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Introduction:

The State of Bahrain lies at the centre of the southwestern coast of the Arabian Gulf and lies at a distance of around 22 kilometres from the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia and at a little more than this distance from the western coast of the Qatar Peninsula.

The State of Bahrain consists of an archipelago of 36 islands with a total area of 706 square kilometres with a population of about 678,475 people. The biggest of these islands is the Bahrain Island that comprises around 83.4% of the total area of the State's islands. Bahrain is linked by the King Fahad Causeway to the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia, which was opened in November 1986.

Bahrain has gained a prominent reputation throughout the ages - its geographical position has enabled it to play a significant role in the history of thriving human civilisations in the region, such as the Euphrates Valley civilisation, Sind Valley civilisation and other prosperous cultural centres in the Arabian Peninsula.

As the Bahrain islands have played a vital role several thousands of years ago as a meeting point between ancient cultures, it is still playing this role with the same degree of effectiveness and influence. Today Bahrain represents a key and vital regional centre for trade and economic exchanges and maintains cultural links with other nations of the world.

The policy of diversifying the national sources of income is considered as the mainstay of the State's strategy for achieving economic and social development. It also seeks to provide the developed infrastructure and public services needed for attracting Arab and foreign investments in various industrial, manufacturing, trade and tourist sectors.

Intellectual Principles for Development of Bahrain's Women:

The issue of social development is considered to be one of the key priorities for the State of Bahrain. Women's issues are prominent among the overall development priorities. The country's Constitution recognises the principle that all citizens are equal without any discrimination and provides for the principle of equality and equal opportunities as one of the principal bases of the society. Article 18 of the Constitution provides that all people are equal in enjoying human integrity. All citizens are equal before the law in terms of public rights and duties, with no discrimination between them because of race, ethnic origin, language, religion or creed.

The family is considered as the nucleus of the society and its basic pillar. Hence the State seeks to develop it and to preserve its entity. The Constitution explicitly provides in Article 5 that the family constitutes the basic foundation of the society through a belief in religion, ethical values and loyalty to the homeland. The law preserves its legal existence and strengthens its bonds and values through protection of motherhood and childhood. Within this framework, children enjoy care and protection and are safeguarded against exploitation. They are protected from moral, spiritual and physical negligence and abuse.

With the above in mind, the State has sought to introduce basic principles and laws, especially in the educational, training and health spheres, with a view to ensuring equal opportunities between both sexes and ensuring continuous development.

Thanks to the continuous efforts made by Bahrain in boosting comprehensive development efforts, the country has occupied a prominent position in the Human Development Reports prepared by the UNDP. During the years 1996, 1997 and 1998 Bahrain took the lead among all Arab countries in the field of human development, which reflects the State's concern with development in various spheres.

The Bahrain Government now pursues an open-door policy while seeking to preserve the society's cultural, religious and moral values. Focus on women has been an integral part of the policy statements and speeches of His Highness the Amir of Bahrain, who has reiterated the need that women must acquire all their rights and must participate in public life. In view of this position, plans for municipal elections are currently under review allowing women equal rights to voting and nomination in such elections. It is also expected that a Government plan will be approved shortly concerning the involvement of women in the island's Consultative Council.

Progress Achieved in the Crucial Areas Outlined by the Beijing Action Programme:

First: Women and Poverty

Bahrain is considered an oil producing country with a per capita income of \$9,000. Public services such as electricity, drinking water and sewerage schemes are available throughout Bahrain. Thus, poverty conditions are relative in Bahrain and cannot be compared to such conditions in other developing countries. Further, social cohesion and belief in true Islamic values have played a role in strengthening social bonds; hence severe poverty does not exist. In the light of the above, poor people in Bahrain should better be described as low-income bracket citizens.

The Government policy is based upon extending social aid to the needy families. Around ten million dollars have been allocated in the year 2000 state budget for payment to about 10,000 poor families. Of these families, 68% of the cases are supported by women, most of whom are widows or divorced women.

On its part, the Ministry of Labour is seeking to encourage able members of such families to get jobs by entering the job market and getting the necessary training. Women enrolled in training courses organised by the Labour and Social Affairs Ministry's community centres during the period between 1995 to 1999 totaled 6,248 women, most of whom now work in their homes.

Earlier this year, an Amiri Decree was issued whereby the Ministry of Electricity granted a reduction of the electricity consumption charges to the needy families registered with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

In addition, the Ministry of Labour has been taking steps to develop the Productive Families Project with the aim of broadening its participant base through urging the private sector firms to provide the necessary support for these families. Also new markets are being sought for marketing the products of this project. A total of 305 families are involved in this project with 88% of the total number playing an active role. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is presently seeking to facilitate procedures for the Project participants to set up their own projects by sponsoring them towards other authorities, or by asking the latter to exempt them from providing the necessary bank guarantees.

Seeking to alleviate poverty and to attract citizens' participation in social development schemes, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs adopted in 1997 the Micro-Start Project. This scheme has been launched by the Child and Mother Welfare Society and Awal Women Society with a third society expected to join them soon.

This Project has been positively welcomed by the targeted groups, especially women, attracting a total of 379 participants with women totaling 306 or around 81%. This proves that women need encouragement and financial support. Due to their family conditions, women have a preference to work from their own homes.

Individuals are joining hands with the Government to alleviate poverty and to ensure decent living conditions for the citizens. The authorities are fully supportive of setting up local organisations for this purpose. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has issued licenses for the setting up of charity funds throughout Bahrain, with a total of 46 charity funds licensed until March 2000. These charity funds and women's organisations are doing their part to lessen the economic and social hardships for the needy people through payment of financial aid and giving assistance in kind. Their contributions also include the payment of school fees and expenses for the needy families' children, especially when they join universities and higher academic institutes. In this field, the women's societies are actively involved in providing occupational training courses especially for women to encourage them to enter the job market.

The Ministry has sought through the High Council for Vocational Training to deduct a proportion of the private sector companies' contributions to training to be allocated for providing education for low-income level families, especially students attending colleges and higher institutes. A total of 2,905 students reaped the benefits of this scheme during the period from 1995 to 1999. Females account for around 49% of this figure reflecting the growing concern with training on the one hand, and seeking to ensure that no discrimination is shown in giving opportunities for both sexes on the other hand.

Obstacles:

The following obstacles are faced in our efforts to eradicate poverty:

1. There is a lack of a definition of the poverty line in view of the economic situation in Bahrain.
2. Local citizens have been accustomed to receive public services free of charge and this practice prevails amongst many people in spite of the fall in oil income in recent years. Hence it is necessary for local people to have better awareness and to change their social attitudes.
3. Lack of a database ensuring co-ordination between charitable organisations and the Government in giving charitable assistance to avoid duplication and waste of funds.

