

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF RURAL WOMEN IN JORDAN

Several articles were published by Al-Raida⁽¹⁾ on the status of women in Jordan but they generally dealt with women's education and work in urban areas. The study made by Mr. Hassan Hammad⁽²⁾, briefly presented in this article, deals mainly with "the problems and prospects of women in rural development" which is the title of his dissertation submitted at Reading University's Agricultural Extension and Rural Development Centre.

In his opening paragraph the author points out that women's status in Jordan varies according to the district in which they live and the class of society to which they belong. In less educated urban society, woman's status and role remain traditional while, in the educated class of large towns, women are beginning to take their place alongside men in society. Many are doing public or professional work; some are involved in political careers but the majority take up traditionally feminine occupations. In 1979, while there were 11,811 female teachers and 2080 nurses and midwives, there were only 40 female architects and engineers, 11 lawyers, 203 doctors and three journalists.

The village women offer a different picture. The majority of them work in the field on family land with their husbands; their economic contribution, generally uncompensated, is important because they carry on a double burden of field work and household duties until the end of their lives. Those who belong to rich rural families usually refuse to take part in field work outside the house, but they make their contribution by looking after the animals within the house and "hosh", the household yard or compound.

The author goes on to say that Arab countries, though they have different stages of development, offer a similar image of women in rural districts. They follow a double standard which includes discrimination between girls and boys, an imposed guardianship on women in adult life, a lower status for women who are single, widowed or divorced. The birth of a boy is accompanied by ceremonies of rejoicing which are denied to girls. The period of breastfeeding is longer for males than for females. A strict code of honor exposes a woman to lose her life if she is suspected of wayward conduct.

As to education, the Jordanian law requires

compulsory education for boys and girls at the elementary stage in separate schools, but the percentage of girls attending school in rural districts is still very low and that of dropouts (children who leave school before they have learned to read and write) is higher for girls than for boys. In the Jordan Valley, (Al-Ghor), it reaches 90 percent among girls. An official report published in 1979 stated that the illiteracy rate for males in rural districts was 49.5 percent; for females, between 76 and 85 percent. No vocational education was available for girls. In the Jordan Valley, where the number of girls attending school was half that of boys, the only secondary school in the district was reserved for boys.

According to a survey published by the University of Jordan in 1979, the educational level in the «Badia», (the bedouin areas in the country), is the lowest of all. Fifty percent of males of all ages have never entered school while the figure for female illiteracy is 88 percent.

The government literacy program which takes care of adult education, suffers from the lack of trained teachers and readable material. It does not provide women with the knowledge and skills necessary to improve and increase their productivity. Rural women are equally neglected by agricultural radio programs which cater only for male farmers. Extension workers generally belong to the male sex and are prevented by social norms from reaching women.

Health services in rural areas do not receive more attention than education does. They are limited to health clinics which are not always available nor easily accessible because of bad roads and long distances. Infant mortality in these areas reaches 130-160/1000 while the general figure is 90-100/1000. The average number of children is 10 per woman of age group 36-50 years. 81.3 percent of the children's deaths occur before they are two years of age.

On the whole, the rural and bedouin population are suffering from a serious lack of health education as compared with urban dwellers. Their health needs may be briefly stated as follows:

1. Health and nutrition programs to be directed to all members of the family.
2. Installation of a sewer system.
3. Provision of the rural population with clean water and regular checking of water sources.
4. Increase in the number of clinics and improvement of their quality.
5. Provision of preventive health advice.
6. Provision of out-patient treatment, including mobile health and dental units.
7. More health surveys and research.

(1) See Al-Raida, May 1979, Vol. II, no. 8, p. 8, Voluntary Social Organizations; Aug. 1, 1980, Vol. III, no. 13, p. 5, The Role of Women in Jordanian Society; May 1, 1981, Vol. IV, no. 16, p. 15, Women's Work in Jordan; Aug. 1, 1981, Vol. IV, no. 17, p. 9, Attitude Toward Women's Work in Jordan.

(2) Published in *Jordan Times*, Thurs. Fr., July 9-10, 1981, p.3.

IYDP IN LEBANON

The number of the handicapped persons in Lebanon attains 1% of the population, creating a problem rendered more acute by the persistent war.

