

Iran's Universe Periodic Review -2010

Report submitted by Business Women Council in Tehran Chamber of Commerce to United nations High commissar to Human Rights

September 2009

Summary:

The women business activists' community in Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Mine is a non-governmental organization established in Feb. 2007.

The 2500 members of the Council are businesswomen active in different economical and business sectors.

Increasing the role of women in economical and commercial practices, their presence in international trade, exchange of experiences and mutual cooperation with the businesswomen in Islamic countries, are the main goals of Council.

In recent years, women have occupied more than 60% of university seats and this indicates the role of both governmental and private sectors to the subject of employment.

A part of this report has been prepared according to statistical indicators and the other part base on the identical observation.

The most important factors in women's low rate of participation in socio-economic affairs could be lack of self-confidence and self-belief in women and the traditional values holding the men as the sole providers of living necessities of the family, keeping, in turn, the women at home for the accomplishment of indoor obligations.

The recommendations to improve women's participation is; to hold training courses specially for women and to broadcast TV programs in this regard.

Introduction:

The women business activists' community in Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Mine started its official activities in Feb. 2007, with more than 2500 members, being entitled the Iranian Businesswomen Council as the biggest formed NGO in this field.

The members of the Council are businesswomen active in different economical and business sectors such as import/export, transportation, agricultural production, food, pharmaceutical, oil, mine, heavy industries and engineering consults and services.

Increasing the role of women in economical and commercial practices, their presence in international trade, exchange of experiences and mutual cooperation with the businesswomen in Islamic countries, encourage them to reveal their skills in the said activities and, finally, joining the Tehran Chamber of Commerce to use its support and technical assistance, are defined as the main goals of the Council.

To achieve the goals, **the domestic activities** of the Council has been : encouraging the inauguration of The Businesswomen Council in a few other provinces' Chamber of Commerce, held a few seminars in order for women to submit their articles. Continued training courses on international trade were taken place and regular consultancy sessions were offered and, finally, the Council's web site was built up to furnish updated useful information to the members.

Besides, the Agricultural Bank (Keshavarzi Bank) has been asked and accepted to render facilities to the newborn enterprises.

The international activities: To extend the activities of the Council to foreign countries, an agreement has also been signed between the International Islamic University of Malaysia (MOU) and the Businesswomen Council in Tehran Chamber of Commerce. Making arrangements to participate to workshops in Malaysia, to international seminars in Doha, Syria and Emirates for the occasion of the women's day. Making connections with the activists in other countries by easing accessibility to their database.

Methodology:

This report has been prepared on the basis of the Council's direct talks to the women referring to the Council, regular visits to the workshops of creative women in different provinces and searches in the local and international web sites of reliable organizations. Respectively, a great deal of the national and international organization's information, in their web sites and their printed reports were piled up.

Meanwhile, The Statistical data was extracted from the sources of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, The Statistical Center of Iran and The Research Center of Iran Economy Periodical. References are listed in the appendix.

Present situation:

Considerable progress of Iranian businesswomen presence in economical fields, specifically in managing business enterprises, has been recently recognized.

For the moment, 2500 businesswomen have obtained membership in the Tehran Chamber of Commerce (*) who are active in the fields of production, trading and services. Among them, Only three are members of the Board of Representative of the Country' Chambers of Commerce, which is an indication of businesswomen's contribution of less than 1%. But, higher level of social knowledge has resulted in their presence in economical activities to increase considerably.

According to a study report published by The World Economic Forum in 2008, (**), it was revealed that, among a group of 30 countries, the Iranian women took the 128th place in political powers, 120th in parliamentary affairs and 126th in ministerial positions.

Iran has got the 116th position regarding the gender differentiation between men and women this year, against the last year's record of 118^{th shown} in the same report, which indicates a 2% improvement.

Talking about the gender differentiation in terms of literacy and high education, Iran has obtained an appropriate place- 120th in parliamentary affairs and 126th in ministerial positions.

According to the report of ILO (International Labor Org.), (***), the employment rate of Iranian women, a country with a record of high achievement rate in women's academic and educational studies, who precedes most of the countries in the region, is only 13%. So, This very low rate of women participation has become the biggest challenge the authorities are facing.

Weakness and obstacles:

In a recent study made by The Women Socio- Cultural Council, (****), about the employment situation of Iranian women, following results were obtained:

-60% of Iranian women is eager to have a job and 20% like to work outside on conditions that will not hurt their family life. Certainly, The more they are educated, the higher their willingness to have a job.

