference fulfilled its purpose of establishing a dialogue and preparing the way for mutual understanding among the Christian churches, in accordance with the spirit of the Ecumenical Council.