Future Plans:

The Bahrain Government is seeking to attract the citizens to contribute to the country's social and economic development. For this purpose, it is fully aware of the importance of helping people to help themselves by the following methods:

1. Adopting projects designed to encourage local citizens to be self-employed.

2. Enabling the citizens, especially low-income bracket individuals, to obtain soft-term loans.
3. Developing the Productive Families Project to broaden the base of beneficiaries from this scheme.
4. Finding job opportunities for young members of families that receive financial assistance to enable such families to depend on themselves.

Second: Education and Training of Women:

The educational policy and philosophy in the State of Bahrain are guided by the Constitution, which provides in Article 7 that the State supports science and the arts and encourages scientific research. It also supports educational and cultural services for the citizens. Also provided is free and compulsory education in the early stages determined by the law and in the manner stipulated therein. The law draws up the necessary plan for eradication of illiteracy. Several laws related to education were promulgated; the last of which was the Private Education Law that was enacted in the year 1998. A draft law on compulsory education and eradication of illiteracy is still under review.

Although compulsory education is not enforced by law, the majority of school age children go to school, especially in the first three stages (primary, intermediate and secondary). Free education and availability of schools throughout Bahrain, as well as the public awareness of the importance of education, have played a vital role in the spread and growth of education in both rural and urban areas to the benefit of boys and girls.

The Ministry of Education has taken steps for curbing the drop-out rate in schools as a result of poverty by ensuring that low-income students are provided with the necessary stationery items, morning meals and uniforms free of charge from their schools.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education is making continuous efforts to develop the educational and learning process for students of both sexes, considering that education is one of the basic human rights for all. The Ministry adopts the following measures:

1. Seeking to eradicate the illiteracy of uneducated citizens in the 10 - 40 year age group in the next few years. Strategies in this direction include taking steps to cut the drop-out rate in the primary and intermediate school levels, reducing the number of illiterates through encouraging people to joint Anti-illiteracy and Adult Education Centres and enhancing awareness of the eradication of illiteracy with the help of the various media especially television.

2. Underlining the value of technical education through expanding the available technical schools.
3. Achieving the integration of regular and irregular education by enabling students of Anti-illiteracy and Adult Education Centres in the 10-22 year age group to join Government schools and to continue their regular education.
4. Improving teachers' performance through continuing to train school teachers in the modern skills required for the latest trends in teaching and education.
5. Enhancing the quality of education by introducing cultural programmes and IT programmes in all educational levels in boys and girls' schools.

Anti-illiteracy:

Available statistics indicate that there is a drop in the illiteracy rate among the 10-44 year age group to 6.4% for males and 9.18% for females during the 1996/97 school year. The Ministry of Education is currently reviewing plans for eliminating illiteracy that stood at a rate of 5.25% during the school year 1998/99. This can be achievable through transmission of educational programmes on TV to enable the eradication of illiteracy, especially for housewives.

Formal Education:

Admission rules are equal for both sexes in the basic school levels to the completion of the secondary stage. Upon reviewing the educational statistics, the following is noted:

- The number of students attending government-run schools in the year 1999/2000 in all school levels totaled 114,669 students of whom 56,503 are males or 49.3% and 58,166 females or 50.7%.
- School girls are more than school boys in the intermediate and secondary levels with the latter totaling 13,622 school boys compared to 13,875 school girls in the intermediate school level. There are 10,495 schoolboys and 11,742 schoolgirls in the secondary level.

The reason for that is the preference among males of low-income bracket families to find jobs rather than continuing their education. Another contributing factor is the high level of awareness among the local population to give girls the opportunity to go to school and to help build up their character. In addition, it is commonly acknowledged that education is the gateway for girls to enter the job market.

The predicament facing females who go to school is the limited scope for admission in certain educational courses that are badly needed in the employment market. Thus, they have less scope of finding jobs when they graduate. For instance, the technical education is limited to males rather than females while the latter only have the opportunity to join commercial schools that qualify them to work as secretaries or clerks in local companies and banks.

The Government encourages Bahraini girls to continue their university education by offering grants and scholarships. With a locally available national university offering easy access, many students of conservative families, especially in the villages, have been motivated to continue their higher education. There is no doubt that the rise in percentage of educated women in rural and semi-rural areas will have a positive impact upon such communities in the future.

Statistics indicate a remarkable increase in the number of female students attending the Bahrain University. In 1994/95 there was a total of 3,756 female students compared with a total of 2,886 male students. Most of them attend the Colleges of Arts, Education and Science. It was noted that there was an increase in the number of female students attending the College of Engineering in 1996/97 with a total of 1,180 female students compared with 494 female students in 1994/95.

In 1995 the actual recurrent educational expenditure totaled BD83.4 million, or 16% of the State recurrent expenditure in the same year. Such expenditure rose in 1997 to BD91.6 million or 16.6% of the recurrent expenditure, which reflects the State's concern with education and its belief in making it available for all (Statistical Abstract 1997).

The island has numerous private schools, specialised institutes, handicapped institutes and day care centres. In this connection, we should not overlook the Gulf University and College of Health Sciences.

**Numbers of Schools and Students According to Gender
In Government - run Education from 1995/96 to 1999/2000**

Particulars	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of Schools:					
Males	90	92	94	96	98
Females	90	90	94	94	95
Number of Students:	109890	110161	111443	113043	114669
Males	54801	54634	55104	55765	56503
Females	55089	55527	56339	57278	58166
Percentage of Females in Education	99	98.4	98.8	97.3	97
Percentage of Females in Primary Education	101	102	101	101	100
Percentage of Females in Intermediate Education	100	98	96	96	98
Percentage of Females in Secondary Education	94	89	90	98	98
Classroom density for Males	29	29	29	29	30
Classroom density for Females	31	31	30	30	30

Training:

The Government of the State of Bahrain shows special interest in the development of human resources, which are considered the true wealth of the country. Against this background, training has a top priority in the country's plans and strategies. The Government is making intensive efforts to turn Bahrain into a regional training centre. For this purpose, training centres have been set up, led by the Bahrain Training Institute, to play a significant role in training young Bahrainis of both sexes and providing them with the skills required by the labour market. The number of females who joined the BTI's courses account for 27% of the total number of trainees in 1995. This figure rose to 33.4% in 1998, reflecting the increased interest in training.

Meanwhile, responsibility for training civil servants is assumed by the Civil Service Bureau. The total number of civil servants who were trained by the CSB was 2,870 in 1995, of whom female civil servants account for 34.4%. In 1999 a total of 2,429 civil servants attended training courses with females accounting for 32.9%. In addition, every Government ministry and organisation is committed to training its own staff, and a percentage of its budget is allocated for this purpose.

