

A Brief Look at the Lebanese Family Planning Association (LEPA)⁽¹⁾

The IPPF, International Planned Parenthood Federation, founded in 1952, has developed branches all over the world. Its programs are adopted by associations spreading over more than a hundred states. Yet few people are aware of the activities that it has been carrying out. The LFPA which was founded in 1969, affiliated in the same year with the IPPF from which it receives its impetus and the large part of its funds. Since then it has been steadily expanding its activities.

Some people think that the aim of this Association is limited to the implementation of the principle of birth control through the use of contraceptive measures. In fact, its activities go far beyond this aim. Broadly speaking, we may say that the LFPA tries to create in the family, a rational attitude toward pregnancy and child birth, by realizing an equilibrium between its economic status, including health and lodging conditions, and the number of children it plans to have. The age of the couple, and the type of work they do, have also to be considered in the planning process.

This multiple goal requires a preliminary study of the educational, economic and social status of the families that the Association has to deal with. While it fully respects the freedom of each couple to plan the number of their children and to space them, the Association tries to make them aware of this responsibility and of the necessity of fulfilling the duties which the U.N. Charter of Human Rights requires of parents toward their children.

The LFPA has followed since its start a well-defined program of action inspired by the general need and the ready response of the public to its program. In 1974 it effected a field-study, published in two volumes, about the Lebanese Family. The following are the main results, briefly stated:

1. The concept of birth control is not new to Lebanese families, particularly to urban and semi-urban communities, who practiced it in their own way before being acquainted with modern Western methods.

2. The spouses, on the whole, show readiness to practice family planning through the use of contraceptives. A study made in 1971 showed that the husbands, agreement reached 65%, that of the wives 74%. In 1984, the percentage rose to 87% for husbands, and 94% for wives.

3. The attitude of the spouses is basically dependent on their age, their educational, social and economic status, plus their environment and the facilities it offers for child birth and child care.

guidance, and general service. Experience has confirmed the tight relationship existing between family planning on one hand and demographic, economic and lodging conditions on the other.

The demographic question holds a primary importance in developed countries which mobilize all their efforts to prevent overpopulation and keep a birth rate that fits their economic and geographic capacities.

Encouraged by this example, the LFPA has kept contact with the ministries concerned with family planning and the social organization of Lebanon, calling their attention to the necessity of amending old laws and establishing new ones, for the purpose of meeting the needs of the Lebanese Family and improving its status. Its activities covered the following fields:

1. Preparation of field studies about (a) family status, (b) causes of sterility and high birth rate, (c) treatment of problems derived from these conditions.
2. Creating Guidance or consultation clinics for parents in cooperation with the local administration.
3. Creating family planning centres outside the regular clinics, wherever the need is felt and the opportunity avails itself.
4. Training a sufficient number of social workers specialized in family planning.
5. Organization of family planning conferences and panel discussions on family and child welfare.
6. Using information media including television programs, radio broadcasts, newspaper publicity, publication of a monthly periodical and yearly reports.
7. Publishing the recommendations of family planning conferences regarding amendments in the personal status laws, such as fixing the minimum age for marriage, requiring a health certificate from candidates for marriage.

More recent activities:

1. Organizing a workshop on breastfeeding, in 1979, with the aim of recommending this natural function as more beneficial, more convenient and more hygienic than bottle feeding. Besides, it helps in spacing childbirth.
2. Setting-up summer camps for children, an activity which has proved exceedingly useful as it allows them to use their energy in disciplined group

⁽¹⁾ Yearly report of the Lebanese Family Planning Association 1986 (in Arabic) Triennial Plan of the LFPA 1988-1990. "Al-Usra" Magazine, (Arabic). September 1988 and December 1988.

Following this field study, the Association, in spite of the obstacles created by the Lebanese war, has carried on its activity in the fields of consciousness raising,

work, such as games, handicraft, social gatherings, entertainment programs, serious discussions and other educational activities. The success of these camps depends on the availability of trained leaders and necessary equipment. Last summer, 1988, 1500 children, distributed over 9 villages, spent 13 days away from their parents, enjoying open air activities in the districts of Bekaa, Iqlim-el-Kharroub and South Lebanon.

3. Holding a yearly family-planning week. This activity was started 10 years ago. Its aim is to show the importance of women's role in family planning, hence the necessity of liberating women from ignorance, blind obedience to tradition and to tyrannical parents and husbands. Panel discussions were held, meetings between LFPA members and secondary school students took place in various parts of the country. The topics discussed included demographic planning, family relations, the modern concept of woman's liberation, religious law and contraception, sex education, child development, etc.
4. Drawing up a three-year plan, 1988-1990 with a well defined program of work including the following strategies:

a. Increasing the interest and participation of political leaders, parliament members and academies in demographic questions, with the aim of creating a demographic policy which joins together family education and family planning.

b. Assigning to young men and women a more important role in the handling of social and development problems.

c. Keeping on the family planning services offered by clinics and community centers until the government is able to take charge of those services.

d. Continuous efforts for the increased integration of women, particularly rural women, in general development, including that of family economy and the handling of social problems.

f. To eliminate all influences which in the name of religion or tradition, try to hamper or disparage family planning activities.

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