

# At the Crossroads of Development

The following article is an excerpt from a paper presented by *Dr. Lubna Ahmed Alkazi* at the regional conference on Planning for the Integration of Arab Women in Economic Development, which was organized by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World.

With declining revenues and national minorities, the Gulf oil rich States are reassessing their development plans. Many ambitious projects have been eliminated, but yet economic self-reliance is a distant goal. They have achieved educational progress and expanded welfare services. Yet, the productivity of nationals is still low. National men are concentrated in administrative white collar occupations by their own choice. While women are being channelled into sex segregated occupations through indirect social consensus. This wastage of Human Capital is irrational and detrimental in the long term future of society. Every individual in the labour active age must contribute to the country's future. How long can Kuwait and its neighbours buy technology and the workers to manage the process? The oil glut has shown these countries that its nationals must now create an income to substitute the oil revenue invested in them. Women are an important half of the society and they must be allowed to participate in their country's future.

**(a) Guided Employment:** Both national men and women should be employed according to their qualifications. Women with Science degrees should work in fields that require this education. Law graduates should practise law and accountants and statisticians must not be channelled to areas not requiring those specializations. Women should be given vacation with the schools, so that children are not neglected in the summer. And one major reason for employment overstaff-

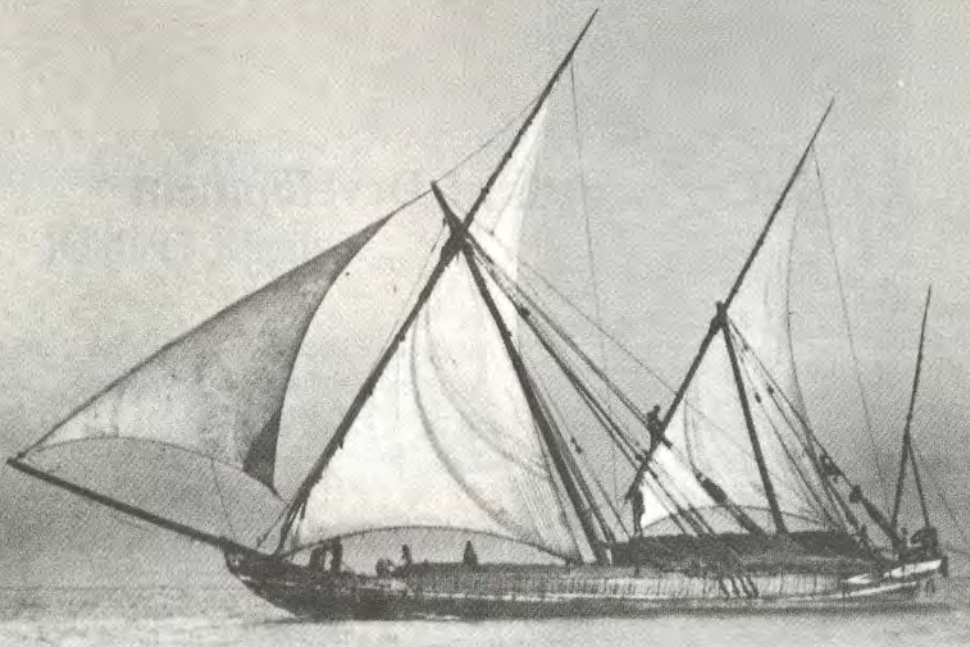
ing in schools would, thus, not be necessary for women.

**(b) Vocational training:** Vocational training for uneducated and less educated women should be opened in various centres of the country. These centres could train women how to operate a telephone board system, typing, weaving textiles, etc. Traditional crafts like dyeing and weaving wool could be revived: along with other crafts such as cane weaving and pottery. These handicrafts could later be exported and create a source of income to the country. There has been a revival of past crafts in Kuwait by private organizations. But on a national level, it would employ larger numbers of workers and contribute to the Gross National Product.

**(c) Daycare centres:** There has been rising discontent with strangers rearing the children isolated in their homes. Daycare centres in the larger bureaucratic organizations or Ministries could be opened for the children of the employees. Mothers could take turns in caring for these children which would not entail an additional staff at the company or in their homes. Furthermore, working mothers would feel a sharing of responsibility with their female colleagues.

**(d) Counselling centres:** Social obstacles are increasing for working women everywhere. In countries with rising unemployment, women workers have been blamed; in countries with rise in drug abuse, mothers have been blamed; rising divorce rates is due to ever demanding wives. Thus, women have to confront various obstacles and accusations if they try to leave the prescribed role for them. The task of balancing domestic roles and careers can be psychologically overwhelm-





ing for many women. Some give up the struggle and return home. In western countries, counselling centres are open for working women to seek advice and solve problems. However, in Gulf societies, there is no qualified centres that women could seek legal and psychological advice. The growing demands on women have increased and counselling centres would help those who need them.

**(e) Dispelling Myths:** Without studies and facts to support them, claims have been made on the instability of female labour. Yet women workers remain in the same occupation longer than men, as they are not willing to risk their jobs. Men are more likely to change occupations in order to find better prospects. Studies should be conducted on job turnover between national men and women to dispel the myth that women are short term workers. Also on-the-job-training is often suited to the male employees by being scheduled in the evenings. Female employees who would wish to benefit

from these training programs cannot do so as double work shifts would create domestic problems. However, if job training was offered during work hours, it would have greater female registration. Women are led to believe that their cohorts are all being employed in segregated areas. But, Kuwaiti women have entered various fields and new occupational possibilities are always created with the expansion of the market. Thus, the contribution of women in various spheres should be publicly known so as to encourage others to venture in these fields.

At present, government officials are complaining that women are only working in sex segregated areas, while they are needed in other areas. However, if a survey was conducted of women in those sex segregated employments, the officials could analyze the cause — is it by the choice of the women workers alone? or, is it imposed on them by the men in their society? What are the benefits in these areas which could be transferred to those areas needing recruitment?