The High Council for Vocational Training (HCVT) is one of the active mechanisms for developing and enhancing human resources. In 1998 HCVT supervised the training of 42,290 people. The total training budget for various training programmes supervised by the HCVT for that year was BD20,711,593. A training levy is applied to companies employing 50 workers or more for financing training in these companies or smaller companies.

The major companies on the island such as Bahrain Petroleum Company (Bapco), Bahrain Telecommunications Company (Batelco) and Aluminium Bahrain (Alba) have their own training centres. Owing to the significance of the banking sector to the island's economy, the Bahrain Institute for Banking and Finance Institute has been set up for training of local banking staff. Women have benefited from the available training opportunities offered by BIBF.

Female trainees in 1995 accounted for 39% of the total trainees. This has risen currently to 41%.

Educational and training challenges are significant and for this reason the Ministry of Education is making every possible effort to draw up policies and plans for realising them in the near future. These are made up of the following:

1. Stemming the sources of illiteracy by reducing or even eliminating the dropout rates in various basic educational levels.
2. Focusing on the quality of programmes delivered to the students of Anti-illiteracy and Adult Education Centres to ensure that illiteracy is totally eradicated.
3. Ensuring that adult students do not revert to illiteracy.
4. Improving the quality of educational programmes in government schools.
5. Introducing modern technology in the primary school level.
6. Altering the attitudes towards women in school curricula so that the focus will be on reflecting the positive development of women.
7. Continuous matching between the educational output and needs of the labour market.

Third: Women and Health:

Health is one of the basic pillars and foundations of human development. Human development is the objective sought by all communities with a view to improving the quality of life and seeking to attract every individual to make a vital contribution for improving standards of living and social conditions in general.

Health is one of the basic human rights without discrimination due to race, religion, sex, economic or social condition or political beliefs or ideology. Recognising the importance of this right, the Bahrain Constitution provides for offering healthcare for all residents in the State of Bahrain. The State of Bahrain provides free of charge healthcare at all levels to local citizens and residents. Support is also given to the development of preventive and medical services throughout the island. The State of Bahrain has ratified Resolution WHO 34-36, issued by the World Health Organisation, and the UN General Assembly Resolution No.36-43 for providing health for all by the year 2000. Basic healthcare has been considered as a prelude to achieving the strategic goals for healthcare.

Bahrain has made vast strides towards realising the goal of health for all by the year 2000 according to the indicators laid down by the World Health organisation. Indeed, the country was able to realise most of the goals of the "Health for All Strategy" before 1990.

A total of 21 health centres and two clinics provide comprehensive healthcare throughout Bahrain. The Government provides 92% of the available health services while the private sector only provides 8% of such services.

The per capita expenditure by the Health Ministry equals BD87,400 (in 1998) or the equivalent of US\$232. Government spending on health represents 8% of the total public expenditure (in 1998). Health services are readily available for all the population (100%) without any restrictions.

To continue to maintain the health gain and improve health standards, the Ministry of Health drew up a strategic plan for the period from 1994 to 2000 and the following years. This plan aimed to enhance and improve the population's health conditions. Ten key major programmes were incorporated in the plan:

1. Combating hereditary diseases.
2. Mother and child health.
3. Combating cancer.
4. Combating vascular system and cardiac diseases.
5. Combating physical disability diseases.
6. Combating respiratory system diseases.
7. Protection against accidents and injuries.
8. Mental and psychiatric health.
9. Combating dental diseases and maintaining oral health.
10. Other national health programmes designed to achieve the "Health for All Strategy".

It should be noted that there is a lack of health information concerning behavioural patterns and ways of life affecting the population's health conditions, such as dietary behaviour etc.

One of the major challenges facing the health services is the cost of healthcare. The problem lies in the need to re-allocate the budgets earmarked for health services so that the primary healthcare can get the lion's share, given that it is the main focus of this strategy. Another difficulty is in maintaining health gains and improving health conditions in view of the prevailing economic conditions.

The following Table shows the development in the area of women's health and the achievements within the framework of women's development:

HEALTH INDICATORS

Average life expectancy upon birth - males and females	72.9	1998	Health Statistics 1998
* Males	71.1	"	
* Females	75.3	"	
Mothers' mortality rate per 1000 live births	0.15	1998	Health Statistics
Infants' mortality rate per 1000 live births of both sexes	8.5	1998	" "
Mortality rate of children aged 5 & below per each 1000 live births	11.1	1998	" "
Percentage of women using contraceptives in the 15-49 year age group	62%	1995	Family Health Study
Percentage of pregnant women of the 15-49 years age group and suffer from anaemia.	40%	1995	A Health Study on Pregnant Women' Diet Situation.
Percentage of pregnant women vaccinated with two doses of the tetanus vaccine	54%	1995	
Percentage of pregnant women who receive pre-natal care	98%	1995	Family Health Study
Percentage of medically supervised child births	98%	1995	Family Health Study
Percentage of fully vaccinated children	98%	1998	Health Statistics.

The average life expectancy for both men and women has risen significantly due to the development of health services and rise in living standards. Family planning awareness has also improved due to the focused awareness campaigns in this field as well as the rise in the standards of education. As a result the average number of children for the Bahraini women reached 4.01 in 1995, compared with an average of 6.6 in 1981.

It should be noted that, since 98% of all births take place in hospitals, all births are supervised by medical specialists and midwives. Post-natal check ups of mothers giving birth are quite common.

Reproductive Health

The information and data to be highlighted in this section concerning reproductive health is derived from the GCC Family Health Survey, which was conducted in 1995. The survey involved interviews for a sample of 4122 Bahraini families.

Marriage Patterns

The study shows a significant fall in the percentage of early marriages and also reveals that there is a positive relationship between the educational level and age of marriage. The age of marriage rises with the rise in the educational level.

Fertility Rate

The overall fertility rate of per Bahraini woman is 3.2.

Family Planning Methods

The study has revealed that, through interviews conducted with a sample of 3769 married women below the age of 50, 83% had maintained a time gap between pregnancies, and 64% used modern family planning methods. This

study also showed that 49% used the pill, 30% depended on the use of condoms, 8% used the loop and sterilisation of women accounted for 6%. Separation of women from their husbands represented 51%.

It is noted that awareness of family planning methods among women is very high, with 99% of married women being fully aware of at least one of these methods.

The pill, women's sterilisation and loop are the most common methods and the ones of which married women are familiar (93%, 96%, 99%). These are followed by the use of condoms and men's sterilisation (80%, 92%). Traditional methods such as keeping a distance, safe period and such other methods are widely known to married women.

Although knowledge and use of family planning methods is considered high amongst Bahraini women, it is noted that interest in preventive services leaves much to be desired. The study has shown that there is a modest level of post-natal care for women and this is one of the challenges facing officials in charge of such programmes.

Some studies have shown that 40% of pregnant women who frequent health centres suffer from anaemia caused by iron deficiency (1995).

