

The Lebanese Family Planning Association

(October 31, November 1-2, 1985)

The Lebanese Family Planning Organization held its fourth conference on «The Image of Women in the Media» to assess and evaluate the conditions of women in Lebanon. Among the participants were fifty delegates representing women's groups, federations, social and health centers, as well as members of the association.

Dr. Adnan Mroweh, president of LFPA opened the conference by emphasizing the need for family planning to improve the conditions of women in general, and of the rural women in particular. *Dr. Aman Shaarani* gave a speech on the role of the media and its effect on the integration of women in development. She mentioned that the image of women in the media did not reflect the true needs and reality of women, especially on issues like development and the problems that hamper women's integration in development. Instead, the media emphasize the looks of women and portray them as beautiful females while they can be productive members of society sharing the same rights and responsibilities as men. She recommended a more viable policy which would aim at changing the traditional image of women, and enacting laws that do not discriminate against the employment of women in the public and private sectors. She also suggested preparing special programmes that will educate women and make them aware of their different roles in society.

On the second day of the conference, *Dr. Hashem Husseini* gave a speech on the image of women and the changing reality. He said that the image of women in the media is a reflection of their image in society, and any change in this image is linked to changing women's conditions. The media usually like to please the people, and have more power to re-inforce existing values and concepts than to promote new ones. People tend to respond to images and ideas that they already believe and are common to them.

Mrs. Nabila Breir (UNICEF) presented an assessment of the UN decade for women conference that was convened in Nairobi, July 1985. She stressed the need

for more interaction between the administrative and financial bodies and women's organizations and associations. She also spoke about the workshops that were held in Nairobi and that were related to Arab women emphasizing the need for eradication of illiteracy of women in order to enhance their integration in development.

Discussions in the conference revolved around four major areas, namely: the media, the decision-making process, Nairobi, and women's integration in society. For each of these areas, the following recommendations were suggested:

The Media

- To determine the important role the media play in re-inforcing the status of women, emphasizing the need for field studies before preparation of the programmes.
- To encourage the television to reject all advertisements that portray women in a sexist manner.
- To have the media accessible to all areas of Lebanon.
- To appeal to women's organizations to cooperate with the media to promote a positive image of women, whereby a committee will coordinate with the censorship board at the ministry of information to identify the programmes that mispresent women.

The Decision-Making Process

- To recognize women's rights in the decision-making process in Lebanon.
- To modify legal and constitutional laws to conform to the principles of equality.
- To adopt and implement the recommended changes by most organizations and federations and policy-planners.
- To study women's status specially when modifying legal and constitutional laws.



Nairobi Conference

- To hold a conference to assess the recommendations that were reached at the end of the decade for women.
- To form a follow-up committee to study all forms of discrimination against women.
- To call upon the mass media to cover all conferences relating to women, noting that the media's treatment of women is narrow, with little response to changes in women's lives and aspirations.

Women's Integration in Society

- To provide training centers for women in all areas of Lebanon.
- To recognize the need for women's integration in governmental and non-governmental organizations.
- To carry out research studies on the reasons that hamper women's integration in public life.

General Recommendations

- To modify all laws that do not safeguard the equal rights of women, especially concerning laws of citizenship for Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese men.
- To sponsor more field-work studies and increase the number of field-works in all areas of Lebanon.
- To recognize the pervasive influence of the media on attitudes and opinions; the way women are

presented will strongly affect people's notions on the status of women.

- To encourage men's participation and the educational bodies in such conferences.

To conclude, it is clear that knowledge of how human beings react to the media is very diverse, yet the media can influence the audience to abandon stereotypic thinking and to reinforce a positive image of women. Women rarely appear in «hard news» covering which reflects their exclusion from decision-making positions. Most of the people who set the policy in the media are men, and this imbalance poses a problem of perspective which can be solved by hiring more women in the media.

At the international level, UNESCO and the UN Fund for population activities are helping establish feature services for news about women in different regions around the world. The aim of the project, according to UNESCO is to make sure that «the image of women projected will be closer to the realities of a society in a process of change»⁽¹⁾, it is impossible for the media, print or broadcast to have a positive presentation of women as long as discrimination against women is still accepted in the real world.

Aida Arasoghli

(1) «Regional Women's Feature Devices Taking Shape», UNESCO press release, May 23, 1978.