In No. 16 of Al-Raida, May 1, 1981, p. 5, we announced that, on the occasion of IYDP, a general census of the handicapped in Lebanon had been projected by the Government. According to an article published by «Le Réveil», August 6, 1981, no accurate statistics about their number has so far been obtained, but it is estimated at 30,000 to 40,000 in a population not exceeding 3.2 million, which means that this country counts one handicapped person for every hundred inhabitants, equalling five to six times the world ratio. A quarter of the total number comprises the war victims that fell between 1976 and 1981.

This same article relates a conversation regarding this problem, held with Dr. Ramez Hajjar, himself a paralytic fastened to a wheelchair since six years, as a result of a car accident which occurred to him while he was a medical student. In spite of his infirmity, he was able to overcome his psychological breakdown, take his exams, obtain his medical degree and occupy a position at the American University Hospital of Beirut.

Moved by the sad condition of the handicapped in a still feudalized society which refuses to accept them as adults with equal rights, Dr. Hajjar has established friendly relations with other handicapped individuals. One of them, a congenital paralytic, has succeeded like him in obtaining a doctorate in law, in history and Arabic literature, plus a "licence" in sociology. Together they plan to create an association of the "motor handicapped", those in wheelchairs, and whose problem of readaptation differs from that of the blind, the deaf and dumb and the mentally retarded. Their objective is to emancipate the mentality of other

people concerning the handicapped, give the latter a reason for existence, spread in the Lebanese society an awareness of their problem and elaborate a project of law recognizing their rights in society, particularly their right to work.

With the present situation of insecurity in Lebanon, where the danger of snipers is lurking everywhere, any person may receive a bullet in his back and become incapacitated for life. Hence the importance of making the problem a responsibility of all the Lebanese.

How are the "motor-handicapped" taken care of in Lebanon?

The old fighters who have become handicapped by war receive a certain indemnity from their military organizations. The civilian handicapped depend on their families. Many of them are sent to private specialized institutions which are very costly and though they try to rehabilitate the patient, yet they isolate him from society. Such centers exist at the American University Hospital, at the French Hotel-Dieu, at Beit-Chabab, Ouzai, Kafa'at, but they can accommodate only a few of the large number of handicapped people in the country. On the other hand, there is a pressing need for the creation of a unit which would take care of the patient at the critical stage of his ailment. Such a unit is still inexistent in any of the above institutions.

The association which Dr. Hajjar and his group are planning to create, will vindicate the rights of the handicapped as regular citizens. They do not claim the pity of others nor their charity. What they claim is a change in their mentality, so that they may recognize for the handicapped equal rights to health, schooling, reeducation and work. Their claim to have larger elevators, steps and sidewalks accommodated for their wheel-chairs, should not be considered a privilege but a right. The group created by Dr. Hajjar and his friends already includes more than 200 members who hope to obtain soon the statute of an association of public utility, recognized by the State.

THE WOMAN BREAD-WINNER

«In the United States, the myth of the ideal nuclear family structure was debunked when it became apparent that women were the sole heads of 34% of all minority households and 11% of all white families. In 1972, 52% of the former and 25% of the latter category of families were below the poverty level as compared with only 5% of the families with an adult male head.

Additional data have revealed that this is by no means a phenomenon restricted to the United States. Women-headed households account for 35% of all households in many parts of the Carribean. Between 1960 and 1970, the proportion of such households doubled in Brazil and increased by 33% in Morocco. Using census data for 74 developing countries we calculated the total range of adult women who, because of their current marital/family status, carry the

potential of being, or eventually becoming, family heads.

The percentage of potential household heads varies from 10% to 48%; the average of 74 countries is 18%. Their proportion could be 18% in India, 23% in Indonesia, and about 46% of the household heads in Botswana (Africa), 18% in Kenya and 15% in Iran.

In parts of the Middle East, real conflicts are surfacing between increasing economic pressures and the continued existence of traditional obligations; conflicts that inhibit kinship units from providing economic support to female members as it is 'ideally' and even legally prescribed. In many countries male unemployment and male marginality have prevented men from keeping their economic obligations towards their kinswomen. This has contributed to the breakdown of the extended family."

(Quoted from an article on "The Plight of the Woman-Breadwinner" by Mayra Buvinic, Nadia H. Youssef and Ilsa Schumacher, in "The Unesco Courier", July 1980, p. 11-12).