Women's Employment Status in the Health Sector

Women are playing an increasingly effective role in the health sector's decision making process on the local, regional and international levels compared with the situation in previous years.

Since women account for a large proportion of the health workers in the Government-run healthcare system, (77%) women have been actively involved in many key committees at the Health Ministry. Women are now occupying a number of leading positions in the health sector up to the level of Director.

Bahraini women working in the health sector have been given the opportunity to develop their management and professional skills in the health services field on an equal footing with men through enjoying equal training opportunities and participating in decision making.

Programmes Targeting Women

When the Ministry of Health adopted the "Health for All Strategy" by the Year 2000, mother and child welfare services witnessed a significant expansion. The Ministry paid special attention to preventive services aimed at women, such as the annual regular check-up that includes mammograms, tests for early breast cancer diagnosis, uterus cancer and the pre-marriage check-up scheme. The latter scheme is designed to reduce the rate of incidence of hereditary diseases.

The Government provides health services for all through the primary healthcare programme offered at health centres throughout the island. The scheme offers pre-natal and post-natal care for women. Cases that need secondary healthcare are being transferred to the hospitals.

Through the Infant Friendly Hospital Scheme, launched by the Health Ministry since September 1992, women are being encouraged to continue breast feeding their children without any discrimination as to gender. A new teenage health programme, for both sexes, was launched in 1998.

In addition, several new educational and awareness schemes involving nutrition were recently introduced, with a view to furthering women's awareness in this vital area related to her health, since a great number of Bahraini women suffer from anaemia resulting from iron deficiency.

Family Planning on the Local Level

Family planning and reproductive health issues are an integral part of the priorities of the Bahrain Family Planning Society especially these concerned with women and youngsters. Therefore, the Society plays an effective role through its various committees by carrying out specialised activities and awareness enhancement workshops for its members of both sexes. Special emphasis is being laid on women's rights and reproductive health rights and expert advice is being given in this field.

These programmes involve the use of various methods and facilities such as holding personal meetings with senior officials at the concerned ministries or holding educational and cultural courses for local leaders and media personnel. Moreover, awareness sessions are organised at the anti-illiteracy centres and community centres. The Education Ministry's social workers usually participate in such events. Given the decision-making responsibility of males in reproductive health, the Society is keen on training its male members to educate and inform other men at the anti-illiteracy centres, youth clubs and mosques. There is also a special focus on young men in terms of population and family education, as they play a key role in spreading family planning concepts and they will be future parents.

Therefore, the Society is keen on implementing a youth awareness enhancement programme and carrying out activities targeting young people. As part of the services provided by the Society, publications and leaflets dealing with family planning, reproductive and sexual health issues are distributed to various groups in the community.

One of the major projects started by the Society in July 1998 was the launch of a family planning and reproductive counselling centre. Qualified staff who ensure total confidentiality offer advice to visitors of the centre to enable them to take appropriate decisions without any outside pressures. This centre supports and complements the services provided by the Government sector.

This new centre is based at the Society's premises and has been launched after extensive training and qualification of its staff. The objectives of this centre are as follows:

1. Providing advice and education to people seeking advice on family planning, reproduction and sexual health.
2. Providing advice to married couples on reproductive and sexual health and family relations.
3. Giving advice to childless couples, assisting and advising them on how to follow up their treatment.
4. Giving advice to family planning service seekers and helping them take the appropriate decision concerning the suitable method for them.
5. Monitoring the use and availability of family planning methods in Bahrain.

Challenges:

The main challenges facing those concerned with developing women's status and their participation in social and economic development include the following:

1. How to benefit from women's capabilities as an effective agent of change in the health field by developing her personal, family and the wider community's health.
2. Providing psychiatric healthcare and counselling services for women as an adjunct to healthcare within the official and non-official levels (community level).
3. Focusing on women's health especially as regards post-natal and family planning services through the following strategies:
 - * Developing the skills and capabilities of health workers who are responsible for providing such services.
 - * Continuing to provide health education to women and stressing the importance of regular check-ups and spacing pregnancies.
 - * Using the media for health education targeting women.

4. Supporting strategies for the development of women's leading role through the following:
 - * Giving women equal opportunities.
 - * Training women in management and leadership.
 - * Providing services supporting working women, such as day care centres etc.
 - * Providing material and other support for women.
5. Continuing to forge closer links between Government organisations in the field of health awareness and programmes relating to developing women's health and enhancing the role played by women.

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Fourth: Women and the Economy:

Bahraini women play an effective role in economic development through contributing to all public and private economic sectors. Bahraini women have been contributing since ancient times to the community's economic growth. In the past, such contribution took the form of undertaking minor handicrafts that developed with time, but now women work in key positions in the public and private sectors.

The significant role played by women, and their ability to fill such high positions, would not have been possible without the strong backing of the country's leadership. The country's laws do not discriminate against women and treat them on an equal footing with men. Women enjoy the same employment benefits and receive the same wages as men, even though women are more privileged in certain respects by getting maternity leave and time off to breast feed their new born babies.

Indeed, the high educational and cultural awareness levels enjoyed by members of the Bahraini community have helped women reach the highest educational levels and take part in the various areas of employment and production. We see large numbers of Bahraini women having, as a minimum, the secondary school certificate. According to the 1991 census, the working Bahraini women having the secondary education certificate totalled 5,361 women. This represents 41% of the total Bahraini working women. The number of women holding higher degrees totalled 5,979 women, which account for 45% of the total Bahraini working women. Having high educational standards, Bahraini women have been able to efficiently fill key management and professional positions.

In the past, women were embarrassed to work in certain economic sectors owing to the strength of the inherited social customs and traditions. However, as a result of the development of social awareness and high percentage of educated women and due to the economic and social changes witnessed in Bahrain in the 1980s and early 1990s, they no longer have such reservations. This has been a major factor for the dramatic increase in numbers of working women by around 80% during the last twenty years.

While the total number of Bahraini women in the public and private sectors totalled 12,176 according to the 1981 census, this figure rose to 17,544 women according to the 1991 census. Now the total number of Bahraini women is 21,846 women according to the most recent estimates of the Central Statistics Organisation.

Bahraini Women's Involvement in the Public Sector

Bahrain women's participation in the public sector represents 37% of the total number of Bahraini workers in this sector (according to the information of the Civil Service Bureau). Female employees work equally side by side with men in all Government ministries, departments and in different occupations. They share the same duties and responsibilities.

The majority of Bahraini women working in the public sector are employed at the Ministry of Education where women account for 51% of the total number of female employees in the Government sector. The Ministry of Health employs 31% of the total number of women working in the public sector. At the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs women represent a 60% majority of the total number of employees at this Ministry. There, the female employees are mostly university graduates and work in various areas and departments at this Ministry.

