

PROMOTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN LEBANON AND OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES⁽⁵⁾

The changing circumstances in the world to-day are driving women into work outside the home, either because they are the sole providers for their households or because the high cost of living obliges them to share in family expenses.

An evaluation of women's participation in economic development requires the provision of accurate information about it, which is generally defective in the Arab world. **Statistics** regarding this topic show the following defects: 1) They overlook woman's domestic activity and her participation in family productive work, field work, seasonal work, etc. 2) In collecting data about working women, those who do irregular work are often omitted; when the husband answers for his wife he often refuses to recognize her extra work in and outside the home.

Necessity of revising questionnaires:

They should include women who do irregular work, minimum number of their work hours, number of unemployed, seasonal work, causes of unemployment.

Analysis of Women's Work

It should indicate its characteristics and the factors influencing it, its distribution, interrelation of characteristics, their relation with demographic agents like age, marital or family status, educational level.

In evaluating women's housework, two obstacles stand in the way of obtaining adequate results: 1) scarcity of studies about the nature of domestic tasks, 2) difficulty of defining and covering them.

Changing Public Opinion

Those who are against women's employment use the argument that it would result in unemployment for men.

Refutation of this negative attitude:

1. Women's participation will be gradual and within possibility limits.
2. Women's work is necessary in Lebanon and other Arab countries where male emigration to the oil countries and to the West has obliged women to care for themselves and for their families.
3. The present economic policy tends to increase labor opportunities for both men and women so as to meet the need for increased production.
4. From the social point of view, women's participation in outside work seems indispensable for several factors such as their desire to make use of the vocational training they may have had, the tendency to reduce the number of children per family, modern housekeeping facilities and the sharing of the husband and children in domestic tasks.

Ways of encouraging woman's economic contribution:

1. Redesigning work schedules with the aim of allowing a larger number of women to take part-time or full time jobs.
2. Granting working women certain privileges and advantages in the form of adequate maternity leaves, nursery schools, and the possibility of re-entry after a short absence.
3. Cooperation of social institutions and information media in creating a favorable attitude toward women's work. Women's involvement in political parties would help to promote their involvement in work.

Finally, the effectiveness of national strategic policies regarding woman's work depends on the **preparation of accurate informational data** and the creation of a positive attitude towards it in society as a whole.

1. Abstract of a lecture given by Dr. Huda Zurayk at the Second National Conference for Demographic Policies, organized by the Lebanon Family Planning Association, 1-3 April 1982. See elsewhere in this issue.