

The Government of the Sultanate of Oman recognizes that human development, defined by UNDP as the expansion of people's choices is achievable when the people have access to services, commodities and knowledge.

Based on this, social and economic changes have taken place that have led to the improvements in the quality of life and standards of living which was noted by the Human Development Report of 1997. Also progress has been made in closing the gaps between rural and urban areas, men and women, human resources and the labour requirements of the socio-economic structures of the country.

The present report presents and measures advancements achieved by Omani women since 1995 in accordance with the objectives of FWCW. The main focus of the analytical material which the report contains concentrated on four different areas:

- 1) General Trends to achieve equality between men and women in areas such as education, health and employment (from 1995 to present).
- 2) Financial and institutional measures adopted to realize equality between men and women and in bridging the gender gap.
- 3) Achievements which have been reached in implementing the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action as a result of integrating gender issues into the development plans and programmes.
- 4) Recommended operational measures which will enhance in the advancement of Omani women in light of globalization.

Chapter I

Challenges facing the Omani women in empowering them in participating in economic and social life.

The traditional perception of women which narrows their role to the reproductive and familial role which is an inherited perception

lack of knowledge by women of their Sharia and legal rights

Insufficiency of support services for women such as day care centers, vocational training, information on labour market requirement or on credit.

policies and mechanisms that have been adopted for the advancement of Omani women

Eradication of poverty among women through productive programmes

INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL MEASURES

Financial:

The methods that are presently used in distributing the General budget over the different sectors do not allow monitoring the general or specific expenditures for programmes for the advancement of women nor can they provide a percentage of expenditure, therefore, it is not possible to find a trend in expenditure proportion since 1995. However, it can be said that there is an increase in expenditure for programmes and projects for women through other indicators which demonstrate clear achievement in areas such as education, combating of illiteracy, public health, reproductive health and cultural awareness. Presently the Ministry of National Economy is working at disseminating data by Gender and providing this information to those responsible for allocation of general resources that are specific for the advancement of women.

Along with this, training is ongoing for personnel in both the public and private sector in data processing according to gender concepts and issues.

Institutional Measures:

Is defined as the laws, legislations decisions and administrative directives that governs the practical activities within any administrative structure in any governmental institution. That also applies to the external relations of such institutions and organizations. The Institutional mechanisms is one of the twelve areas of the PFA which had been given priority according to para 196. Based on that this part gives importance to highlight goals and problems related to the institutional structures in the administration of women affairs. In addition it identifies mechanisms and Institutional structures which that state has established before and after 1995 which are targeted towards strengthening the status of women in the Omani society.

WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

National objectives:

1. Increase the participation of national work force in general and women in particular.
2. Increase the participation of women through ensuring equal opportunity in education, equal wages and work benefits.
3. Providing assistance to women to undertake productive projects.
4. Monitoring the needs of the labor market so as to identify available opportunities for employment and making this information available through a database.
5. The provision of support services for working women such as expansion of day care centers in both private and public institutions.
6. Feminization of occupations that women can do such as teaching at the basic level.
7. Strengthening the cooperation and coordination between the Government and the public sector and the women organizations in order to provide support to these NGOs.
8. Raise the living standard of poor families.
9. Give due attention to training of national work force.

Policies and mechanisms:

1. To develop the basic education and to expand and ensure equal opportunities in education
2. Raise the awareness of women about their role.
3. Provision information and data for proper planning purposes through regularly updated database.
4. Establish data base on women and children for planning purposes and establishing programmes.
5. Expanding the women volunteer work both in numbers and geographic coverage and providing it with the necessary financial and technical support because it is important to backstop government development efforts.

Achievements:

1. Adopting the proper measures to increase the number of women at the various levels has led to an increase in the number of women who are employed and it is expected that more women will enter the workforce during the coming few years. Increase in the rate of economic participation of women from 6.7 in 1993 to 10.2 in 1997, and increase of employment of women in the public sector from 20% in 1995 to 24% in 1997.
2. About 57% who are working are in the age group of 20s and 73% work in the public sector.

Sectors:

In agriculture, the participation of women increased from 6.1 in 1993 to 11.4 in 1996. In industry, from 20.9 to 26.4 and services sector, from .9 to 9.7 for the same years.