Bahraini Women's Participation in the Private Sector:

Women are now seeking jobs in the private sector as a result of reaching the saturation point in the Government sector, which is no longer able to offer jobs for job seekers. In addition, the Government promotes the policy of increasing the employment of Bahrainis in the private sector through setting Bahrainisation levels and giving incentives to private sector companies that employ Bahraini citizens.

In spite of the continuous increase in the number of working women, their participation in the employment market represents only 19% of the total Bahraini workforce according to the 1999 figures of the Central Statistics

Organisation. This may be due to the nature of the labour market that always looks for trained and qualified workforce in addition to the concentrated demand for manpower in industries that require physical efforts and finally the competition posed by the expatriate workforce. Therefore, it is vital to draw up training plans that give priority to giving jobs to women with an increased focus on career and social guidance as well as creating new fields of work suited to women. Making intensive efforts designed to reduce competition from expatriate labour will reap positive results.

The annual report published by the General Organisation for Social Insurance indicates that the percentage of Bahraini women to the total insured workforce employed by firms registered with GOSI (firms that employ 10 workers or more) in 1999 represented 23% of the total Bahraini workforce.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE BAHRAINI PRIVATE SECTOR WORKERS FROM 1995 TO 1999

Type	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Bahraini manpower	35412	37773	40649	46567	50402
Males	29591	31309	33428	37111	38937
Females	5821	6464	7221	9456	11465
Percentage of Females	16	17	18	20	23

Source: Data of the General Organisation for Social Insurance

The majority of female workers are concentrated in the downstream industries sector where the Bahraini females working in this sector represent 28%, followed by female workers in banks and financial institutions that account for 17%. Growing numbers of women are employed in very small firms. However, there are no specific statistics related to this category because it is not compulsory that they should subscribe to the GOSI insurance scheme.

It is noted that the number of self-employed women is steadily growing. 25% of the commercial registrations of businesses are owned by women according to 1998 figures (Statistics of the Ministry of Commerce). Further, the first Bahraini Businesswomen Society was recently registered grouping female owners of businesses in various economic sectors.

Some self-employed women, especially uneducated women or housewives develop an interest in doing some simple handicrafts at home. Such women are not subject to the legal requirements of having commercial registrations nor do they have to join the GOSI insurance scheme. In addition, the fruits of their work are not included in the Gross National Product. This situation is not peculiar to Bahrain as it takes place in all countries of the world.

Meanwhile, the Government is making continuous efforts to find jobs for youth of both sexes. In 1996 it set up an Employment Services Bureau at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for finding job opportunities for young Bahrainis. The ESB 1999 Annual Report said that a total of 3,913 jobs were found for Bahrainis of whom males represent 3,173 job seekers or 81% while females for whom jobs were found represented 740 females or 19% only.

The above statistics reflect what we have already mentioned about women's modest participation in the workforce. Therefore, it is vital to boost women's efficiency through introducing the appropriate educational and training programmes enabling them to enter the job market since they are able to compete in an environment that witnesses rapid technological changes. In addition, steps must be taken to study the social obstacles preventing women from gaining employment, restricting their contribution to the economy and finding the suitable solutions for overcoming such problems.

In this context, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has drawn up a national career guidance plan designed to change values, attitudes and behaviour patterns represented by the low status of certain jobs such as working in factories by women. The plan also aims at investigating the disinterest shown by Bahrainis in taking up such jobs. This plan outlines the roles of the family, school, community organisations, employers and authorities in the areas of implementation and follow up.

Moreover, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has prepared a **five-year plan (1996-2000)** for accelerating the process of maximising the employment of Bahrainis. Aspects of this are the replacement of expatriate workers by Bahraini job seekers and providing financial resources for developing the training and qualification of Bahraini manpower. The move focuses on raising the rates charged for work permits and fees imposed for recruitment of foreign workers from abroad. The income gained from raising the fees is used to finance the training of Bahraini job seekers. In pursuance of the five-year plan, Ministerial Order No. (7) of the Year 1996 was issued for raising the percentage of Bahraini in the workforce at the annual rate of 5% in private sector companies and firms.

There is no doubt that increasing numbers of women have benefited from this new plan. Now, four years after its implementation, an evaluation should be conducted of its influence on creating job opportunities for both sexes and how far women have benefited from it.

The challenges currently being faced and given top priority for women in employment may be summed up in the following:

- * Increasing the focus on training programmes targeting women so that they will be aimed at new and non-traditional areas.
- * Concentrating on enabling women to gain the skills required in the employment market.
- * Changing the public view of low status occupations.
- * Updating the manpower and job market statistics and classifying in the population census due to take place in 2001.

Fifth: Women in Power and Decision-Making:

Formal education for women started in the State of Bahrain in 1928, i.e. nine years after the beginning of formal education for boys in 1919. Since this date the scope for women's education expanded which was gradually reflected in their participation in productive activities and entry to the job market. Initially, women's participation was limited to clerical jobs and subsequently to teaching, health and social welfare jobs. Being new to the job market and due to the prevailing social conditions, women were unable to hold key positions.

In the early 1970s the Constitution of the State of Bahrain, Labour Law for the Private Sector and Civil Service Regulations contributed to reducing discriminatory practices between men and women in terms of the right to jobs, type and wage levels. Subsequently, women began to take up more senior jobs. They played an effective role in key by expressing their views to the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General Mr. W.J. Yardley, Head of the Fact-Finding Mission, to confirm Bahrain's Arab identity and independence. His was achieved by holding meetings with a number of women societies' members as well as some specialists in the history of Bahrain.

During the period from the 1970s to the 1990s, women occupied many senior positions. The number of Directors in various public service sectors rose to 15 Directors in the fields of Social Affairs, Health, Commerce, Statistics, Audit, Education, Engineering and Human Resource Development. Two women now occupy the positions of Assistant Undersecretaries (Civil Service and Social Affairs). Another woman was appointed as Ambassador Plenipotentiary to a leading European country. Also a number of female diplomats have been appointed in some of Bahrain's consulates and embassies abroad.

In addition, women were appointed, for the first time in Bahrain's history, on the boards of administration of local governorates when they were established in Bahrain three years ago. It is expected that women will

participate in Municipal elections by way of nomination and election upon the directives recently issued by the country's leadership. Rules and regulations ensuring women's active participation are now being reviewed. Given the Government's policy of opening up, Bahraini women look forward to taking part in the Consultative Council as members on par with men.

Although there are a few women in key positions in the private sector, this sector recently witnessed major advances in favour of women. A radical change was witnessed recently with the appointment of a number of women as heads of branches of commercial banks, in addition to the post of a deputy general manager in a major bank in the country. Another woman was employed as Human Resource Development General Manager in a leading company in Bahrain. In addition, a woman was elected on the Board of a major company in Bahrain.