-98% of women confessed that the family responsibility is a big barrier to their employment.

-More than half of women still believe that the equal opportunities for women compared to men is still missing.

- 73% of working women declared their satisfaction and the rest complained about the lack of secured positions.

- 76% of men agreed with their wife's participation in economical affairs, while the reminder confessed the responsibility of their wives at home as an obstacle to outside jobs.

- 51% of married women emphasized that their job has affected the emotional relationship with their family members, while 34% showed no changes in this regard.

- 45% of married working women are against having more children, as they can not comply with the children's needs. 35% of them believe that women's job occupation plays an important role in birth control of the country.

- Most of unmarried women do not consider their occupation as an obstacle to their marriage. The rest see it as an obstacle because of the probable disagreement of their future husband.

In general, it makes it very difficult for the women to have an occupation outside home and at the same time take good care of their children. So, most of them feel anxiety and unhappiness about it.

Causes of women's low socio- economic participation

The most important factors in women's low rate of participation in socio-economic affairs could be briefed as below:

1- lack of self-confidence and self-belief in women.

2- The traditional values holding the men as the sole providers of living necessities of the family, keeping, in turn, the women at home for the accomplishment of indoor obligations.

Opportunities & Improvement:

Recent positive movements in Iran indicate increased women right protection in the country, some of them mentioned below:

- There are more women deputies now in the Iranian Parliament rather than before.
- The Department for Women's Affairs in the Presidential Bureau has been opened which is actively taking part in suggesting and following up the women's subjective matters.
- The Women Socio-Cultural Council has been inaugurated in the Cultural Revolution High Council, aiming to detect and resolve the social, economical and legal problems women are coping with.
- The Commission of Women Affairs in the parliament and the Department for Women's Affairs in the Presidential Bureau seek close cooperation with other related information sources such as the Statistical Center of Iran, World Bank and the expertise of some international NGOs, in order to search the ways of protecting the occupation and the income of women.
- To this extent, The Labor House of Iran has also appointed special divisions for protecting the female workers and their rights.

Conclusion:

Iranian women have always worked close to their men but their participation in social and political scene has never been revealed in a serious manner. They have always been put to simple and low-level tasks.

In recent years, due to great changes in social behavior, the trend of women's willingness towards education, technology and creativity has moved upwards substantially. They, being counted as a half of the population of the country, not only prefer not to stay idle, but are also considered as literate-expert members of the society who have surpassed their masculine fellows in terms of educational careers by occupying about 60% of university seats. (Iran Statistical Center) (*****).

Obviously, the contribution of women in different sectors of society can cause the increment of the family income and, consequently, affect their welfare. This, in turn, will lessen the burden of the head of the family.

On the other hand, the contribution of more women in the employment resources of the country will, of course, lead to higher supply of work force and decrease the wages and, consequently, will cause reductions in the cost of production and their prices.

Recommendations:

Following suggestions are made to improve the status of women socio-economic participation in our country:

- To encourage women to increase their serious and active participation by initiating projects and plans to creating more opportunities for them in all spheres in the country.
- To increase advocacy activities and create awareness on the actual and potential roles of women in all aspects of their social, economic, political, public and private lives.
- Developing the knowledge among women based on women work creativity and entrepreneurship by TV broadcasting roundtables, interviews and/or producing soap operas in this theme.
- To promote the employment of women workers in the private sector by providing incentives for employers to recruit, invest in and retain women workers, by proper means such as granting tax exemptions to them upon employment of more women workers.
- To create opportunities for women to do part of activities at home periodically or in a particular condition.

Appendix:

Men & Women employment tabulation table

Extracted from Research Center of Iran Economic Periodical: (***)**

Remarks	Year 1383	Year 1388
Overall employment (in millions)	18/90	23/38
Men's share in employment	64/5	69/20
Women's share in employment	12/9	16/2
Unemployment women's rate	17/8	3/9
Unemployment men 's rate	11/3	8/2
Overall unemployment rate differences between men & women	6/5	1/1
Women's participation rate out of total female population	15/4	18/5
Educated active women's rate out of total active female population	23/50	27/60
Educated active men's rate out of total active male population	9/3	11/10
Unemployment rate of higher educated women	23/6	9/3
Unemployment rate of higher educated men	9/09	7/9
Overall unemployment rate differences between educated men & educated women	14/50	¼

References:

Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Mines (*)

The World Economic Forum ()**

International Labor Office (*)**

The Women Socio-Cultural Council (**)**

Statistical Center of Iran (***)**

Iran Economic Periodical (***)**