

Saudi Arabia: Development and Growth

The idea of setting up factories for women only was initiated by His Majesty King **Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud**.

The factories will be operating within five years time and will employ around fifty thousand females, who will contribute to relieving the country of its dependence on foreign labor.

The rationale behind the integration of Saudi women in the industrialization endeavors of Saudi Arabia will be discussed in an article titled «Saudi Women and Industry» in this issue of *Al-Raida*. The future issues of *Al-Raida* will cover women of different Arab Gulf States focussing on the potential and responsibilities of women in the process of social and economic development. Here I find it convenient to write about **AGFUND**, the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations. His Royal Highness Prince **Talal Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud** proposed the idea of creating a programme to contribute towards easing the problems of developing countries to UN Secretary-General in 1980.

It was decided that the financial help could best be channelled through these organizations. With strong support from the heads of Arab Gulf states (Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) as well as private donors, governments and corporations inside and outside the Gulf, **AGFUND** was set up in April 1981. The fundamental aims that were delineated in the programme focussed on women and child affairs, and a Women's and Child Bureau was established at **AGFUND**.

With its headquarters in Manama, Bahrain and an office in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, **AGFUND** has a staff of 20 people including seven professionals. **AGFUND** is presided by His Royal Highness Prince **Talal**, assisted by an Administrative Committee comprising representatives from each of the seven contributing countries. **AGFUND** contributed US\$ 133 million as a help towards financing 184 projects that touched over 200 million people in more than 110 countries. Sixty per cent of the funds of the programme were allocated to projects and schemes relating to mother and child; hence priority in support for UN Organizations was given to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). **AGFUND** founder and President, Prince **Talal**, has always emphasized the role of women in social development and the need for the integration of women in social development, «there will be no social development and no improvement in the conditions of children and mothers unless women are integrated in social development».