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Voluntary Participation of Rural Women in the Sultanate of Oman During the Pre-Renaissance Era: A Socio-historical Perspective

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Abstract

This study focuses on understanding the nature and reality of voluntary activities conducted by rural Omani women in the past, specifically before 1970, an era known in Omani society as the pre-Renaissance era. The study aimed to gather intangible heritage related to the types of voluntary participation of rural women in Omani society during that time. This research belongs to the descriptive-analytical type, aiming to describe a historical phenomenon, namely the voluntary activities of rural women in the past. To achieve this objective, a combination of descriptive and historical methods was employed, allowing for a precise description of these voluntary activities. The study utilized a specially prepared in-depth interview guide, and based on the nature of the field data, content analysis was used to derive the findings. This approach enabled an understanding of voluntary experiences from the participants' perspectives, facilitating the documentation of these experiences within their historical, social, and economic context. The study included a sample of 20 elderly rural women over 60 years old at the time of data collection in February 2018. The community attachment model was used to analyze the data, considering it an indicator of the extent to which residents of a particular area share cognitive or emotional bonds with their locale. Communities, even those that lack a developed social life, may exhibit high levels of attachment, which applies to the social dynamics in Omani society before 1970. The results reveal that voluntary work was an integral part of the daily life of rural women, that was increasing in both quantity and quality during social and religious occasions. These voluntary initiatives were both individual and group efforts, taking into account the absence of institutionalized voluntary work at that time. Additionally, the social, cultural, and economic nature of rural life played a significant role in creating specific types of voluntary activities for women in addition to the characteristics of those communities. Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that rural women played a central role in fulfilling many of the economic, social, and moral needs of their communities.

Keywords: Rural women, Voluntary Participation, Community Attachment Model, Omani Society, Pre-Renaissance Era.

Introduction

In the past, many societies relied on individual and group voluntary efforts to meet their basic

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needs that traditional social welfare systems couldn't meet. Moreover, some of these societies did not have any formal or even semi-formal social welfare systems to begin with. Hence, voluntary efforts became the primary means on which these societies relied to meet the basic needs of their residents. These efforts have developed in many societies to become a major part of sound social construction because of their positive effects on all societal systems: individual, family, and society. Voluntary efforts are now viewed as an important element in the formation of social capital and civil society since these works are the product of elevated social and human values, and they also produce elevated values in the souls of both participants and beneficiaries alike. Thus, they have become a fundamental pillar of social policies in most Western countries (Debbie, Lucas, & Lesley, 2009).

Since ancient times, human societies, with their various orientations, have sought to find support for social cohesion by creating an atmosphere of familiarity and love among their members. Then, the heavenly religions came to support this cohesion and define the relationship between man and his Creator and the relationship between man and his fellow man. Hence, the roots of voluntary work differ and multiply according to cultures and times in addition to political, religious, and social frameworks (Chalip, 2000). Omani society is one of the conservative Islamic societies in which religious commitment plays an important role in activating voluntary efforts. Saleh and Al-Maawali's study (2006) confirmed this, which marked the social and religious motives as the most important and influential factors in encouraging women to engage in voluntary work (Saleh & Al-Maawali, 2011).

Voluntary work is a civilized aspect and one of the most prominent forms and manifestations of social activities that indicate the level of maturity and development of society. The development of voluntary work is connected to the development of human thought and the development of the societies in which it is practiced. As a result of the increasing pace of individual, group, and organizational voluntary work, the social care standards of the citizens also rise, reflecting positively on society as a whole (Scott, 2019). Voluntary work provides appropriate equal opportunities for all social groups to participate in it: males, females, children, boys, youth, the elderly, and others, depending on their abilities, experiences, and desires.

Omani society relied on individual and group voluntary work in the past to fulfill many basic needs, at a time when there was not any form of institutionalization in voluntary work. There were no Omani voluntary institutions at any level that provided social, health, or educational services to citizens at that stage, except for some group voluntary work organized by the people themselves. Among these were some works provided through the efforts of some self-help groups or mutual aid groups. The situation of Omani society in the past confirms what Debbie, Lucas, and Lesley (2009) have stated: that the recognition of the importance of volunteering in many communities, voluntary organizations, and individual voluntary efforts has only flourished in recent decades (Debbie, Lucas, and Lesley, 2009).