Many women are active members of the Boards or Executive Committees of many professional and academic societies such as the medical, bar, engineering, economists, chemists and other societies. They are also members of many important committees such as the General Committee of Bahrain Workers, which is concerned with the protection of workers' rights, National Committee for Eradication of Illiteracy, Environment and Wildlife Protection Committee and National Childhood Committee. Women are active participants on the regional level in the membership of the Committee for Co-ordination of Women's Activities in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula, Regional Environment Protection Network and Arab Network for National Organisations. On the regional and international levels, two women are working in the World Health Organisation in the post of Regional Nursing and Support Health Sciences Advisor at the WHO offices in Cairo. Another Bahraini woman is a senior nursing advisor at the World Health Organisation's Geneva headquarters.

In addition, the State of Bahrain has endorsed all resolutions adopted by international conferences concerning women and social development. It has also introduced the appropriate mechanisms for boosting and supporting the resolutions and strategies adopted by such conferences.

Sixth: Institutional Mechanisms

In response to calls made by successive international conferences to take into account gender by drawing up strategies, policies and planning programmes that ensure improving women's conditions and the necessary introduction of the suitable mechanisms for implementing and monitoring results of such policies, the State of Bahrain has sought to enhance the role played by women. Ensuring women's contribution to public life has been translated through enacting laws and legislation that ensure the necessary protection and support for boosting their role as follows:

Bahraini legislators have been keen to underline women's rights by clearly stipulating in the Constitution that men and women have equal rights and duties without discrimination. The law provides protection for motherhood and social security guarantees for women in case of old age, illness, disability and widowhood. Social insurance services, free healthcare and rights to education and employment have been secured by law. The Labour Laws ensure protection for working women and regulate the terms of her employment such as getting a maternity leave and the right to shorter working hours to breast feed her baby for two years.

In confirmation of the above, a woman was recently appointed as Assistant Undersecretary for Social Affairs. This person had extensive experience in voluntary social activities, was an active member of a well-known women's society and chairwoman of the Children and Women Information Centre. The significance of this appointment lies in the Government's trend to pay an increasing level of attention to the social work sector, targeting women in particular and families in general.

Ministerial order No.10 of 1997 was issued with respect to the co-ordination mechanism for women's affairs on the national level. The Social Development Directorate is the authority concerned, on the national level, with monitoring the implementation of the Beijing Conference Resolutions and Declaration of Action, recommendations of the Arab Conference and decisions of the Arab Council of Social Affairs Ministers.

The Social Affairs organisational structure includes an independent Directorate of Community Development, comprising a section concerned with women and family affairs. Its principal duties include working to follow up the implementation of strategies and plans of action agreed by international conferences, directly connected with women in particular and the family in general.

Affiliated to the Social Affairs Sector at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs are seven local community centres serving different areas of the country. In their programmes, they focus on rehabilitation; development, training and awareness enhancement programmes that help women and families acquire the suitable skills for participating in productive efforts and proper management of family resources.

For the improvement of women's conditions, there is a section at the Social Affairs Sector responsible for national and co-operative societies, including societies concerned with the development of women. It is concerned with administering and regulating the non-government social and professional organisations and associations. This section seeks to facilitate women's participation in local, regional and international conferences and seminars and to ensure that they are benefiting from the contributions of such organisations in the local and international community.

A department has been set up at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs concerned with the rehabilitation of members of needy families that directly benefit from financial aid provided by the Ministry. This authority seeks to direct members of such families to join rehabilitation, development and productive schemes that will help them move from the ranks of needy people to the ranks of productive and effective workers. In this way, they can help contribute to their families and society at large.

The State has allocated annual financial aid for national societies and non-governmental associations to help them implement programmes aimed at training their staff and personnel and setting up development and productive projects. This move will enable them to broaden their organisational structures and thus allow more people to benefit from their services. According to the provisions of Ministerial Order No.19 with respect to Raising Funds and Donations, such groups and organisations may approach private sector firms and individuals to implement their projects and programmes.

Believing in the principle of participation in the development process, the government is encouraging national societies to adopt the methods to ensure the implementation of their action plans relating to the Beijing Conference resolutions. The Societies have effective means and mechanisms in this respect of which we would like to mention the most important:

- * **Women and Children Information Centre of the Children and Mothers Welfare Society:** The Centre was opened on 20th December 1995 and was set up following agreement between the CMWS and the Cairo-based Arab Childhood and Development Council (ACDC) for establishing an Arab sub-network in Bahrain dealing with women and children. It seeks to collect and compile data concerning women in terms of numbers, services, projects and contributions made by women. Its other duties include collection of the studies and reports prepared by national organisations and associations through the relevant conferences and seminars. The ultimate aim will be to draw up strategies, policies and plans related to cultural, population, economic, social, educational and health developments that have a major impact on the status of women and children in Bahrain, GCC states and the Arab world as a whole. To be used for this purpose is the data network shared by the Centre with ACDC in Cairo to facilitate the exchange of data and information using modern scientific systems.

- * **Family Guidance and Orientation Office of Nahdat Fatat Al Bahrain Society:** This was opened on 21st March, 1996 at the offices of the Society and provides its guidance services to all members of the

family by qualified and trained staff in family guidance and advice. This office co-ordinates with the community development centres, health centres and Ministry of Education schools so that its services will be offered to a larger base of beneficiaries and people who need such service.

- * **Legal Advice Office of the Awal Women Society:** Prior to this project, the Hotline Service was launched in 1992 to receive women's family complaints. It was followed by introduction of the Psychiatric and Social Advice Service in 1994. Subsequently, the Legal Advice Office was set up to provide free legal advice to women in general and families in particular by specialised lawyers. A specialised committee supervises this office. Women's rights awareness activities represent a major part of the operations of this office. Its latest publication is a book about women's rights in Islamic Shariaa.

Seventh: Human Rights of Women:

The rights, social and economic conditions and legal protection for women are considered a reflection of a society's progress and how far it keeps abreast of living conditions in a framework of justice, equal opportunities and ambitions. Therefore, the State of Bahrain has been very keen on introducing legislation that secures women's rights at all levels. These laws and measures include the following:

- * Granting Bahraini citizenship to eligible people including a number of women.
- * Refraining from compelling a wife to comply with compulsory execution of submission judgements, which would require her to be with her husband regardless of her wishes
- * Prohibiting arbitrary divorces since divorce can only take place in court.
- * Maintaining women's rights to alimony for her and her children and to ensure alimony cases are heard before the Courts of Summary proceedings.
- * The Courts are obliged, according to the Code of Civil Trials, to comply with the time limits provided for in the law (Judgements handed down in presence of the parties 45 days from date of handing down the judgement and in respect of judgements in absentia 45 days from notifying the judgement to the concerned party) which would help reduce the period of settling personal status cases that concern women in particular.