Obstacles:

1. The role that the family and some teachers and educational institutions play in forming a negative self perception. Therefore what is needed is to develop positive perception about women and their abilities to contribute to national development.
2. The preference given to men over women in some employment even if she is fully qualified. Also preference is given to the expatriates to Omani women due to differences in wages or benefits.
3. Most of the private sector institutions are concentrated in the Muscat province which does not allow many women to be employed. Also, these institutions do not provide social services for women.
4. In the industrial sectors there are no services for the children of the women workers and no health services for both men and women.
5. The insufficiency of occupational counselling whether in the General Education or at the University which hinders the Omani women the occupation which is appropriate for their qualifications. Many female secondary school graduates register in Colleges of Education or Medicine because such areas are...
6. The belief among some men that women compete against them in the labor market which is against the concept of complementarity between them and the best investment is human resources.
7. The national inclination of women to work is limited number of occupations such as clerical, teaching and medical area.
8. The responsibility of the women within the context of her family.
9. Many women prefer not to work after marriage

Future Actions:

The Sultan is presently in the process of developing modern programmes that introduce technology, new knowledge, new skills especially in the industrial sector. Also, there is a need to develop the technical skills of the local population so as to allow mobility among the production sectors. Within its context there is a need to prepare and train women so they can have new opportunities through:

1. Adopting an educational academic programme that provides General Science Education as well as applied skills.
2. Introducing the educational system that would allow on the job training and which require links between the educational institutions and the economic sectors.

3. Adopting special programmes open to young girls, after the compulsory education phase.

WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

Future Actions:

- A. To eliminate the social obstacles and values that hinder women's employment and to identify the positions and occupations in which women can be employed.
- B. Adopt plans for employments of graduates in various sectors
- C. Activate networks of communication and coordination between educational and training institutions and employment institutions
- D. Establish specialized employment units centrally and in the provinces for women to direct women to appropriate employment opportunities
- E. To activate women NGOs so that they can promote awareness on employment for women and provide information to women on banks and similar institutions as well as support them with equipment, etc.
- F. Facilitate access of women to soft loans and credits through applying pressure on banks to establish specialized department for small business credit
- G. Mobilize local resources as well as foreign capital to finance projects for women.
- H. Activate the role of women NGOs to adopt long-term plans for the advancement of women.
- I. Develop Centre for Technical and Vocational Training so that they can provide training for young girls.
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DECISION-MAKING

Objectives:

1. To identify a proactive role for women in the decision-making process.
2. To expand the consultative circles around the decision making process.

Policies of mechanisms

1. To train on a continuous basis members of women NGOs on negotiation skills, parliamentary procedures, constructive discussions.
2. Establish a database on issues relevant to women for use in guiding the decision making in matters that affect women or families and different population groups.
3. Increasing the number of women in leadership positions at all governmental levels.
4. Increasing the ratio of women in the two Councils, the Shura and the State Councils.

Progress achieved:

1. Women are now represented in the two Councils. The first time that the Omani women were allowed to be nominated for the Shura Council was in 1992. Two women were elected and they represent the Muscat Province. Also, the women membership in the State Council increased in 1997 and there are now 4 women out of 41 members.

Decision-making:

2. Women in leadership positions

There were 3 deputy ministers in 1998 in the National Economy, Social Affairs, Labor and Vocational Training and the Ministry of Education.

Also, women were appointed as advisers in various ministries and one as an expert. Also, there were 7 Director Generals, 22 directors in government offices.

Women in the Public Sector

Between 1985 and 1998, the participation of women in the public sector increased from 8.3% to 25%. While during the same period, the ratio of participation of men in the public sector decreased because of laws allowing early retirement.

Twenty-two percent of the civil servants in 1997 were women working in the following sectors: health, education, higher education, social affairs, labor and vocational training. The greatest numbers are in higher education and health which reached 68% of the total employed in 1997. There are almost no women in the offices of the Council of Ministers and in the Council of Civil

Servants. Most of the workers are between 20-35 years old.

Women in the Private Sector

Women are working in private sector occupations that require applied technical and clerical skills as well as services. The Omani women are also involved in business.

Women Volunteers in the Social Sector

Women NGOs are monitored by the Department for Cultural Women NGOs in the Ministry of Social Affairs. There is always encouragement to establish women NGOs because it is a mechanism that allows women to participate in decision making and to be involved in community work.

