

2B. Summaries and Presentations

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Session One

Kuwaitization: A mirage or a reality?

Speaker: Lubna Al-Kazi - Kuwait University

Moderator: Ibrahim Saif - Economic and Social Council, Jordan

A brief history will be outlined of the policy of Kuwaitization, as to when it was implemented and why the government saw it necessary to involve more nationals in the development process. An overview of the labour force by nationality and gender in the last two decades will highlight the changes that have taken place. A discussion of policies passed by the government will be examined to evaluate how it has hindered or facilitated female labour force participation, such as early retirement, unemployment benefits, etc. Furthermore, the role of the Parliament in involving women effectively in the development process will be assessed through the policies that they passed or blocked. A concise description will be given on how civil society through NGOs and journalists acted as pressure groups to block policies that could have been detrimental to women's labour force participation. Lastly, some possible strategies to encourage women to remain in the labour market and be better distributed will be discussed.

Session Two

Is there Economic Reform for Saudi Women?

Speaker: Hatoon Al-Fassi - King Saud University / Qatar University

Moderator: Steffen Hertog - London School of Economics

Saudi women entered the official labor force at a later stage in the Saudi modern history starting in the sixties as temporary labors, then were included in the Labor Law of the seventies. Although those laws did not discriminate against women directly, there were many articles and exceptions that made an allowance for that, in which work became an area of a religious and social dispute between those who consider it "permitted" and those who believe it is prohibited unless for necessity. Today, this dispute has reached an advanced stage, where the high rate of women's unemployment, their low percentage of economic participation and the increased number of expatriates are haunting any reform that the state is trying to bring forward. In this paper I shall explore the socioeconomic debate about Saudi women's participation in the labor force, the challenges of unemployment that exceeds 26% and the efforts to respond to this problem officially, religiously and socially in terms of public policy reforms or the fatwas that counter all positive efforts or women's mobilization to enforce their demands. Part of the conclusion will depend on the coming month's political and economic changes, if any.

Session Three

Emiratization public policies and their impact on women

Speaker: Ruba Al-Hassan - Executive Council, Abu Dhabi

Moderator: Ibrahim M. Abdalla Al-faki - United Arab Emirates University, Al-Ain

The presentation will begin with a brief on the current situation of women in the labour market in UAE and will then outline UAE Federal and Abu Dhabi local government initiatives on Emiratization and assess the impact these policies have had on women. It will further present an overview of new proposed public policies and initiatives currently being discussed by Abu Dhabi government. The presentation will be very interactive with an aim to open the discussion towards full engagement of the participants to gather their views on the proposed policies and identify potential positive and negative impacts of these policies on women.

Session Four

Gender-based differences in employment conditions in the GCC context: The case of the United Arab Emirates

Speaker: Mohamed Al Waqfi - UAE University, Al Ain

Moderator: Shamael A. Al-Sharikh - Oil Sector Services Company, Kuwait

This paper examines gender-based differences in employment conditions in the UAE labor market. The paper starts with a discussion of the main characteristics of the local labor market environment and its implications on the employment opportunities available for females in this context. The paper uses data collected from a sample of 1400 employees, selected randomly from a wide range of organizations from both the public and private sectors in the UAE, to assess gender-based differences in access to employment opportunities as well as return on human capital including wages and benefits, promotion opportunities, and various other aspects of the working environment.

Session Five

Qatari Women and the Labor Market

Speaker: Hassan Ibrahim Al-Mohannadi - Qatar Permanent Population Committee (in Arabic with simultaneous English interpretation)

Moderator: Ibrahim Awad - American University in Cairo

This presentation focuses on the role of Qatari women in the labor market. Women in Qatar are well placed within the Qatari society in all aspects of life, particularly the job market. In the pre-oil era, which was discovered in the end of the first half of the previous century, women's participation was equal to men's, as they partnered in all prevalent crafts at the time, like hunting and herding, and even in practicing some manual traditional crafts. After the discovery of oil and the subsequent improvement in the living conditions of all social groups, women's social status was strengthened. The country's permanent constitution guaranteed equality between men and women in terms of rights and responsibilities without any discrimination. Women's empowerment became over time a political and strategic priority, particularly in the fields of education, health, and employment. This was well reflected in Qatar's 2030 national vision, population policy, and official family strategy. As a result, women's status witnessed a significant improvement as indicated in the country's growth indicators, many of which are comparable to those in industrialized countries. In spite of all this progress, the place of Qatari women in the job market continues to face some challenges. The high increase in female education (which surpasses male education figures) has not resulted in a corresponding progress in their employment participation and training opportunities, which are highly influenced by prevalent social and cultural norms. This has been reflected in a great concentration of women in certain sectors, particularly education, which led to the reduction of work opportunities and a higher percentage of unemployment among women versus men.

