

## **Role of the Kuwaiti Woman in Development Administration <sup>(1)</sup>**

The State of Kuwait enjoys a large capital provided by the oil revenues but its work force is much below its need. As a result, the state is obliged to employ a heterogeneous group of foreign specialists to fill its need for development administrators. The mobilization of university women graduates to participate in meeting this need seems quite appropriate.

### **Women Graduates of Kuwait University**

Between 1975 and 1980, the number of women who graduated from the technological institutes affiliated with the Ministry of Education (Normal Training Institute, Institute of Commerce for women, Public Health School) reached 2668, while that of men who graduated from technological institutes reserved for male students attained only 1542; which means that women comprised 63% of the total, and men 37%.

It is expected that in the early eighties Kuwait will face an alarming shortage in administration leaders. The Planning Council presumes the need for 2550 general directors and 4000 executive heads.

### **Women's Participation**

So far, women's participation in administration has taken two forms: first, a highly limited role in the government sector which includes general directors and executive officers; second, a wider involvement in social activity which should allow them to participate in development administration. This involvement takes the form of women's societies and organizations which could extend their influence to state structures and organizations but, so far, have restricted their activity to the holding of tea-parties and dead-end conversations.

### **Women's Work in Government Administration**

1. Their participation in 1972 reached 11,9% of the total work force in the Government sector, 18,2% in 1976.

<sup>(1)</sup> Condensed from an article by Dr. Nasef Abdul Khâleq, in **Journal of the Social Sciences**, (Kuwait University), vol. 9, n°. 4, Dec. 1981, pp. 7-35.



2. The majority of women employees, 43,2%, are concentrated in the educational field and, next, in that of public health.
3. The largest number occupy technological posts where they numbered 4603 in 1976 and formed 54,2% of the total number of women working in the government sector.
4. Women's participation in Government positions in 1976 did not exceed 18,2% of the total number of Government employees.

### Women's Participation in the Public Administration Sector

This sector comprises the Kuwaiti Air Lines, Social Insurance, Central Bank of Kuwait, National Oil Company etc.

Kuwaiti Women graduates of the School of Commerce, Economics and Political Science represent 53% of the total number of graduates of the above school employed in this sector.

### Obstacles to Women's Participation in Development Administration

The total participation of Kuwaiti women in the labor force is reckoned at 3% of the whole and in the upper echelons of administration, it does not exceed 1%.

There are two major factors behind this retardation. **First** is the traditional socialization of women which emphasizes sexism and servitude. "Woman's place is at home and she should devote herself to the home." This common slogan, frequently repeated, is contradicted by a study made in 1979 showing that one hundred thousand of housewives do not perform any work because they entrust their duties to housemaids. The number of unmarried women between 18 and 30 is 45%. In the absence of house duties, these women need an outside job to occupy them. Woman's traditional socialization results in creating in her an attitude of inferiority and self-abasement and in promoting the idea that "a girl's worth is measured only by her attractiveness to the opposite sex."

**Second** is the unfair attitude toward women on the part of both government and society. The labor code does not encourage woman's work by recommending the creation of nurseries for the children of working women. The labor code does not provide working women with a half paid maternity leave for a sufficiently long period, after which they may recuperate their work, and there is dissemination of inexact ideas about women's incapacity for work because of their "unstable temperament," "lack of dependability," "cycles of emotionality due to menstruation," and so on. Recent studies have shown the falsehood of such beliefs and that men are subject to the same cycles of emotionality and instability as women.

### Recommendations

In view of the above facts, the author of the study recommends:

1. Increased representation of women in Social Welfare Committees, Councils of City Quarters and Civil Service, Social Insurance, Planning Committees, Administration of Cooperatives, Sports Unions, etc.
2. Amendment of laws concerning women in the Labor Code.
3. Opening new channels for female work.
4. Giving Kuwaiti women the right of suffrage and election for Parliament.
5. Using information media as a means of influencing public opinion in favor of women's promotion to administrative positions.
6. Urging women's associations to revise their constitutions and programs with the aim of effecting actual participation in social activities and helpful contact with research centers and cultural institutions.
7. Creating a research center for studies regarding the family.

### Kuwait denies Suffrage to Women

In January, 1982 the Kuwaiti Parliament rejected a proposal to allow women to vote and declared that the "time is inopportune for receiving the idea in the light of well-established traditions." Only male, literate Kuwaitis over the age of 21 can vote in elections for Parliament, a law which reduces the number of voters to 13,000 out of a population of 1.3 million.

A telegram of protest against the Parliament's decision was sent to the Speaker of the House by the Kuwait Women's Social and Education Society stating that Kuwaiti women have achieved a more progressive status than those of neighboring countries. Many of them study abroad or hold key posts in the ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, Health and Social Affairs.

Badriya al-Awadhi, Dean of Faculty at Kuwait University, thinks that "it was schizophrenic to allow women to hold high executive posts but deny them the right to vote."

(Asian Women, September 1982, p. 19)

### A Victory

The Women's Liberation Movement in Algeria has forced the government to withdraw the proposed "Family Code" which would have legalized polygamy and treated women as minors under the law. Women held mass demonstrations, demanded public debate, and presented a 10,000 signature petition to the Assembly. Women who had been active in the struggle for Algerian independence demanded to know how a "socialist" government could propose such a blow to women's rights.

(Manushi, no. 12, 1982, p. 35)