In 1998, there were 23 such women organizations and those located in the provinces are considered main social institutions through which governmental service are linked to the people. Also through these organizations, women provide an indirect input into decision-making processes. These organizations have focused on three areas of concern that are part of PFA:

1. Poverty reduction
2. Participation of women in decision-making
3. Women in the family

Future Actions

Omani women's participation in the NGOs indirect participation. Therefore allow women to greater participate action should be taken:

1. Ensure that there are opportunities for more women to participate in the decision-making at the level of community.
 2. Ensure the training of women in technical and managerial programmes so that they can make their decision in a more informed manner.
 3. Ensure proper opportunities for women in the planning aspects of community projects and links to central structures.
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HEALTH

The objectives of the Human Development Plan in the area of women and children:

1. Providing primary health services for all population
2. Decreasing infant mortality, child and maternal mortality
3. Vaccinating all children under 5 against the six childhood diseases as well as hepatitis
4. Increasing the number of deliveries in hospitals and mothers child centers
5. Increasing the percentage of employment of support medical services personnel.
6. Integrating mother childhood services within primary health services
7. Providing pre and post natal health care for mother and ensuring child spacing so as to reduce infant and maternal mortality
8. Encouraging pre-marital health examination and increasing the number of centers that provide such services
9. Giving due attention to awareness campaigns
10. Developing and training national male and female personnel in all health services
11. Working to increase the participation of communities (in providing health services)

Policies and measures in the area of health:

1. To complete implementation of primary health programmes including the provision of preventive health care and ensuring the allocation of governmental resources for these programmes.
2. Developing national capacities
3. Increasing the size of graduates in the various professions and ensuring self-reliance in meeting new needs.
4. Ensuring access of the population to primary health care and providing other services in accordance to available resources
5. Increasing the participation of nationals and the expatriates in bearing some of the cost of curative health services with the objective of increasing health services in general.
6. Strengthening the role of the private sector in the area of health services through:
 - a) providing soft loans for the construction of hospitals, private clinics and laboratories.
 - b) Outsourcing some of the health services to the private sector

Achievements:

1. Establishment of Sultan Qaboos University in 1986 in order to provide the national human resources in different specialization such as medicine and science, etc.
2. Establishment of 14 institutes linked to Ministry of Health, 11 of which are devoted for preparing female nurses and the remaining devoted to meeting other needs such as physiotherapy health education, nutrition, assistance in the area of pharmacy, public health, general administration and dentistry.
3. Support groups have been established for health services including community

participation.

4. Establishing volunteer groups to assist health personnel.
5. A Birth spacing programme was established which provides counselling and choice contraceptive methods with emphasis on the role of the man in birth spacing decisions.
6. A Programme to support mother and child care was establishment in 1987 and has been expanded recently to provides reproductive health care for women.
7. Some communities are provided with health services by the Ministries of Defense, Oman police and the Company for Omani Oil.
8. The private sector has undertaken a small role in providing health services under the supervision of the Ministry of Health.
9. All hospitals provide primary and preventive health care
10. Health centers now provide 96% of the health needs of the country.

Indicators in the health sector:

- There are more female graduates than male of the 14 centers of the Ministry of Health
 - 1187 women versus 345
 - In 1997, 437 graduated from the nursing institute and women double the men. 117 men and 320 women. Out of these, 20 of them to specialized 8 men and 12 women
 - There are 2500 female volunteers in the health sector
 - There is an expansion in the birth spacing programmes in 1997, 89% of those who were in the programme were Omani women.
 - Infant mortality decreased from 23 per 1000 births in 1994 to 18 per 1000 in 1998
 - Maternal mortality has decreased from 27 to 18.5 during the same years
 - Pre- and post-natal care covers 96 % of women who are pregnant, 92 have delivered in hospitals. Abortion has decreased to 12.7 to 1000 women ages 15-49.
 - Decrease in children with malnutrition 18 in 1998
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WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

There was a national seminar held in Muscat in 1994 to examine the role of women in protecting the environment and it made many recommendations for inclusion in development plan including:

- increasing the opportunities in education and training in areas related to environmental protection
- increasing women's participation in decision-making related to environment\
- establishing a Committee for Women representing different sectors under the supervision of the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment in order to deal with all issues related to women and the environment.

Progress:

- There are now 54 volunteer groups for environmental awareness in which the Omani women participate extensively.
- In order to encourage women to implement environmentally-friendly projects, a number of women were given permission to establish ins.. . Institutions of Environmental importance during the period 1995-1997 such as freezing and packaging fish, carpentry, production of plant outs and production of plastics.
- Twenty-one women were trained on environmental skills.
- Provide information on environment, the proper use of communities and products.
- Athirteen women were appointed in managerial and technical posts of the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment during the period 1995-1998.

