

KUWAIT

Brief overview of Kuwait's experience in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing + 10)

The State of Kuwait is committed to implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and has taken various measures to that end.

Kuwait's top three priorities

I. Safeguard (Kuwaiti) women's right to participate in power structures and decision-making

1. Achievements:

- His Highness, Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, has indicated that this is a matter warranting serious attention, and accordingly issued a decree granting women full political rights.
- Women' right to stand as candidates for election to the Municipal Council has been approved.
- The Minister of the Interior has approved the proposed appointment of women environmental focal points.

2. Difficulties and obstacles:

- The Emir's decree granting women full political rights was not passed by the National Assembly because of a coalition of conservative and tribal forces. The measure failed by a margin of only two votes.

3. Solutions:

- Enlarging the pool of women qualified to rise to leadership posts;
- Training courses in social leadership and communication techniques for women working in local, national, regional and international organizations;
- Governmental and non-governmental bodies currently seeking to integrate women's issues into the country's public policy orientations and to promote women's advancement in general are responsible for helping society realize that it is important for women to be represented in decision-making posts, as the country would benefit as a result;
- Preparation of educational, cultural and informational programmes aimed at enhancing the image of women, especially in power and decision-making centres.

Outcome of the failure of this initiative

Kuwaiti women are determined to try again to have the Emir's decree approved.

II. Strengthen Arab women's economic self-reliance and capacities with a view to enabling them to enter the workforce

The socio-economic changes that Kuwait is currently experiencing have led to higher female labour force participation rates and higher education levels for women. Women have begun to take their place alongside men in economic leadership posts, even economic decision-making posts. Women in Kuwait are now moving into important economic posts. They are becoming empowered and enhancing their capacities and self-reliance.

1. Achievements :

- Establishment of a Kuwaiti businesswomen's committee;
- Election of Sheikha Hessa Saad al-Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah as President of the Council for Arab Business Women for the second time;
- Opening of a women's stock market;
- Women now attend and participate in all economic fora and global conferences, thereby enhancing their skills and abilities in that field.

2. Obstacles:

- Comparatively few women have gone into the stock market, personally and directly, as yet. Most of them make use of the services of representatives and brokerage offices to handle their economic affairs.

3. Solutions :

- Activation of Kuwaiti legislation to safeguard equal employment opportunity for women;
- Enlistment of working women as participants in the drafting of legislation relating to the civil service and prospects for promotion;
- Enactment of laws providing for leave with pay to allow women employees to fulfil their family responsibilities:
 - Two months' maternity leave with full pay;
 - Six months' child care leave with half pay;
 - Leave to accompany a family member who is ill or a member of the diplomatic corps, or to perform any official function outside Kuwait.
- Establishment of child care facilities at ministries, companies and workplaces to enable women to reconcile their economic and family roles;
- Implementation of socio-economic programmes to facilitate women's participation in the workforce;
- It is essential for women's committees in trade unions, professional associations and other organizations to provide services for young women who are not working;
- Organization of exhibitions for articles produced by women.

III. Women as contributors to natural resource management and environmental conservation

Many factors have contributed to Kuwait's environmental problems. The most important of those factors is the unprovoked Iraqi invasion of 1990, which resulted in the contamination and degradation of Kuwait's land, air and marine environment. Another factor has been industrial activity. Fish stocks are depleted, and the natural desert plant cover has also been damaged as a result of wars and lack of conservation measures.

1. Achievements :

- Women environmental focal points (important partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs));
- Formation of a volunteer environmental protection committee and establishment of desert bird and plant sanctuaries and fish sanctuaries;
- Campaigns aimed at making people in Kuwait aware of their water and electricity consumption, featuring material and moral incentives and conducted by women in partnership with men.

2. Obstacles:

- There is still relatively little environmental awareness.

3. Solutions :

- Enlistment of women as participants in natural and environmental resource management planning and in monitoring and follow-up action;
- Enlistment of women as participants in the enactment of environmental legislation;
- Development of educational courses on environmental conservation;
- Focus on women's NGOs as pioneers in shaping public opinion;
- Making advantageous use of environmental data and women's experience in environmental conservation (as in tilling land near their homes and using it for growing crops);
- Development of programmes for the general public and training courses on the environment and environmental conservation (water, the marine environment, the desert environment);
- Funding for environmentally beneficial projects and programmes;
- Action to address environmental pollution and deal with its sources.

