

QUESTIONNAIRE

Part One

Overview of trends in achieving gender equality and women's advancement

The Kuwaiti Constitution of 1962 seeks to safeguard the rights of Kuwaiti women and encourage their participation in action for social development, as provided for under article 26, which states:

"Everyone is equal in human dignity and has the same general rights and duties before the law, without distinction on the basis of sex, language, origin or religion."

The Constitution, which guarantees women the right to education, health care and so on, has been supplemented by a series of laws and statutes aimed at strengthening and affirming the rights of women in all personal, social and economic spheres. The Civil Service Law in particular provides women with the flexibility they need so that they can work without being under so much pressure that they are forced back into the home: maternity leave and all other types of leave for women are cases in point.

The fact that Kuwait has signed a number of international conventions and agreements relating to the promotion and protection of women's rights, including:

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women; and

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

is evidence that both the State and society affirm and acknowledge the importance of women and their right, without any form of distinction or discrimination, to contribute to the development of society.

All of this has provided Kuwaiti women with an opportunity to advance their status and to achieve a position of equality with their male counterparts in all spheres of activity. This situation has also been helped by the fact that women now account for some 50 per cent of the Kuwaiti population; the proportion of women in the workforce has risen from 17 per cent in 1980 to 93.32 per cent in 1998.

Part Two

Financial and institutional measures

The State continues to provide financial support for women-specific programmes and policies, allocating budgets to initiatives aimed at enabling Kuwaiti women to contribute to the social development process on the same footing as their male counterparts. By Decree No. 250 of 1994, the Council of Ministers adopted a budget for a State project costing some 505 million Kuwaiti dinars (KD) which aims at placing Kuwaiti girl drop-outs in government jobs, following a period of training.

Total spending on girls' schools at various levels increased by KD 8,790,088, from KD 298 314,727 in the school year 1995/1996 to KD 307,104,795 in the year 1996/1997.

On 23 December 1996, a ministerial decree was issued for the establishment of a permanent national committee for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Chaired by the Assistant Deputy Minister for Social Development of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and including representatives from government agencies, the committee has been charged with the task of designing a national strategy and plan of action for the implementation by Kuwait of the Beijing Platform for Action. In accordance with Decree No. 65 of 1997, the committee has also been given the task of establishing a department for women inside the Office of Children's Affairs of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. There are various channels through which support and cooperation are exchanged with welfare agencies and the Kuwaiti Union of Women's Associations on matters relating to women.

Part Three

Implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action

Not content with merely establishing a committee and a department, the Government has also taken courageous action that reflects the political determination of decision makers to assert the role of women and afford them the opportunity to participate fully in the life of society. In 1998, the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour appointed women to sit on the boards of directors of cooperative societies and endowment committees engaged in local development activities. This was a bold step, which does credit to the State, if one considers that the State began by appointing Kuwaiti women to positions on the boards of directors of cooperative societies and endowment committees located in areas that are still considered to be very resistant to the idea of giving women an important role in the decision-making process. This is a practical example of how the recommendations of the Beijing Conference have been implemented with regard to enabling women to gain access to positions of authority and decision-making. It also demonstrates the faith which State officials place in the abilities and aptitudes of Kuwaiti women, who are every bit as capable as their male counterparts.

Recognizing the importance which the State attaches to planning for a future in which the individual will be required to assume direct responsibility for earning his or her own living, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, in cooperation with the Endowment Fund for Family Welfare, has designed a project called "By My Own Efforts" which is targeted at women of working age (between 14 and 45 years) and which emphasizes the importance of a work ethic in the life of the individual. The project stresses the need for every individual to contribute to the production process and to the development of society.

On 16 May 1999, in recognition of the vital contribution of Kuwaiti women throughout history to the development of Kuwaiti society and of their material sacrifices and sense of responsibility in meeting the various challenges which the country has faced, the Emir of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, issued an order granting Kuwaiti women full political rights, including the right to vote and to stand for election to the representative bodies of Kuwait. This decision was made, taking account of the elections that are scheduled for 2003. The legal requirements for this measure are already in place.

Kuwaiti women have gained access to a number of leadership positions, including that of deputy minister, ambassador and university dean. In 1996, women held some 29 per cent of all leadership positions, compared with 4.1 per cent in 1993. The following table shows the trend over time in the number of posts held by Kuwaiti women at the Ministry of Education as a percentage of all posts held by both men and women at the Ministry.

Trend in the number of posts held by women as a percentage of all posts at the Ministry of Education over the period (1995-1998)

Position	1995/1996		1997/1998		Percentage increase*
	No.	Percentage of posts held by women at this level*	No.	Percentage of posts held by women at this level*	
Leadership positions	-	-	-	-	-
Management positions in the Office of the Ministry	160	35	176	39	10
Management positions (schools)	760	67	830	67	9
Technical positions	1 023	75	914	76	11
Administrative positions	1 020	79	1 901	83	28
Ancillary positions	76	8.6	32	8	58
Total	3 039	62	3 853	69	10

*Translator's note: These statistics do not add up.

The number of management positions held by women at the Ministry of Education has risen significantly and by as much as 10 per cent. The number of women at the Ministry occupying management positions in schools (headmistresses and deputy heads) has also risen by 9 per cent. There has been a 28 per cent increase in the number of women working in administrative positions, while the overall rise in the number of women working at various levels is in the order of 10 per cent, reflecting the efforts of the Ministry to provide women with an opportunity to work in a range of jobs.

Increasing numbers of Kuwaiti women are now entering the media, taking on media jobs that used to be the exclusive preserve of men. There are women chairpersons of boards of directors. The Assistant Deputy Minister for Foreign Information is a woman and there are women owners and editors-in-chief of several magazines.

Both sexes have equal access to education at all levels. The University of Kuwait has established a media studies department offering courses in all aspects of the media and organizing, through the Ministry of Higher Education, media studies exchange programmes and study grants for both women and men students.