



# **Economic Independence of Women**

A pre-condition to full participation of women

**NGO Report for the UPR review of the Iranian  
Government**

**House of Culture and Sustainable Development  
August 2009**

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1. The House of Culture and Sustainable Development (HCSD) is a non-governmental and non-for-profit organization formally registered in the Islamic Republic of Iran, with an aim to enhance cultural activities in Iran to strengthen sustainable development since 2001. This organization does various training and research activities and moderates an information network among NGOs. HCSD has been nominated as the Secretary of the National NGO Committee on the Millennium Development Goals in Iran, selected as the member of the Central Council of the Tehran NGOs House (2005-2007), member of the Communication Network of Iran's Environmental NGOs, and member of the NGOs Secretariat in Tehran Municipality.
2. Millennium Development Goals are among the HCSD priority programmes. Various activities have been planned such as translation, holding training meetings, publication of newsletters, etc. Among the goals, the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment are among the focused areas of the organization. The organization is now active in two important fields: empowerment of women headed households and combating the gender-based violence.
3. The present statement deals with the economic independence of women, as it is a major issue within the greater subject of women's empowerment in Iran. At the present time, a plan for empowerment of women headed households is being implemented by the State Welfare Organization and certain NGOs are active to offer the needed trainings. HCSD is now working on producing the necessary literature for empowering these women. That's why, to our point of view, economic independence of women is one of the significant issues to be dealt with. To produce this report, HCSD has used various reports produced by governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations, especially the draft charter of Iranian women (presented by an NGO), the Labour Law, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran as well as the views presented by experts.
4. In our society, "labour" has always been affected (and somehow defined) by two variables of "gender" and "age" in such a way women have not been able to fully participate in the society. Men are obliged to work and earn money and according to the civil law, they are guardians of women and children. Employment and the production system are directly targeted on men's labour, and women's employment is directly affected by the cultural attitudes and gender clichés. Jobs such as working as secretary, cooking, sewing, caring of children, typing or certain other jobs that do not need any skills or knowledge or expertise are referred as women's jobs in the mind of most of people.
5. Paragraph 26 of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) mentions a clear commitment of states in this regard as follows : [State has to] "*promote women's economic independence, including employment, and eradicate the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women by addressing the structural causes of poverty through changes in economic structures, ensuring equal access*

*for all women, including those in rural areas, as vital development agents, to productive resources, opportunities and public services.”*

6. According to the Labour Law of Iran, women and men have to be treated equally in employment, but in reality, women working in governmental bodies and private sector entities, are paid less than men and especially In rural areas, women work more than men and are treated as wage-less Labourers who should work from early morning till night, and provide more prosperity for men at home and in farms.

## **Major Concerns**

7. Inequalities in employment opportunities, lack of employment security for women, inappropriate employment places and lack of enjoyment of special supports for women, economic poverty and dependence of women (especially housekeepers) are among the major obstacles for women's participation.
8. Women's employment in informal sectors, while being a way of enumeration for women, is not formally considered in state statistics. That's why the formal statistics of women's employment has to be carefully reviewed and revised.
9. An overview of women's employment in governmental sector indicates that there is a wide gap between existing positions for employment and the job application by a great number of the educated women looking for employment. The rate of jobless educated is twice more than the men with expertise.
10. "Policies of Women's Employment of the Islamic Republic of Iran" adopted in 1992, drafted by the Higher Council of the Cultural Revolution and approved by the Expediency Assembly, opened new windows of hope for women, but never came into force. Article one of this law, refers to, *expressis verbis*, value of women's work at home and mentions: "Taking into account the holiness of motherhood and the role of women in nurturing the future generation and management of the house, and their role in the process of cultural and economic development, the moral and material values of women's role in the family and their Labour at home, should be considered."
11. The opportunity for any married woman, who seeks to have a better life through working and earning money, is always limited to her husband's permission.