Outcome of the success of this initiative

Greater awareness among housewives of the importance of the environment and environmental conservation.

Women and armed conflict

As a result of the unprovoked Iraqi attack on Kuwait in 1990, there remain no fewer than 625 persons who were captured and whose fate, as of this writing, is still unknown, apart from the occasional report of a death. This situation has caused Kuwaiti families grievous suffering for 14 long years. These men's mothers, wives, sisters and daughters have been afflicted with profound psychological problems, including:

- Learning difficulties;
- New psychological disorders in our society, with children and young people being particularly affected;
- Frequent family disintegration as a result of the absence of a father, brother or husband.

Achievements:

- The Social Development Office, which serves this category of persons who have suffered psychological trauma as a result of the invasion and the capture, and now the martyrdom, of their men in captivity;
- The Martyr's Bureau, which provides special care for these persons who have suffered psychological trauma as a result of learning that their man has been killed, and consequently have lost all hope of ever seeing him again, after having been sustained by that hope after the fall of the tyrannical regime;
- Many public-interest associations have established committees with the express function of keeping in touch with the families of these missing persons and offering them encouragement and support;
- The National Committee on Prisoners and Missing Persons has provided these families with services for fourteen years, and continues to provide them with intensive material and moral support.

Obstacles:

The recent armed conflicts in the Gulf region have been a source of suffering to the women of the region. Moreover, terrorism in the region has had both direct and indirect psychological impacts on Kuwaiti women. Kuwait women are naturally peaceable, rejecting terrorism in all forms and leading lives in which persuasion is the rule, rather than force.

Violence against women

Kuwait is a State that unequivocally condemns violence in all forms. It has consistently sought to eliminate violence, whether directed against individuals or States, and has enacted legislation aimed at eliminating that phenomenon. Violence against women specifically is not a big, clear picture; it is something that occurs in some families, and is related to customs and traditions that tend to prevent women from recognizing the phenomenon for what it is and, as a rule, involve the family environment. However, Kuwait's legislation includes clear and unambiguous provisions making any person who engages in violence liable to penalties and safeguarding the

rights of women, whether wives, mothers, children or sisters, in accordance with the law of the land and Islamic law.

Achievements:

- In September 1994, Kuwait ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, albeit with reservations to some articles dealing with public life and political rights (article 7), nationality (article 9), family law, marriage, divorce and inheritance according to Islamic law (article 16) and the settlement of disputes between signatory States (article 20);
- Women's public-interest associations are working to empower women and promote their rights by organizing campaigns aimed at the enactment of amendments to legislation that discriminates between men and women. They are also working to eliminate discrimination and violence against women.

Obstacles:

Some Kuwait families are still influenced by customs and traditions which, while not promoted by the State, tend to make it difficult for women to admit that they are being subjected to violence at the hands of their husbands, fathers or brothers. They are content with simple, direct solutions that do not guarantee that their rights will be respected or that they will not be subjected to further violence.

Women and poverty

Kuwaiti women do not live below the global poverty line, as they enjoy a daily income that is above the world average. Women who have no one to support them are entitled to a State allowance paid by the Ministry of Social Affairs. This allowance, too, is above the global poverty line.

Achievements:

- Support for small business ventures by women in the form of markets and exhibitions for honest but needy families. Responsibility for this initiative is shared by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and public-interest associations;
- Cash loans to women, and support for them in the form of economic advice, investment advice or credit;
- Capital support for poverty-mitigating small business ventures by women;
- Legislation making provision for social insurance for women after the legal age of retirement, with generous allowances for life. These allowances provide an average of 65 per cent of women's total income during retirement, and thus help them to lead lives of dignity;
- Female labour force participation was 31.3 per cent in 2000, up from 23 per cent in 1994.

Education and training of women

In Kuwait, girls began to attend school in 1943. Government-funded education is free up to the university level, and this has made it easier for women to acquire an education. Kuwaiti law has eliminated disparities between men and women in the matter of free, compulsory education.