Regarding women's participation in voluntary work, it can be said that the role of women in voluntary work in Western and developed countries is better compared to their role in third-world countries and in Arab societies in general. The results of a study on the impact of community attachment on citizens' voluntary participation in rural community improvement projects showed that community attachment based on community interests has a strong direct and indirect impact on voluntary participation, while the impact of emotional attachment was often indirect (Ryan, Agnitsch, Zhao, and Mullick, 2005).

The results of another study also confirmed that women are more involved in voluntary work in

the USA compared to men (Mesch, Rooney, Steinberg, and Denton, 2005). This goes back to the women's characteristics that distinguish them from men, as they are more interested in charity and care work, as well as their great roles in raising children and engaging in church and school activities (Wang, Yoshioka, and Ashcraft, 2013). On the other hand, some studies addressing the Arab reality, for example, Irfan's study (2010), confirmed the weakness of women's voluntary participation in general, specifically in civil and trade union organizations and associations during that era (Irfan, 2010). For our part, we see that the confirmation of some previous studies on the limited participation of women in voluntary work in the present time is an important matter that must be discussed to identify the nature of women's participation in voluntary work in the past. Accordingly, we define the problem of this study as identifying the reality and nature of voluntary participation of rural Omani women in the past, specifically before 1970, which is known in Omani society as the Pre-Renaissance era.

Literature Review

Volunteering has always been a part of human nature to help each other and those in need (Moss, 2006). Barker (1987) defines it as those movements carried out by individuals or groups without expecting financial compensation, to provide humanitarian services outside the framework of governmental institutions (Barker, 1987). It is also described as an unpaid activity where someone gives their time to help a non-profit organization or individual with whom they are not associated (Voluntary Action Rotherham, 2019). The Australian concept of volunteering was announced by the national peak body for volunteering in Australia, Volunteering Australia, in July 2015.

Volunteering is also time spent willingly for the common good and without financial gain. It can also include the concept of reciprocity, such as participation in groups where mutual aid and services are performed for the benefit of others as well as the volunteer (Govolunteer.com, 2015). The concept of volunteering in Western countries, in particular, separates the concepts of charity and philanthropy on the one hand and volunteering and helping others on the other hand. However, the Islamic religion does not call for such a separation. voluntary work is described as a form of social behavior that includes a freely chosen decision to sacrifice a significant amount of time or effort to help a person, group, or other cause and is usually done through a non-profit organization (Schroeder, D., Graziano, W., Stukas, A., and Snyder, M., 2015).

The concept of volunteering can be approached from multiple perspectives. The sociological view focuses on theorizing this concept by connecting it to free time, while the psychological investigates the motives that drive volunteers to participate in voluntary work. The perspective of economists focuses on understanding the reasons for volunteering and estimating the return or value of its contributions (Lockstone-Binney, Kirsten, Smith, and Baum, 2010). As a result, there is no agreed-upon definition or concept that defines what volunteering is (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996). Hence, the concept of volunteering is situational and takes on different meanings and aspects in different environments (Tuan, 2005).

By reviewing the various concepts of volunteering, we can understand its importance. In addition, a correct understanding of this concept shows us the extent of the urgent need to adopt, develop, and intensify its use in our contemporary Arab societies. Thus, through volunteering, we can initiate an integrated system of cooperation between the sectors of society: governmental, civil, and private to work on satisfying many societal needs and confronting many problems that stand as major obstacles in the way of development, progress, and modernization. From our point of view, volunteering is nothing but a free, voluntary, purposeful act driven by a

humanitarian, charitable, and voluntary motive, carried out by a person individually, collectively, or institutionally. It may be done in an organized manner, taking various forms: donating money, effort, work, thought, opinion, or moral support to those in need, or helping any person within the borders of society or outside it, without expecting any material or moral compensation for that (Saleh, Abd-Rubo, and Al-Daraai, *Integration Routes Between Social Work and Voluntary Work: A Sociohistorical Perspective*, 2023).

