

«Women's Economic Development in the Arab World»

Proceedings of the conference on «The Integration of Arab Women in Economic Development», organized by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World - Beirut University College, Nicosia - Cyprus 1985.

This conference gave a group of 30 Arab women researchers from 10 Arab countries and 5 representatives from research centers in non-Arab countries, the opportunity to meet and discuss, in the light of modern research, problems of prime importance in the life of women to-day, namely their integration in economic development.

The researchers who strongly believe in sexual equality presented seventeen papers revolving around the central theme:

Why do women work? What Kind of work do they do? Does work provide them with economic independence, with cultural and social development? What is the legal status of the working woman? What obstacles stand in the way of her full integration? What solutions may be proposed for her problems?

The topic was wide and multifaceted and gave very different data about the problems of women's work in the various Arab countries. The conference, however, fulfilled its aim by permitting the compilation of the seventeen papers together with reports and recommendations of the participants' committees, into «the book of the Conference» which served as a basis for several speeches and discussions presented by Arab delegates at the Nairobi conference.

To serve as a reference for all those interested in Arab women's integration in development, the Institute has published the proceedings of this conference under the title «Women's Economic Development in the Arab World». The papers are printed in the original language presented at the conference with resumes in English, French and Arabic. The book can be obtained from the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World at Beirut University College.

To give our readers a glimpse of the book we are reproducing as a prologue the paper presented by Professor Rose Ghurayyib, (see p. 3).

Economic Contributions of Women and the Effect of the Dynamics of the Family in two Lebanese Villages

A study prepared by Irene Lorfing and Mona Khalaf. Working Paper No. 148, Geneva, ILO, 1985.

The purpose of the study according to the authors is to assess the economic contribution of women in terms of both earned and imputed income, in two Lebanese Villages, in the Western Beqaa, 40 miles east from Beirut.

The study tries to quantify the contribution of women and her impact on family dynamics, namely in decision making.

It shows that the majority of males are engaged in agriculture and are self employed. The contribution of women is mostly ignored, though they give a big hand to their husbands by spending more than 100 days in the field often helped by their children of both sexes. The contribution of women, according to the research conducted, is not only ignored but women are often seen as inactive family members while men are seen as the sole earners and supporters of their families.

This image is contested by the authors, as even in remote rural areas like the Beqaa women themselves consider their work in family maintenance and production as part of their home-maker's role. Women in these villages and the like in Lebanon are engaged in the production of goods and services for which the household would be dispersed, if not provided by them. These services are obscured by the fact that they are «domestic» in nature and are not perceived by society and above all by women themselves as «income».

The findings reveal that in the majority of households the proportion of income generated by women in terms of salaries, selling of home made products, unpaid agricultural work, animal care and food preservation and processing range between 5 to 25% of the total household income. The study shows that women work most when there is a pressing economic need. When the husband's means improve, they often resort to their domestic duties and others are hired to do the labour in the field.

The research reveals that women have an imputed income contribution. The same cannot be said on earned income in non-agricultural sectors like teachers, clerks, telephone operators and nurses.

The study is highly recommended for sociologists and anthropologists to help them in understanding the change in family dynamics in rural areas in Lebanon.

«Women, Employment and Development in the Arab World»[☆]

Edited by Julinda Abu Nasr, Nabil F. Khoury and Henry T. Azzam.

The launching of the United Nations Women's Decade in Mexico in 1975 sparked an increased interest in the role of women in economic development. This resulted in a number of policy recommendations and research priorities, promoting the integration of women in economic development and suggesting ways in which women contribute to this process.

«Women, Employment and Development in the Arab World» was prepared by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World and the International Labour Organization. The book contains the main determinants of women's productivity in some Arab countries and may well serve as a reference on Arab women's economic activities. It also provides quantitative and qualitative data that may be helpful, to planners, policy makers and researchers.

Chapter one identifies the basic trends in the integration of women in development presenting an overview of the economically active females in the different Arab countries.

Chapter two analyses the role and status of women in the economy of the society of the Yemen Arab Republic.

Chapter three presents a general overview of the employment opportunities available for women in the four Gulf States of Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

Chapter four presents a case study of the employment situation of Lebanese women.

Chapter five presents the characteristics and structure of female labour force participation in Jordan.

The last chapter presents findings of a study measuring attitudes towards the role of women as perceived by both male and female university students in institutions of higher learning in the Arab world.

Notwithstanding the fact that the subject is both complex and intricate and demands further research, recommendations of some avenues that need to be explored in trying to integrate women in the process of economic development are given. The findings and conclusions in this book could be considered an attempt to pinpoint the important role that women should play in the development of Arab countries.



(*) Mouton Publishers, Berlin, 1984, pp. 143.