

Development of Arab Women and the Concept of «self-image» ☆

Measuring the economic participation of Women and assessing their share in the development process, implies a deep and comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms and determinants of such participation.

So far, attempts have been made at analyzing relationships between female employment and women's status, fertility patterns, education, legislation and other social and economic variables. However, some basic issues have been overlooked or neglected because of lack of appropriate instruments to use in measuring issues such as:

- **Perception** of Arab women's role in the process of development;
- **Self-image** of Arab women as a result of her participation in economic production;
- **Self actualization**, through participation and the impact of women's employment on:
 - 1 - decision making patterns in the family.
 - 2 - child rearing patterns.
 - 3 - husband-wife relations.
 - 4 - breaking or strengthening of the extended traditional family.

There is a need to work out appropriate concepts, measurements, and analytical processes for the study of the concept of self among Arab women, and how it affects their participation or non-participation in the process of economic development. Evaluating women's share in the development process, should not only be restricted to their economic participation but also to their development as individuals and the impact of their personality on their family and ultimately their community.

These comments are based on the review of available literature at the Documentation Center of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World and on two studies undertaken by the Institute, namely:

- 1 - *A survey of rural household resource allocation in Lebanon in 1975 (a pilot study).*
- 2 - *Sex-role orientation of Arab male and female university students (1979).*

In the survey of rural household resources allocation, it was found that the tools for data collection were excellent for gathering quantifiable data on resources, but not

very efficient in the assessment of the position of women in family interaction, participation of women in decision making process, and in perception of options and constraints that face them and their families.

The objective of the second study was to measure the attitudes of both male and female Arab students towards the role of women in present Arab society and determine the direction and dimension of attitude change. Scaling of responses from traditional to non-traditional was assessed on the basis of conformity of responses to the traditional sex-role pattern in the Arab world. The questionnaire covered issues such as wife-mother role, husband-father role, husband-wife relations, women's employment and economic independence and women's access to education.

It was found that in Lebanon both males and females took a moderate position towards non-traditional sex-roles, with females having significantly more modern attitudes than males.

Socio-economic variables could explain 27% of the total variation in sex-role orientation of the females, and mother's education had the strongest share in the tool of predictability of the variables. Demographic variables such as age, and class at the university explained only 6% of the variation. On the other hand, religion did not account for variation. Although these results are comparable with other research studies on college students both here and in the West, we still have a long way to go in order to explain all the variation. It is possible that additional information on self - image and role perception could add to the understanding of the situation of women in the process of economic development.

It is therefore essential to create models that would be used to study two situations:

- 1 - *A model to measure the impact of Arab women's participation in economic development on their total personality, their family and society.*
- 2 - *A model to measure the reasons for non-participation of Arab women in economic development on three levels: personal, familial and societal.*

(*) Comments made by Julinda Abu Nasr at a meeting of the Population Council, American University of Beirut.