

INTEGRATION OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT PLANS WITHIN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES⁽¹⁾☆

«Development education is increasingly specified as action oriented and aimed at raising critical awareness. Its content focuses on the issues of human rights, equity and social justice, self-reliance, dignity and the quality of life.»

(From an article on the topic by Nicu Van Oudenhoven, Unicef Information Bulletin, 14 April 1981, p. 11).

In a detailed introduction of 30 pages, Dr. Haidar Ibrahim Ali presents the concepts and the problems of development within the United Arab Emirates.

«Development» in the modern sense is linked to westernization and industrialization; it requires a change in the conditions of traditional societies, leading to their adoption of a Western style of development. This is based on a capitalistic system of production, rapid industrialization, parliamentary government and constitution and so on.

This form of development does not necessarily result in general welfare. It may lead to one-sided growth, favoring an increase in income for some classes at the expense of others. As an example, we may mention Brazil, where industrialization failed to solve the problems of underdevelopment.

For a clearer understanding of development, the author tries to define «underdevelopment», the first sign of which is the uneven distribution of national income resulting from its abuse in worthless or futile expenditure. Another sign is the preponderance of the rural sector with its traditional use of archaic implements and the persistence of feudal ties between landowners and workers. This leads to dwindling rural production and an increased migration to urban centers. A third sign is the dependence of the country on a single source of raw material such as oil or one type of agricultural product. The product is sold at a low cost. The end product is bought from the world markets at a high cost.

The above analysis leads to the following definition of economic development: Adequacy of production, a fair distribution of income and elimination of economic dependency. In the case of the Gulf Region, other implications should be considered herewith. These include the complete utilization of human resources with an end to transforming them into productive forces, the elimination of illiteracy and the application of education to cater for the needs of the development process.

Problems of Development in the Gulf Region⁽²⁾

In the Gulf States, as in other Arab countries, there is the problem of limitation of employment due to the difference between potential and actual workers. This condition applies particularly to those Gulf states which are obliged to employ large numbers of workers from other Arab countries or from foreign ones. In 1975, the percentage of resident Arab workers in Bahrain, Kuwait and UAE was 41.7%, that of Pakistani and Indian workers, 45.7% and that of Iranians and Europeans, 12.6%. Local Arabs account for only 26.5% of the foreigners.

A second problem is the disparity that exists between the various sectors of production brought about by the predominance of the oil sector. Opportunities for employment are not proportional to the huge capital since capital-labor ratio is subject to the decisions of the oil companies.

A third problem is the cultural lag resulting from the disparity in the rates of material and cultural growth. In the educational field in particular, methods and programs have not evolved according to a plan which aimed to prepare good citizens. Illiteracy is high, especially amongst women; the mass media do not have the impetus that would allow them to contribute effectively to the education of the public.

To the above problems we may add other harmful aspects of the «oil culture» such as: 1) the increased interest in consumption as a way of life. 2) Disdain of work, especially manual work. 3) Money fetishism, i.e. considering money as the key to social status, and 4) Ethnocentrism, which means giving a superior rank to a racial or cultural group instead of encouraging true democratic relations in society.

(1) Abstract of a study prepared in Arabic by Dr. Haidar Ibrahim Ali, Professor in the Sociology Department, School of Arts, University of the United Arab Emirates, presented at the **Second Regional Conference** for Arab Gulf Women, March 28-31, 1981.

☆ The United Arab Emirates are Abu-Dhabi, Ajman, Chariqa, Dubai, Al-Fujaira, Umm-ul-Qi'wayn, and Ras-el-Khayma.

(2) It includes Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, Oman, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and possibly the two Yemens.

Women and Development

The author of the study agrees with those who believe that the liberation of women is closely linked to that of men and of society as a whole. However, he disagrees with those who believe that general progress depends on the adoption of a particular political system, as do those who affirm that socialism can solve all problems, including those of women. To him, those societies which have been indicated as models, are still in the experimental stages and so far have not been able to achieve the results which their initiators predicted.

To Dr. Ali, the problem of the Third World is not so much that of slow growth or lack of industrialization and westernization. It is the problem of choosing the right system — a system insuring social justice and general welfare, resulting from the right sort of development.

While women's integration in development is everywhere deficient, it is particularly so in the Third World. Men are, in most cases, the sole source of income, and hence they enjoy complete authority within the family while women are restricted to house-keeping and child care.

Since education is the first pre-requisite for women to participate in the development process it is essential to look into the status of women's education in the Gulf states.

