

Arab women and the environmental dimension of sustainable development

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The importance of environmental dimension of sustainable development focuses on natural resource conservation and the benefit of present and future generations through reducing the degradation of the environment and natural resources and resource efficiency, and the good management of development projects. It also addresses the challenges of environmental sustainability.

The Arab world is threatened by scarce water resources and drop in biodiversity; contamination of atmospheric air. These threats call for action to confront climate changes which would end in loss of some kinds, spread of some agricultural pests harmful to the environment.

The Arab world also suffers from two types of environmental challenges: First, the traditional pattern associated with governance; and second, environmental challenges caused by changes in country, regional, and international activities. There is a significant disparity between the Arab peoples in terms of economic conditions, political instability, in addition to the wars in the region (early 1990s), which caused harmful effects on both the environment and the social situation; ad to these poverty, unemployment, and military conflicts.

A number of development plans are suggested to reduce the negative impacts of environmental changes both on the level of governments and civil societies to monitor and to assess climate changes, and the necessity for technical personnel, and to raise awareness of the importance of this.

The paper highlights the importance of women's role in environmental protection and nature conservation, and proper use of water, energy and food, in addition to hygiene and health; and to reduce pollution through efficiency key to sustainable development, family health, education and community upgrading values either inside her home or in the surrounding environment.

The paper addresses the relation between work, education, and environmental issues. Within the community, women play key roles in conserving the environment and deal with related issues such as water and sanitation, solid wastes, transport, air pollution, health and family planning, plus the beauty of the city.

Additionally, the paper emphasizes the role of political systems in supporting women's

organizations, both financially and technically in order to encourage their active role in protecting the environment and in conserving natural resources, by ensuring the right of women to management and work in the fields of environmental protection and natural resource conservation; and also to introduce the topic of environmental management and education in school curricula. Besides, other policies required to support women's role in environmental protection.

The paper also reviews the measures that should be taken to integrate women in environmental development and to increase the level of their participation in the management of natural and environmental resources at various levels: local, regional, and international level. It also discusses the constraints that limit women's participation in development processes, which include the imbalance in the allocation of time between work and family, and social values that limit the involvement and high illiteracy among women. It also stresses the importance of women's pressure groups which would encourage women activities, which includes plans for promoting environmental awareness, and provides women with knowledge and skills to develop specialized actions in environmental protection and awareness to eliminate wasteful consumption, and alert the danger of population explosion as a result of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and early marriage.

This paper also discusses the significant role of rural women in sustainable local economies based on : agriculture; animal care; in simple productive projects such as handicrafts, in addition to other occupations such as teaching and nursing. These roles emphasize the need for development and advancement of rural women, which in turn involve providing their needs and resolving their problems, especially those related to illiteracy and poverty. Furthermore, there is need for training women to deal with the changes and challenges of rural society, especially those issues related to limited farmland, changing pattern of agricultural use, emergence of new agricultural cultures, changing pattern of land tenure, and the growth of small industries and handicrafts together with small projects; plus the transformation of compulsory marketing to free marketing; industrial neighborhoods; growth of rural areas; which demand an integrated package of specialized programmes to support the economic capacity of women, including vocational training and capacity building; community participation and empowerment; reproductive health services; dissemination and development of a culture that supports migration to farming communities developed to serve the state policy of redistribution of population. Practical programmes are also needed to save energy and drinking water resources, agricultural guidance to reduce environmental pollution, plus waste disposal and support of the feed industry.

Several plans are suggested to strengthen the role of women in the field of the environment through five main sectors : awareness and knowledge in various forms; support of women workers through training and skills, increase their participation in decision-making; and taking into account the quality of continued education for females; direct them to fields that serve environmental issues; as well as improving the image of women in society and eliminate concepts that lead to discrimination against women. As well as encouraging and facilitating the contribution of women in community service; their participation in non-governmental organizations, and environmental councils and committees. Also, encourage civil society participation in the preparation and implementation of strategies to conserve the environment; strengthen their role through support and participation in sustainable development programmes, and to promote their participation in the management of urban development.