

# *Rose Mary Ghannoun* <sup>(1)</sup>

## **A pioneering rural guide for Lebanese rural women**

Rose Mary Ghannoun is probably the first woman in Lebanon to occupy a position allowing her direct contact with rural women for the purpose of encouraging their participation in developing and realizing economic independence.

An AUB graduate (1976) from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Guidance, she participates in a rural reconstruction project created in 1978 by the International Development Agency and sponsored by the "Help the Children Office". The function of the project is to give loans to small Lebanese farmers to help them restore their villages and initiate farming and industrial projects.

Rose Mary holds frequent meetings with rural women; offers them capital in the form of loans, which they pledge to refund after a definite period; guides their choice of investment and encourages them to act independently, avoiding family pressure and social traditions. These women are still too shy to start independent projects or share in important enterprises. Most of them are satisfied with a cow as a form of investment and many keep worrying about what they would do if the cow should die.

Rose Mary has effected wide contact with rural women in and outside Lebanon, discussed their needs and problems in international congresses, talked about mass media that would interest them and induce them to share more effectively in development. The problems of women all over the world are similar. The main ones are :

1. Lack of participation of men in child rearing.
2. Problems of marriage and divorce.
3. Problems of social contact and women's freedom.
4. Sexim in home and school.
5. Lack of appreciation of the rural woman's role.

Besides multiple activities, Rose Mary was able to train five rural pioneers from South Lebanon and the Beqaa, the districts in which she is working, for the task of creating awareness among women regarding the importance of their role in farming. Though the family economy rests on their shoulders, these women are unaware of the value of their role and work. They are the victims of isolation from neighboring villages, and excluded from decisions concerning their own lives and those of their children.

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(1) An-Nahar al-Arabi wad-Duali, 31 March – 6 April 1980.