In 1967, the proportions of girls to boys were as follows:

Elementary level	29.5%
Secondary level	24 %
University level	18.5%

In 1976, the proportions rose to the following:

Elementary	36%
Secondary	29.5%
University	34%

In Kuwait, the first elementary school for girls was opened in 1937-38; in UAE (Abu-Dhabi), in 1963; In 1973-74 the number of schools in UAE attained 155, with a total enrollment of 51476 of whom 40% were girls.

In Bahrain, where education began earlier than in other Gulf states, the first elementary school for boys was opened in 1919; the first school for girls in 1928. In

1973-74, the total number of students was 55726, about half of whom were girls. In Qatar, the first elementary school for boys was founded in 1952, for girls in 1956. In 1972-73, the total number of students in Qatar reached 23392, including 10435 girls.

Discrimination between boys and girls exists not only in numbers but also in programs of courses. Professional and technical training for women is greatly restricted. University education is limited to a small number. The proportion of illiteracy reaches about 70% for both sexes, 85% for women alone.

The limited opportunity for education and training imposes limits on job opportunities. Before the oil era, women of these countries participated in money-earning activities such as sewing, trading, cattle raising and the pearl-diving industry. Recent wealth has discouraged women's employment outside the home. The number of women engaged in productive work does not exceed 2% in the UAE. The rest are housekeepers. In Kuwait, a relatively more developed state than the rest, although the number of women students attained 42% of the total in 1974, the percentage of working women did not exceed 5% of the number of Kuwaiti workers. These formed only 25.5% of the whole while non-Kuwaitis reached 74.5%.

To remedy the situation, the Family Revival Association (Jam'iyyat-un-Nahda-l-Usriyya) published, in 1974, the following recommendations in an attempt to encourage women to work:

1. Creation of a committee attached to the Ministry, called «Women's Affairs Committee», whose function would be to guide and encourage the participation of women in development.
2. Inclusion of women in committees responsible for establishing or amending family laws.
3. Creation of professional training centers where women of various educational levels would be admitted.
4. Encouraging women's membership in workers' and employees' syndicates.

General Handicaps to Woman's Integration in Development

Some handicaps are an integral part of local traditions, such as despising manual work and the inherent aversion to work in general. The idea that work, in whatever form, is sacred and ennobling does not exist in their code of conduct. They readily accept government subsidies and grants without any return. Employees lack seriousness, conscientiousness and work ethics. They fail to see the connection between work and civic duties.

To these general handicaps are added those arising from the traditional upbringing of women, such as the belief that a woman's education and involvement in work would blemish her honor. Here the author asks whether it is better to keep women in a state of ignorance and imposed seclusion, or to let them enjoy the benefits of social contact once they have been armed with knowledge and unselfish guidance. Another objection raised against woman's work is the fear that it would destroy her femininity. «What do they mean by femininity?» asks Dr. Ali. If it means indolence, soft living, infatuation, and idleness, then it is a source of corruption. True femininity means that a woman lives according to her nature which requires her to cultivate her talents and achieve self-realization through education and work.

Another source of demoralization, according to the author, is the negative image which the media create of women in Arab history. If carefully studied, history reveals that the Arabs produced many women leaders such as queen Arwa Bint Ahmad (Tenth Century A.D.), who shared her husband's interests and activities and yielded a beneficial influence on her environment.

Recommendations

The author recommends, in the first place, the creation of research centers, provided with statistical equipment, allowing the production of accurate and objective studies around the present status and needs of women.

Second, investigation into Arab heritage with an aim to emphasize the positive aspects of women's lives and contributions.

Third, increasing the number of technical training schools and centers, to the effect of making such training accessible to all students, girls and boys.

Fourth, rehabilitation of manual work by raising the salaries of technicians and craftsmen of both sexes.

Fifth, promulgation of labor laws giving working women equal rights with men, and in so doing help to alleviate their household duties.

Sixth, persuading leaders and members of women's unions and associations, whose activities are concentrated on charity work, to organize campaigns and seminars with the aim of spreading awareness among the public and inducing volunteers to participate in projects of adult education, rural development, literacy campaigns and so on.

Conclusion

The author of this study seems to be a believer in the importance of woman's integration in development. His analysis of woman's situation in the Gulf countries is objective and factual. It expresses his deep interest in the right sort of woman's liberation which would eliminate the harmful aspects of both the traditional and the modern way of life and keep only the best of Arab and Western cultures.