The media have played a significant role in educating the general public with respect to women's issues and personal status matters. This has resulted in improving the Shariaa Court judges' awareness of women's rights, which has positively affected their respect for women's rights in their rulings.

We should not forget that women's financial rights are maintained and respected in Islamic Shariaa. Such rights include the rights to ownership, having a separate financial position and inheritance. However, it remains for the Government to introduce the Personal Status Law based upon the provisions of Islamic Shariaa to secure the rights of women and family.

In addition, the State of Bahrain has been very keen on taking part in all regional and international conferences related to women since the 1975 Conference until the Beijing Conference 1995. Bahrain is preparing to participate in the extraordinary session of the UN General Assembly - Women 2000 (Beijing +5) for review and evaluation of the Beijing

Conference Declaration and Plan of Action. As mentioned earlier, the State of Bahrain is seeking to provide the appropriate institutional mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of the resolutions and recommendations adopted by such conferences.

It should be noted that during 1999 an Amiri Order was issued for the formation of the Human Rights Committee at the Consultative Council. This move demonstrates that Bahrain has taken into account the question of respect and protection of human rights. One of the Committee's priorities is to investigate the legislation and regulations in force with respect to issues relevant to human rights. It also proposes amendments considered appropriate in this respect, in addition to the follow up of human rights and seeking to protect them and find the suitable solutions for them. Since support of women's human rights and treating them on an equal footing with men as an integral part of human rights, the Committee is currently reviewing the applicable legislation from a human rights perspective and women's rights in particular. Also monitored are issues concerning women's rights in order to refer recommendations in His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Prime Minister.

Eighth: Women and the Media:

Women represent fifty per cent of the society. As mothers, wives, sisters, housewives and working women, they take part with men in building and developing the community in almost all areas of life. In reality, women make additional contributions because they constitute one half of the productive force and also look after one half of the country's producers.

The State of Bahrain looks upon women with a great deal of respect. In the field of information, women have been actively involved over a long period in various areas of audio, video and print media. At the Bahrain Radio and TV Corporation, women represent around 35% of the total workforce. Women were able to rise up the ladder and occupy key positions by participating in the policies contributing to the Corporation's development. Furthermore, many women are working as engineers, technicians (camerawomen, lighting, sound, technicians, machine operators, etc.) and as announcers and programme producers.

It should be noted that since starting their radio career and subsequently in television, Bahraini women have effectively contributed to producing social and family programmes. This has resulted in giving a family nature to such programmes and directing them to tackling women's and family issues from a realistic perspective. This has had a positive impact on women's role in the information service.

In view of the principal aims of information in serving the listeners and viewers, the Corporation has given top priority to women and family affairs by dedicating no less than 12 hours daily to such programmes (main radio programme and second programme). At least 5 hours of daily transmission is allowed on the Bahrain TV Satellite Station out of the total 24 hours transmission. Similarly, eight hours of transmission is allowed on the Channel 55 service.

The Corporation is seeking to create a suitable atmosphere for working women to enable them to strike a balance between their duties as employees and also their domestic duties as mothers. A day care centre was set up for workers of the Information Ministry in 1991. The Corporation is striving to ensure that its different programmes provide a positive presentation of Arab woman as an effective participant in development. Therefore, it has produced programmes mainly prepared by women to discuss vital issues. These include but are not limited to 'In the balance' that deals with women in various areas of employment. There is also the programme entitled "Other Half" that discusses the needs and issues of concern to the Bahraini family. Women take an active role in discussing such issues especially the live programmes presented by Bahrain Television. Famous pioneers among women are given coverage and the light is shed on women who have contributed to developing the community. Also covered are the activities of local and women's societies dealing with women's issues. Moreover, the Corporation co-operates with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other Ministries that are concerned with women's activities and underlining their cultural role.

The local daily and weekly newspapers and magazines devote regular features for women's issues and activities. The coverage is a reflection of the progress made by women in the community through interviews with officials concerned with women's activities in the government and private sectors. Women's involvement in the local press is significant. There are female journalists, reporters, columnists, editorial staff and graphic designers in the local newspapers. Female journalists working in Akhbar Al Khaleej total 11, Al Ayam 10, Gulf Daily News 8 and Bahrain Tribune 9. Women's prominent role in the local press is undeniable and is no less than that of men. Given that the media are a reflection of the community, we can conclude that the picture depicted by the radio and TV stations of Bahraini women is true and realistic.

Ninth: Women and the Environment

The international concern with women and their significant role in protection of the environment, its resources and wealth has been prompted by the belief in women's ability to make effective and influential contributions in this field. Women have a vital role in bringing up and raising a new generation that loves and respects the environment. Younger people can be raised in a balanced and moderate manner to maintain the environment without damaging its ability to be useful and resourceful to the future generations. Women are our mothers and are the housewives and active members of our society. In brief, they play an important role in the overall economic development. Therefore, facilitating their task to carry out their mission and enabling them to play a key role in preserving the environment is both vital and significant. It is a duty of all communities to give women assistance to achieve their overall development from the economic, social and environmental aspects.

The relevant Government authorities have focused on women to play a leading role in the management of their own environment. This takes place by enhancing their awareness and education on certain urgent environmental issues of concern to the country. Once they are aware of such environmental questions they can make a contribution to solving and dealing with them. For example, educational field campaigns have targeted women to train them on how to properly dispose of domestic waste in a proper manner for the protection of the environment. They were also advised on ways of reducing the production of domestic waste and recycling some components of it. The campaigns sought to familiarise women with the risks posed by waste and how to deal with such refuse in a preventive manner. Such efforts have resulted in reducing the quantity of waste produced by local homes, thus alleviating burden on the concerned government authorities and reducing the land area used for dumping such waste.

On the other hand, Government authorities organise continuous courses to inform and familiarise women with the serious water shortage situation in

Bahrain and the discernible decline in the quantity and quality of underground water. Women are told that it is vital to preserve this wealth in terms of quantity and quality. Such courses give practical steps that can be applied at home for reducing water consumption.

Meanwhile, the Government is making concerted efforts for rationalisation of power consumption, with particular emphasis on domestic consumption. In this area, women play an undeniably vital role.

An increasing number of women are playing an effective part in protection of the environment through participation in committees concerned with the environment, such as the Environment Protection Committee, Water Consumption Rationalisation Committee, Bahrain Garden Club and Bahrain Health and Safety Society.

To support such Government efforts, non-government societies and clubs cooperate with government authorities in enhancing awareness and education to improve environmental awareness standards. Women's societies have been making commendable efforts in tackling urgent environmental issues such as the water shortage problem and growing production of domestic refuse. Such efforts took the form of holding seminars, lectures and workshops and exchange of information and expertise in the area of enhancing women's role in preserving the environment. Further, some women's societies are represented on the boards of directors of certain regional environmental networks, hence giving them a valuable opportunity to enrich their practical experience.