Achievements:

- Establishment of evening and morning literacy classes for women;
- Establishment of school classes for children with special needs (Down's syndrome and autism) and disabilities (visual, hearing and motor);
- Establishment of training institutes for women to upgrade their potential employability (including in particular the Vocational Training, Science and Technology Institute), and special courses to enable them to develop their skills, in Kuwait or abroad;
- Kuwait enjoys a particularly high literacy rate. In 2000, 79.9 per cent of Kuwaiti women and 84.3 per cent of Kuwaiti men over the age of 15 were able to read and write;
- Girls' school enrolment was higher at all levels during the period 1995-1999 than during the preceding five-year period, 1990-1994. At the primary level, 77 girls attended school for every 100 boys between 1995 and 1999, up from 67 during the preceding period, while the corresponding figures for the secondary level were 66 and 62 respectively. The numbers of women students attending university have also increased;
- In 2000, 41.7 per cent of women university students took arts, education and the humanities, compared to 16.4 per cent of men students, while 40.7 per cent of the women studied business administration, law and social science, compared to 65.9 per cent of their male counterparts. Women studying engineering accounted for 5.3 per cent of the total, compared to 9.9 per cent for men, and women studying health science represented 3.3 per cent of the total, compared to 4.4 per cent for men;
- Computer science is a compulsory subject in all Government-run schools.

Obstacles:

A small percentage of girls drop out of school before completing the secondary level, i.e. after completing their compulsory education, to attend vocational institutes and take training and skills development courses.

There is little desire to go on to university, despite the fact that it is free of charge; many students prefer to look for a job with lower-level educational qualifications.

Some curricula have not kept pace with information science and technology, and some are poorly adapted to the types of employment available in Kuwait. Consequently, it is essential to develop training courses. The State should devote a special budget to courses of this kind aimed expressly at its employees.

Women and health

Achievements:

- Establishment of special centres for maternal and child care and for the care of pregnant and nursing women; services are provided free of charge, except in private hospitals. As a result, the maternal mortality rate and under-five mortality rate have both declined;
- All aspects of child care are available;
- Preventive health centres, such as maternal and child health centres (which are compulsory); these centres also provide information about the period from birth to early childhood;
- Organization of global conferences and awareness campaigns on infectious diseases or diseases associated with drug addiction;
- Arriving workers are subjected to a detailed medical examination to make sure that they are in good health;
- Scientific research centres that conduct studies on women's health, issue publications aimed at heightening awareness and present television programmes on women's health (including the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, the Institute for Scientific Development, research centres at the university and training centres within the Ministry of Health);
- Establishment of centres for family physicians;
- Government-run hospitals and health centres are linked in an electronic network containing files for all references;
- Working mothers with infants to care for are entitled to nursing breaks;
- Two years of maternity leave, including six months on half pay;
- Free health care for elderly men and women at home, with any necessary treatment provided free of charge;
- Establishment of the National Committee for Drug Control, which includes women members and works with Her Highness Sheikha Hessa Saad al-Abdullah al-Sabah.

Obstacles:

- Low level of health awareness among some women who come to Kuwait, especially domestic workers;
- Lack of interest in some cases in making use of these centres or continuing to receive care, despite the fact that it is free.

Women and the economy

Accomplishments:

1. Women's stock market;
2. Establishment of the Kuwaiti Businesswomen's Committee.

The Kuwaiti Businesswomen's Committee is a member of the umbrella organization known as the Union of Kuwaiti Women Associations, to which many groups concerned with women's issues in Kuwait belong.

Introduction to the Committee

The Kuwaiti Businesswomen's Committee is a not-for-profit socio-economic organization made up of Kuwaiti businesswomen that is completely independent in terms of its structure and activities.

Objectives of the Committee

- To strengthen and develop economic relations and trade links between Kuwaiti businesswomen within the country, and to develop relations between them and their counterparts in other countries, in the interests of the economic development process in Kuwait;
- To strengthen the role played by Kuwaiti women in economic decision-making, especially with respect to the pursuit of commercial and economic activities;
- To encourage women to contribute effectively to the establishment of small industrial and craft-based business enterprises, which constitute an important and far from negligible part of the national economy;
- To identify women's experience and capacities and harness them for the development of all aspects—commercial, economic, scientific, cultural and others—of Kuwaiti society, for the benefit of the country as a whole;
- To enhance awareness of the legal bases underpinning commercial and economic activities to which Kuwaiti women contribute;
- To represent Kuwaiti businesswomen at regional and international economic conferences, receive delegations from organizations that share the Committee's objectives, and strengthen relations of cooperation between Kuwaiti businesswomen and their counterparts in other countries.