In this context, the presentation will explore the various aspects of the participation of Qatari women in the labor market, including the following:

- The constitutional and legal framework that guarantees women's right to work.
- The most important policies and strategies that impact women's work.
- An evaluation of the actual participation of Qatari women in the labor market.
- The challenges that affect the full integration of women in the workforce.
- Proposals for strengthening women's employment prospects.

Session Six

Omani working women: cultural challenges facing Oman Vision 2020

Speaker: Rafiah Al-Talei - The Middle East Broadcasting Networks, USA

Moderator: Nadereh Chamlou - The World Bank

This paper examines Omanization and women's empowerment from a cultural and social perspective. In the process, it discusses the issue of Omani women's education and draws on available figures to explore their place in the workforce, both in the public and private sectors. Does Omanization give Omani women more work opportunities? Has Omanization changed women's social status and role? And what impact has had it on women's relations with their families, with their male partners, and with their male co-workers? In trying to address these questions, the paper will also highlight challenges facing women's full enrollment in the workforce and provide some suggestions to overcome roadblocks.

Session Seven

Domestic workers: the hidden chapter in the nationalization of the female labor force in the UAE

Speaker: Rima Sabban - Zayed University; Dubai

Moderator: Nasra Shah - Kuwait University

This is a paper based on previous research done on domestic workers in the UAE and in the city of Dubai as a globalization model for the region. In a previous paper I addressed the issue of (in)visibility of domestic workers in Dubai. In this paper I use the data on domestic workers in Dubai and link the issues to the argument of Nationalization policies (particularly women) in order to bring the other hidden element in this dimension (domestic workers). The paper brings in figures of the growing sector of domestic work and the dependency connected to it, especially when it comes to working women. This, however, raises an important variable to think off while addressing issues of Nationalization, especially when we think of the long and short term impacts of domestic workers on the region.

Session Eight

Nationalization in the Arab Gulf States: The Role of Women through Civil Society

Speaker: Wanda Krause - Qatar Foundation

Moderator: Ameli Le Renard - University of Versailles Saint Quentin

Nationalization policies in the Arab Gulf States are often thought to be in direct and unmitigated relationship with the job sector as part of a public sphere. However, nationalization policies include channelling the development of human capacities within civil society. Women have been pivotal players in developing the capacities of women to support nationalization programs and nation building. The role of women through civil society, in particular, is little understood. This paper seeks to uncover the role of women's organizations in channelling women's involvement in the public and in taking responsibility for the development of these states. After addressing the impact of these nationalization policies that are heavily gendered and the role women assume through their civil society work, the paper discusses the multi-faceted nature of women's participation. Tensions around identity and nation building lie not simply with new or foreign values as part of globalization and the influx of growing numbers of foreigners. The paper argues that these tensions are growing around making meaning over participation and the different roles that women are playing. In seeking answers to the questions it poses related to the impact of nationalization policies on women's participation and the role women play, the paper argues looking within civil society as the playing field.

Concluding Session:

Does people's power empower women?

Nadereh Chamlou - The World Bank

Meaningful integration of women in the labor market: The role of international development agencies

Simel Esim - International Labor Organization

Overcoming gender segmentation of GCC labor markets

Steffen Hertog - London School of Economics

Future Directions

Samira Atallah - New York University

This session concludes the workshop with presentations that address the prospects of better approaches to women's empowerment and to their effective integration into the GCC labor markets. The session will explore the role of the government, of international organizations, and of the community at large in this process and will advance some ideas of how to prevent women-specific labour rights from becoming deterrents to female employment.