

"Women's Share in a Development Strategy"

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Woman's development, which primarily aims at developing her potential, presupposes, as an initial step, ridding her of out-dated and harmful traditions that block her way to progress. It also requires that she be equipped with adequate education, vocational training and the opportunity for free participation in general development, unhindered by public or private restrictions.

The role played by Egyptian women in the Revolution of 1952 allowed them to obtain certain rights in the 1956 Constitution and in later legislative acts. The Constitution grants them equal rights with men and, as a result, the government has encouraged all measures leading to their integration in development.

In the field of education, the government tries to ensure for both men and women elementary and intermediate education plus vocational training. Gifted students are given scholarships allowing them to go into higher education. The government encourages women's participation in the labor force by granting them a paid three months maternity leave and providing nurseries for their children.

In 1976, the percentage of women's participation in economic activity was 9.2%. In 1977, their participation in rural work went down from 25% in 1971 to 10.2%, showing a shift to better paid jobs requiring more technical training. The percentage of women employed in technical and intellectual occupations rose from 9% in 1971 to 27% in 1977. Equal progress has been recorded in women's secretarial and journalistic employment which went up from 2.5% in 1961 to 10.7% in 1971, and 19.7% in 1977. In contrast, the percentage of women in the services sector came down from 27% in 1961 to 10.2% in 1977.

At the same time, the average number of working women who had received elementary or intermediate education increased from 9.9% in 1960 to 43% in 1977. The number of those with higher education went up from 2.3% in 1960 to 15.6% in 1977. Women holding university degrees such as the M.A., M.S. and Ph.D. increased from 2% in 1960 to 6% in 1977.

Women and Domestic Service

Woman's role as housekeeper (involving her as a manager) should not be underestimated. Though her work in this field is not adequately remunerated, it constitutes an important contribution to economic development.

Recently, a project called "Productive Families" has been created with the aim of providing opportunities of remunerated work for family members, particularly for women housekeepers who care to earn money in their free time. 260,000 Egyptian pounds have been allocated for the purpose of promoting this project and increasing the number of its beneficiaries.

Rural Pioneers

This is another project which tries to stimulate women's activity in rural areas by preparing trained women social leaders, capable of offering social service to their communities.

Political and Administrative Offices

Women occupy 30 seats in Parliament, and 10 to 20% representation in administrative offices.

The 1980-1981 Strategic Plan

The role of local administration, in accordance with the new policy of decentralization, has been enhanced to include planning and follow up projects of nutrition, industry, habitation, sanitation, and sewage in the various districts. Credits for the implementation of this transfer amount to over 240 million Egyptian pounds which will serve to support production and service activities in each district, organize the distribution of credits, ensure general participation in the execution of given plans, and emphasize rural development as a basic aspect of regional development.

Credits allocated to the seven economic sectors in the country follows a priority plan. First comes the transportation sector followed by those of habitation, public health, rural projects, general services, electricity and industry.

Social development receives the same attention as economic development. Employment offices are ready to help all job seekers without any sexual discrimination. Equal opportunities for education are open to both men and women. Laws affecting personal status have, lately, received a number of amendments in favor of women. In institutions of higher education, the number of women students was up to 46% of the whole. The total number of women in the labor force reached 14.5% in 1976.

In spite of the numerous progressive steps achieved by Egyptian women, they still have a good many problems to handle. Notwithstanding all efforts spent in wiping out illiteracy, the 1976 data reports a ratio of 71% of women illiterates versus that of 43% for males.

Traditional upbringing and orientation of females has impeded their normal development. Overpopulation is hampering the improvement of living conditions in the family. Rural women still suffer from relative neglect which is the lot of the Egyptian village as a whole.

Needed improvement in woman's status requires a "close cooperation between women's organizations, community and state. A common action will allow them to effect a thorough study of woman's needs and problems, and therefore, aids them to devise efficient ways of treating them.

(1) Condensed from a paper presented at the Second Regional Conference for Women of the Gulf Countries and the Arabian Peninsula, 28-31 March 1981. See *Al Raida*, Feb. 1, 1982, vol. V, no. 19, p. 11