Influence of the Arab Woman's Education in Helping Achieve General Development[1]

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Educational planning should take into consideration the following points:

1. Meeting the needs of the various development sectors and particularly the rural sector which yields the largest share of national income.

2. Developing educational programs to include adult education, continuing education, and technical training as aspects of the general campaign for wiping out illiteracy.

3. Considering the importance of woman's role in the general process of development.

Compared to developed countries of the world, the Arab woman's participation in the labor force is still very low.

Recent statistics, however, reveal the existence of a general trend toward an approval of woman's work with a view to improving the family income.

In Syria, a recent study shows that 73.3% of secondary school students are in favor of women's work outside the home. The vast majority of women students favor women's work before marriage. In spite of problems faced by working women, 75% of them showed their willingness to keep on working after marriage (1980 inquiry).

Participation of Arab women in development is seriously hindered by their high rate of illiteracy. Their reduced share of education compared to that of men, and their highly limited number in institutes of higher education (especially in science departments) are added debarring factors.

In Syria, however, recent reports show a rising proportion of women students in the classes of applied science. In 1979, this group reached 63%, while those enrolled in the humanities divisions were 45%. Another sign of awareness among Syrian women is the increased ratio of their participation in the labor force: 21% in 1975 against 10.7% in 1970.

Women's choice of a field of specialization is still affected by public opinion and by the facility of combining her work with her home duties. When the government allowed women pharmacists to own pharmacies, where their work could be limited to mere supervision, the number of women students in this field registered a noticeable increase.

Women's future role in development will imply a decrease in the number of women workers below 18 years of age, a higher proportion of literate women, a larger number of training centers, a closer relationship between higher education and local development needs.

In the rural sector where women workers constitute a large proportion (35%), there is room for women specialists in rural fields of study, such as rural engineering, research, scientific study and supervision of production.

As rural engineers, women can play a significant role in guiding consumers and training them in principles of dietetics such as food planning, preparation of balanced meals and calculation of calories, and rational budgeting.

Woman's role is equally significant in the industrial sector, particularly in house planning and in projects of maintenance, improvement, and repair.

Most significant is her contribution in the educational field, where she may have a double role as house manager and school teacher. In the fields of public health and welfare, protection of the environment, general cleanliness, civic training programs, her services are most needed.

Such a far-reaching goal requires a general survey of the present status of women's work in the Arab world, including numbers of actually active and potentially active women, those whose vocational training qualifies them for work, and housekeepers who are ready to engage in certain forms of activities leading to development.

Women's participation in the labor force implies, first and foremost, her freedom to choose and to act, which is not only a necessary condition for integration in development, but also for the upbringing of free future generations.