Women and the environment

The originator of the "women environmental focal points" project was Her Highness Sheikha Latifa al-Fahd al-Salem al-Sabah, the President of the Kuwait Women's Voluntary Association for Community Service. The aims of the project are to highlight women's role in the community with respect to the upgrading of environmental conditions, strengthen the role played by ordinary citizens in environmental protection, promote rational consumption, enhance the role of grassroots organizations in supporting environmental health awareness projects in the country's

various governorates, and activate the role of mosques, schools and cooperative associations in that connection. The project also seeks to ensure that focal points can be effective in mobilizing the people of the region for community service purposes and helping families and homemakers contribute to the task of improving environmental conditions in their communities.

The overall goal of the project is to provide social services on a regional basis.

Lastly, the post of woman environmental focal point is a voluntary one, established for the purpose of making a positive contribution to the country and enhance its status, with a view to ensuring that it occupies its rightful place among advanced States.

The Minister of the Interior has approved the proposed appointment of women environmental focal points.

Women in power and decision-making

Achievements:

- Kuwaiti women now hold a number of important posts, including:
 - The first woman university rector in the Arab world;
 - The first woman ambassador;
 - Permanent Representative and Head of Mission to the United Nations, the first Arab Muslim woman to hold such a post;
 - Member of the Kuwaiti delegation to OAPEC;
 - Members of many boards of directors;
 - Many women now chair the boards of directors of banks and other institutions, and Kuwait has women deputy ministers;
 - Various decision-making posts in governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Part III of the questionnaire Institutional development

- The Constitution of Kuwait enshrines the status of women as citizens, and other legislation extends that Constitutional guarantee into all areas of life;
- The Ministry of Justice offers legal channels that women can use in the event of gender-based discrimination;
- The civil service extends constitutional law enshrining the status of women;
- The Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs (Islamic Law and Legislation Directorate);
- Direct responsibility for the advancement of women in particular has been entrusted to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, which in turn has established a Women's Division. Its initial areas of competence are as follows:
 - Coordinating with governmental and community organizations concerned with investigating family problems, and developing policies, programmes and activities relating to families and women with a view to helping them fulfil their social and cultural functions;
 - Monitoring the implementation of Arab and international instruments relating to women and the family, in coordination with the competent agencies;
 - Contributing to the development of policies, programmes and activities aimed at building the capacities of Kuwaiti women, in coordination with relevant governmental and community organizations;
 - In cooperation with the competent Directorates, gathering and analysing data on women and families with a view to conducting field studies and research aimed at identifying the scope of family problem issues and formulating appropriate solutions, and taking action to address those issues, coordinating for that purpose both with relevant units within the Ministry and with outside organizations.
- Establishment of a Committee on Women's Affairs, chaired by the First Lady, Sheikha Latifa al-Fahd al-Salem al-Sabah, to promote women's rights;
- The National Committee for Drug Control;
- The Union of Kuwaiti Women Associations, which adopted the resolution on women environmental focal points that has now been approved by the Minister of the Interior;
- Many other women's public-interest associations, of which there are 58 in all;
- Kuwaiti women have also served as members of many international human-rights organizations;
- Membership of the Global Alliance for Women, to which 86 States belong. The The Union of Kuwaiti Women Associations represents the Global Alliance within the League of Arab States;
- Women are now able to work in Government ministries on a footing of equality with men without discrimination, i.e. persons of both sexes are selected on the basis of their experience and qualifications.

There is no monitoring mechanism as such. Unfair treatment of women is dealt with on a case-by-case basis. The woman concerned lodges a complaint with the appropriate authority, and the case is investigated and dealt with in accordance with the law.

Part IV
Main challenges and actions to address them

The main challenge is persuading the National Assembly to pass the decree issued by the Emir granting Kuwaiti women political rights :

- Many training courses, conferences and workshops to inform women about their political rights, which the Constitution does not deny them;
- The Emir would like to see a law enacted granting Kuwaiti women their political rights;
- Demonstrations during the voter registration process in the various electoral districts;
- Women should be a prominent, effective presence during electoral campaigns in order to provide tangible evidence of their political role;
- A campaign to gather the signatures of thousands of Kuwaiti women on a petition demanding their political rights, and submission of that petition to the United Nations;
- The voice of Kuwaiti women should be raised in all international fora to emphasize their political rights; despite the fact that this is an internal matter, it has attracted encouragement and support both within Kuwait and abroad.