Voluntary Participation

Voluntary participation is widely used in different contexts without a clear definition (CBM, 2024). It is generally viewed as an action that starts from resources and depends on patterns of social organization for its implementation. Its effects are evident in the context of social integration; these actions are managed by the capabilities or resources that the individual has in the surrounding environment (Amann, 2023). Social participation can be understood as “a person’s involvement in activities that provide interaction with others in the community or society” (Levasseur, Richard, Gauvin, and Raymond, 2010). An individual’s involvement with others is a crucial dimension of social participation, as social activities and social interactions require at least a minimal level of engagement, although it can range on a scale from relatively passive to very active (Schormans, 2014).

A report issued by the United Nations explains that civil participation depends on the availability of three important axes or elements: people’s cooperation, approval, and contribution. To achieve this, people must be aware of the objectives of participation in development programs. Moreover, a strong connection between the people’s interests, the concern for the general conditions in society, and the nature of social relations among its members should exist. People must also coexist under these conditions and practice these relations to be convinced of true participation to achieve and accomplish its objectives (Ministry of Local Government, 1985).

Through experience, field practice, research, and field studies, it is confirmed that participation includes two types of stimuli: material and moral. Material stimuli include stimuli related to the history of community work, economic motivations, and the extent of the possibility of obtaining capabilities that increase family income, etc. While moral stimuli are represented by people’s contact with each other and how to employ these contacts for the benefit of society (Ruth, 1967), this can be called social capital. Overall, participation is an approach to promoting the active consultation and involvement of individuals or groups in a project, program, or activity (CBM, 2024). Volunteering should be seen as a fundamental expression of who we are as human beings and as members of society. It is important to recognize and value voluntary participation in all its various forms: informal and formal.

In this study, the voluntary participation of rural women is the voluntary effort that demonstrates their involvement in providing individual or group voluntary services to help meet the needs and solve the problems of their families, neighbors, or village residents through their capabilities and the use of available community resources, which leads to enhancing cooperation and strengthening social ties among the community’s residents.

Study Objectives

This study seeks to achieve the following main objective: collecting the intangible heritage related to the patterns of voluntary participation of rural women in Omani society in the Pre-Renaissance era. The following sub-objectives branch out from the main objective:

- Identifying the patterns of individual voluntary work of rural women
- Identifying the patterns of group voluntary work of rural women
- Identifying the patterns of voluntary work related to the economic activity of rural women

Study Questions

Based on the previous objectives, this study seeks to answer the main question: What are the patterns of voluntary participation of Omani women in the Pre-Renaissance era? The following sub-questions branch out from it:

- What are the patterns of individual voluntary work of Omani women?
- What are the patterns of group voluntary work of Omani women?
- What are the patterns of voluntary work related to the economic activities of Omani women?

Study Importance

1. This study is one of a series of studies that document the voluntary heritage of Omani society, focusing here on documenting the voluntary participation of rural Omani women in particular.
2. This study represents one of the studies aimed at collecting the heritage of voluntary work that is at risk of extinction, especially since the contemporary researchers, familiar with this heritage, are elderly. Thus, it may be difficult to collect this data at a later stage. The elderly, both men and women, still play an important role in society, as the leaders and guardians of the heritage of any human society (United Nations, 2019).
3. The results of this study provide important scientific material enabling researchers and specialists to make comparisons to identify the size and level of developments in Omani women's voluntary participation between the past and the present.
4. The expected results of this study represent an important source to provide researchers, interested in the field of voluntary work, with a lot of knowledge and information related to the history of voluntary work in Omani society.