Obstacles:

A major obstacle is the absence of database and information on Women and Environment that could provide information on representation of women in social services as it relates to her participation in the use of natural resources. Due to the absence of the data and information, it is difficult to calculate indicators to measure the contribution of women to environmental well-being especially those aspects related to quality of life.

WOMEN AND MEDIA:

Progress:

Some of the progress was reflected in documentary programmes about women showing their development and advancement and emphasis on the importance of political participation.

These included:

Radio programmes, weekly T.V. programmes for women available since 1994, special pages in newspapers that highlight activities undertaken by Omani women. In addition developmental drama in both T.V. and Radio to show the changing role of women

Employment and the Media:

- Men and women have ensured rights to the same wages, benefits, and responsibilities and rights since 1995.
 - Also, higher level appointments have been made such as General Director of the radio station and Chief of Personnel
- In the media, the emphasis is given to highlighting on the role of women
- All the election processes now encourage women to participate in the local NGOs or in the Shura Council. Oman is the only GCC country that has a woman in the Shura Council
 - Media and rural women and Bodwan: Media services focus on women in rural areas as well as in the remote areas.
 - The media also tries to raise the awareness of these women and the community regarding four things:
 - a) the proper raising and socialization of children
 - b) to highlight the importance of the Shura Council
 - c) To give attention to the participation with men - employment
 - d) to mobilize public opinion against violence against women
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GIRL CHILD

Objectives:

Promoting believe in the right of the child, based on all religions, Islamic and International and National legislation, which call for elimination of discrimination against the girl child, the S. Oman ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child by Sultani decree no. 96/54. In October 1997, another decree was issue no. 97/71 to reorganize the National Committee for Childhood to be headed by the Minister of Social Affairs, Labour and Voluntary Training with membership of all ministries concerned. The role of this national committee is to adopt comprehensive policies and monitor their implementation and ensure coordination among ministries.

Progress in the Situation of the Girl Child:

- 1- In order to formulate programmes, a database is established in order to provide profile of the girl-child.
2. Also with the help of UNICEF, the Ministry of Social Affairs conducted a series of training workshops to:
 - a) Train trainers who will be responsible to increase awareness about the Convention of the Child
 - b) Train media personnel
 - c) Provide workshops for the senior officials of the relevant ministries as well as related ones including health, education, social affairs, Islamic Affairs, Justice, Police, Information and Foreign Affairs.
 - d) Provide Workhops for scouts to make them aware of the rights of the child.
 - e) Convene a conference among children in Muscat to simplify the concepts of the Convention.
 - f) Issuing a new Personal Status Law that stipulates 18 as the minimum age for marriage for girls and also stipulates her consent.
 - g) The rate of dropout of girls in the Intermediate or Secondary levels have decreased between 1994 and 1997 which indicates that more girls are completing their education and not marrying early.
 - h) The noticeable improvement in the general health of children in accordance to various indicators.
 - i) Increase in the number of "development homes of the rural children" and in the number of registered children houses (6 months to 3 years)
 - j) Increase in pre-school education which indicates that women are encouraging their girls to go to school and women to be employed
 - k) The increase in the number of pre-school centers in the various NGOs

No obstacles are mentioned.

No future actions are mentioned.

- a) National workshops on advanced statistical techniques on gender and ensuring the participation of producers and users of such statistics.
 - b) Promoting the external training of social statistics on Gender Statistics
 - c) Development and distribution of educational and information materials such as publications on statistical profiles of men and women in Oman, newsletters on economic and social development of gender in public and private sectors and NGOs
 - d) Development of national database with gender disaggregation
 - e) Promoting cooperation with international organizations such as ESCWA in the area of gender statistics.
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Human Rights

Personal Status Law Sultan's Decree No. 32/97. It has six Chapters, 282 Articles that regulates family relations, marriage, divorce, custody and other related matters. It was based on Islamic Sharia. Out of the 282 articles, 127 regulate matters related to engagement, marriage, divorce and custody. These articles gave women privileges in addition to what the Sharia has stipulated.

1. The law gave the women the right to break an engagement to request a divorce.
2. It gives the women the right to manage her dowry as she pleases.
3. The law stipulates that the wife has the right to family name, to have total control over her private wealth, and that the husband cannot cause harm both morally and materially.
4. He cannot force her to live with another wife without her consent and she has the right to demand a separate home should she experience any harm.
5. Omani women in Muscat got the right to vote in 1994, and in 1997 all Omani women got the right to vote.
6. It is expected that the of women in the legal area will increase because in 1997 the College of Law and Sharia was established and women have the right to enrol in the University.