

# \*\*\* RURAL WOMEN

Exported from Holy-Writings.com on 2026-06-21 — 1 clipping

\*\*\* RURAL WOMEN

-----  
Statement to the thirty-second session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

Agenda item 5(b): Problems of rural women, including food, water resources, agricultural technology, rural employment, transportation and environment

Vienna, Austria

14-23 March 1988

\* \* \* \* \*

The Baha'i International Community acknowledges that the process of solving problems of rural women requires time as well as energy resources. It applauds the steps outlined in the Secretary-General's Report on Rural Women, and is pleased to be able to say that many of its member communities are already engaged in implementing programmes such as those recommended.

The Baha'i Community especially welcomes the appeal to rural women themselves to become aware of the need for them to be equal and full participators in productive activities, both as contributors and beneficiaries.

The experience of Baha'i development projects shows that the values espoused by communities and individuals affect the amount of social change. Rarely, however, do documents, research activities and projects designed for development address the need to change basic attitudes that reinforce acceptance of the inequality of the roles women are given in most societies.

The Baha'i Community believes that a climate of awareness that encourages change must be fostered. The attitudes of society towards women regulate their lives, determine their activities, prescribe their limitations and outline their responsibilities and duties.

The Baha'i Community would like to recommend two practical steps. The first is to encourage Member States to use all communications media, old and new, to develop a climate conducive to social change for women. The second is to encourage the education of girls. It has been demonstrated time and again that expansion of public education can significantly affect all other development activities: agriculture, health, housing, sanitation or the environment.

A number of development projects have also shown that people's lives can be altered substantially by appropriate messages through the mass media, reinforced with practical activities. This is being achieved, for example, in the field of health, where communication programmes alter people's fundamental attitudes towards diarrhoeal diseases. In some instances, people are persuaded to behave in ways opposite to their accustomed behavior (e.g., to feed children instead

of withholding food during a diarrhoeal episode). In population programmes, social marketing seeks to encourage even those who may have a negative disposition towards family planning to become more socially responsible.

In the view of the Baha'i International Community, communication projects aimed at altering attitudes and behaviour towards women and women-related issues are crucial to the success of the recommendations of the Secretary-General.

Development communication is already a firmly established field of effort.

Preliminary research on existing attitudes determines both who are the target audiences and what are the appropriate messages for each audience as well as the appropriate vehicles for dissemination of those messages.

Frequently, an important message may need to be directed towards a group that is not the beneficiary. A primary target for communication related to development projects for women may well be men. Each country must determine what level of intensity of the communication strategy will be most effective: an intensive campaign, brief in duration but high in profile, or one that is cumulative, reaching smaller audiences but building up over a period of time.

In addition to the mass communications media, appropriate vehicles for carrying message of change in rural areas are activities such as folk theater, songs and puppetry. These can reinforce discussion in the more traditional open forums.

A mutually reinforcing relationship arises when individual initiative, as shown by women participating in women's programmes, is supported by the village. This process of developing a community spirit to support and fortify individual efforts on the part of women is brought about through an education and communication programme which precedes project activities. It is the effort to achieve such a progressive, dynamic and, above all, harmonious relationship that characterizes Baha'i programmes of social development.

The fundamental concept underlying the two-fold approach of communication and education is that change in behaviour and attitude can be legislated but cannot always be enforced. What legislation can do is to allow new ideas to permeate a community, be reflected upon, and finally be adapted and adopted in a harmonious and non-aggressive way. A programme of communication and education fosters dialogue and draws participants into the development process to the point where the stimulus for change comes from within the community. This maximizes the prospects for continuity after external support has ceased.

The Baha'i International Community offers these views and recommendations as a contribution towards developing a framework within which development activities can take place. It fully supports the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General and is ready to offer every possible assistance in disseminating these guidelines.

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 29 and 30 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

\* \* \* \* \*

UN Document #E/CN.6/1988/NGO/13

— \*\*\* RURAL WOMEN