## **Legal Background**

12. Iran is one of 47 member states of the International Labour Organization that joined ILO at the time of its founding in 1919. Iran has also joined the C100 Equal Remuneration Convention (1951) and C111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (1958).
13. Principle 28 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran stipulates in a general way that women and men can choose any occupation they would like and there is no legal prohibition for women. It states: *“Everyone has the right to choose any occupation he wishes, if it is not contrary to Islam and the public interests, and does not infringe the rights*

*of others. The government has the duty, with due consideration of the need of society for different kinds of work, to provide every citizen with the opportunity to work, and to create equal conditions for obtaining.”*

14. Based on what has been stipulated in the Constitution, Article 38 of the Labour Law rejects any discrimination and mentions that *“In compensating for equal work performed under equal conditions at a workshop, equal wages must be paid to men and women. Discrimination in determining the wages on the basis of age, sex, race, nationality, and political and religious beliefs shall be prohibited.”*
15. Special privileges for women have been mentioned in the Labour Law, in the section of the Working Conditions of Women (four articles) and the employer is bound to provide female workers with the following opportunities:
  - a. Female workers’ maternity leave;
  - b. Prohibition of performing dangerous, hard and hazardous works for women;
  - c. Provision of appropriate conditions for mothers to feed their babies.
16. In the section eleven of the Labour Law, entitled "Crimes and Punishments", any failure to observe the working conditions of women is regarded as a crime. The Labour Law has considered certain working conditions for women and obliges the employer to eradicate any discrimination between men and women in working conditions.
17. At the present time, there are two employment limits for women according to Iran's laws and regulations. One is the prohibition of any employment that is not contrary to Islam and the public interests and the second is the prohibition of married women to any job that is contrary to family interests. In the first type of limitations, two kinds of prohibitions can be identified: a: prohibition from working as judges, and b: employment in armed forces.
18. According to the "Policies of Women's Employment of the Islamic Republic of Iran" approved by the Expediency Assembly in 1992, "women's employment in cultural, social and economic sectors is considered as a condition for social justice and society's excellence and has to be appropriately regarded”.

## **Suggestions**

19. To promote women's positions in economy and to eradicate discriminations, the following measures are necessary:
  - a. State bodies, private sector entities and non-governmental organizations have to recognize women's employment. They have to adopt policies that encourage more support for women's access to material capital (such as credits, financial resources and insurance), human capital (training courses and education), and social capital (support of active women in unions, societies and associations).
  - b. State bodies, private sector and non-governmental organizations have to facilitate women's employment through free provision of kindergartens or centers for caring the adults.
  - c. Employment of women in governmental institutions based on their selection according to their belief, ethnic origin or religion, whether in time of employing or after that, or any discrimination based on gender in job promotions, or giving any priority to male employees in sending them to missions out of the city or the country has to be waived.
  - d. Sexual abuse in work space has to be legally prosecuted.
  - e. Any employment conditions such as the condition of marriage, or any other discriminative condition has to be annulled.

- f. Any gender separation in work places which may end in marginalization of women, has to be waived.
- g. The government has to take special measures for combating the feminization of poverty through social security coverage for women in various jobs, support of old women and women headed households and insurance and retirement for housekeeping married women.
- h. The government has to take measures in considering certain positive actions such as provision of self-employment loans for women, provisions of production equipments for them or any special loan for building a shop or a workshop and strengthening of women's practical skills, appropriate with present needs of development.
- i. The government and civil society organizations have to support women's economic activities in villages, through more education and trainings and enhancement of their access to credits and support of women's cooperative associations in rural areas.
- j. The government and private sector entities have to pay full attention to the situation of female workers in agriculture, especially where they are working in hard conditions, guarantee an equal wage with men and provide them with welfare facilities such as kindergartens or health centers; these female workers have to be covered by social security.
- k. The law has to recognize and take into account the economic value of the informal employment of women and their other economic activities that are done to contribute to family charges, especially after divorce or husband's death. Their share in gross domestic production and their added value created from domestic work has to be taken into account.
- l. Law and regulations have to be revised so that more women can have access to work opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

20. The conventional definitions of jobs in the formal economy do not recognize women's share. Women are facing various social and economic limitations for their full participation in the economy. Formal job opportunities for women during the past fifty years have not increased due to various causes such as a decrease in traditional working opportunities during the years after the Revolution in 1979, all-embracing domination of oil on the national economy and those formal policies that limit women's employment, especially keeping women with expertise at home. During the past decade, the level of education among women has highly increased while more women would like to work outside, but nowadays, both women and men are encountering widespread unemployment. Employed women face with worse conditions in private sector such as lower wage, or inappropriate working conditions. Various existing discriminations may increase the relative poverty of women, especially in rural areas. Therefore, revisions of laws and regulations in this regard are highly recommended. Women's employment has to be supported by the government, civil society organizations and private sector entities with an aim to prevent the feminization of poverty.