In spite of such government and private efforts, there are certain goals that we seek to achieve to enable women to play their full role and to benefit from their full potential in preserving the environment.

Such goals may be summed up in the following:

- * Consolidating women's anti-illiteracy programmes and raising women's educational standards in general, with emphasis on eradicating environmental illiteracy.

- * Drawing up a clearly defined national strategy and national programme of action to boost women's role in protecting the environment and wildlife wealth.
- * Urging the media to produce and compile information materials and programmes to be presented by the media to enhance and deepen environmental awareness and culture among women.
- * Involving women in drawing up environmental policies and giving them the opportunity to take decisions in the field of the environment.
- * Promoting co-ordination between the government authorities concerned with the environment and natural resources and the non-government authorities, especially women's societies, and deciding a clearly defined mechanism to achieve such co-ordination.
- * Striking a balance between women's duties and employment outside their homes and their role in properly running their home environment. This is particularly needed with the indications of increased reliance by many women on foreign housemaids in running their domestic affairs. This will have the adverse effect of wasting the exhaustible natural resources such as water and electricity and improper handling of domestic refuse of various kinds.

Tenth: Role and Mechanisms of the Private Sector Organisations in Boosting Women's Status:

Private societies in general, and women's societies in particular, play an effective role in boosting women and enabling them to assume their appropriate status in the community by helping women raise their cultural, social and living standards. They are also being helped to apply the principle of social solidarity. Assistance allows them to play a role in development of the community. Bahraini girls and mothers in the rural areas are qualified and educated to co-ordinate the work and efforts of women to enable them to confront the social, cultural and economic changes on local and international levels. Efforts include strengthening ties with the relevant Arab and international organisations.

Since the launch of such societies in the early 1950s, they have been actively involved in women's development. Bahrain has five women's societies in addition to women's activities departments in professional, Islamic and charitable societies. Women's societies co-ordinate their activities and exchange information. It should be noted that they have shown a clear interest in applying the Beijing Conference Plan of Action. Societies' efforts may be summed up in the following:

1. **Alleviating the Burden of Poverty:** Societies have been keen on extending financial and in kind aid to poor and needy people, especially women. School stationery items are distributed to the children of such families. Women's societies have taken the lead in setting up the University Student Fund.

In the field of vocational training, each society is setting up its own tailoring and cooking training workshops as well as training on other skills needed by women. They also encourage the launch of small projects to generate a steady income for poor women. Innovative training programmes such as training on photography is currently being introduced.

Two societies, namely the Children and Mothers Welfare Society and Awal Women's Society, have opened two operations for the benefit of their members. The first is a project for manufacture of paper from palm fronds, an operation launched by CMWS. This is considered as a new experiment in the field of occupational training and qualifies young women who are unable to continue their education but wish to acquire new skills in paper manufacture. Use of palm fronds is practical, as the raw material is readily available in the local environment. The vital aims of the project are to create job opportunities and income generating activities and to raise the standards of the Centre's trainees. The Society is seeking to train the biggest number of trainees. Following every two or three courses, trainees are selected from those who have the ability to work as instructors

In addition, Awal Women's Society launched "Al Naqda Vocational Project" to maintain and develop a traditional Bahraini method of embroidery. The Society is seeking to revive this handicraft and the Project has now 11 girls working under a supervisor at the Society's premises. Owing to the success of this handicraft as a local operation, the number of workers is expected to grow in future. Bahraini girls are being encouraged to take up jobs in this traditional business while the operation is operated on a wider scale in the local community to appreciate the products of national handicrafts.

2. Building up a Women Data Base:

The Arabian Gulf region is witnessing rapid changes in various walks of life. Since the Children and Mothers Welfare Society is keen on ensuring that the progress of development should be based upon scientific studies and clearly identified goals, and due to the obvious lack of research centres concerning women, it has established the Women and Children Data Centre to meet the shortage of information in this field. The Centre looks forward to be a focal point for researchers concerned with economic, social and cultural matters. It is expected to grow into a major database about women and children affairs throughout the Arab world.

3. Education and Awareness Programmes

These programmes are designed to overcome social and psychological difficulties and to create a more convenient atmosphere for family planning. It will do this by using all available means, including the media, seminars and lectures, in addition to direct communication methods or publication of magazines, newsletters and periodicals. Local societies are actively involved in implementing family and social awareness programmes and educating the public about women's rights. Such programmes target women at community centres, schools and anti-illiteracy and adult education centres.

4. Microstart Project

The Children and Mothers Welfare Society and Awal Women Society have been chosen for implementing this project which is the first of its kind in Bahrain. It is financed by the UNDP and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The Project is aimed at raising living standards of low-income citizens by extending small loans to them.

5. Reproductive Health, Legal, Psychological and Social Advice * Family Planning and Reproductive Health Consultancy Centre

In July 1998 the Bahrain Family Planning and Care Society launched a consultancy centre to give advice concerning family health and reproductive and sexual health. Advice is given by qualified and experienced staff and personal information is dealt with on a confidential basis. This Centre further supports and complements the services provided by the Government sector. The Centre, which is based in the premises of the Society, trains its own staff on how to give the necessary advice to women.

* **Family Guidance and Orientation Office**

This Office was opened on 21.3.1998 at the premises of Nahdat Fatat Al Bahrain Society to provide family guidance services to families by specialists in the family guidance field. It also transfers patients to the Psychiatric Hospital and gives the necessary legal advice. This Office seeks to co-ordinate with community development centres, health centres and Education Ministry schools to ensure that its services are given to the greatest number of people who need such service.

* **Awal Women's Society's Legal Consultancy Office**

This Office gives legal advice free of charge to women and families through an experienced lawyer who staffs this office one-day per week. A special committee formed by members of the Society supervises the Office.

During the period from 1995 to 2000, local societies held a number of seminars and conferences concerning women's issues. The most important of these were:

1. **Women and Development Seminar: Boosting the Role of Women in Development in the 21st Century**

This seminar was organised in November 1997 by the Children and Mothers Welfare Society. Its main recommendation called for the formation of a working team representing various sectors to investigate women's conditions and obstacles preventing her contribution to development and productivity.

2. **Seminar on Women's Status in Man Made Laws in Bahrain**

This Seminar was held by in November 1998 by the Awal Women's Society within the framework of efforts made in the field of women's rights. The Seminar shed light on women's status in health laws, nationality law, criminal laws and housing law.

3. **Gulf Women in the New Millennium Conference: Opportunities, Obstacles and Required Roles - March 2000**

The convention of this Conference by Nahdat Fatat Al Bahrain Society in March 2000 is considered to be one of the applications of the Beijing Conference Programme of Action, which called for the advancement of women by enabling them to play a more active role in civil community organisations. It culminated in the issue of Al Nahda Declaration 2000.