Methodological Approach

This study belongs to the descriptive analytical studies that attempt to describe a historical situation related to a specific phenomenon: the voluntary participation of rural women in the Pre-Renaissance era. The descriptive and historical approaches are combined to present an accurate and specific description of women's voluntary participation in that historical era. The application of a guide for the thorough interview, prepared for this purpose, is relied upon after it is presented to a group of specialists to control it and ensure its validity and suitability for application. According to the nature of the field data, the content analysis method is used to attain the results, which helps to understand the voluntary activities through the participants' experience. It also provides the opportunity to document these activities in their historical, social, and economic context. The study sample includes 20 elderly rural women who were over 60 years old during the time of the field data collection process. The data collection process was completed in February 2018.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

This study starts by adopting the community attachment model, which social scientists interested in the concept of community attachment have generally defined as a sense of belonging or rootedness in a community. Accordingly, what does it mean to be rooted in a place? (Cross, 2003) As the rural woman feels rooted in her small rural community, where she believes that her existence and life should be devoted to serving her family, neighbors, and community, she is motivated to contribute effectively to voluntary work. The results of one of the previous studies indicate that local social ties, whether formal or informal, have a positive impact on social engagement, which enhances women's voluntary participation.

The interest of rural Omani women in social benefits is strongly connected to their involvement in voluntary work, which leads to strengthening social ties and encouraging rural women to participate effectively in voluntary activities (Vernon, Kerry, Lijun, and Rehan, 2009). Hence, this study relies on the community attachment model, which may be thought of as the extent to which residents of a place possess cognitive or affective ties to each other and to that place. (Shaker, 2023). That is possible for there to be higher levels of attachment to communities that appear to be lacking a well-developed social life (John, Austin, & Yoko, 1986). In fact, this applies to the reality and nature of social life in Omani society before 1970. Community attachment (value) mainly consists of 4 forms: (1) having a sense of belonging to the community, (2) having confidence that a person can impact the community, (3) having confidence that the community can meet and give satisfaction to the personal needs of each member, and (4) having expressions of the reflection of feelings toward the community and among its members (Wijaya, Purnamasari, & Sitaresmi, 2018, p. 3).

To investigate the effect of community attachment, we can review Yang and Huili's study (2023), which reveals the extent of the population's attachment to the community and also testifies to the mediating effect of the population's interaction, consisting of three sub-dimensions: the depth of interaction, the width of interaction, and the frequency of interaction. The mediating effect works in the relationship between improving the community environment and the population's ties to the community (Yang & Huili, 2023). Regarding the current study's approach, the components of the community attachment model can be adopted in explaining the voluntary participation of rural women as the mediating variable that was reflected in improving the community environment by satisfying the material and moral needs of the population and thus strengthening the social ties between them. That also maintained the continuity and sustainability of life in light of the harsh economic and environmental conditions during that era.

Qualitative Analysis

The group interview technique is the scientific tool by which the qualitative analysis of the data is conducted. Data related to Omani women's participation in voluntary work before 1970 were collected through detailed interviews with rural women. These interviews included open-ended questions about patterns of individual and group voluntary work, which allowed the respondents to express their experiences comprehensively. After collecting the data, content analysis is used to analyze these interviews and extract the basic patterns and concepts related to this study. It helps in classifying and interpreting voluntary activities according to the study axes, which provided a deeper understanding of the voluntary role of women at that time.

Study Population Description

The study population consists of 20 elderly female participants who lived in rural areas of the

Sultanate during the era before the blessed Pre-Renaissance (i.e., before 1970). The results of the interviews analysis show that most of them practice agricultural and pastoral activities and some handicrafts.

Regarding their level of education, most of them were illiterate women, except for a few who had a basic education. The results of the analysis also show the diversity of the patterns of voluntary work: individual and group, all of which reflect the traditional rural social lifestyle. The nature of the cooperative social environment imposed various forms of cooperation and social solidarity and playing group voluntary social roles to meet the needs of their local communities. The most important results of the qualitative analysis of the interviews of the study sample are presented below.

Results of Qualitative Analysis

Regarding the results related to answering the first question, which is represented by identifying the patterns of individual voluntary work of Omani women in the era before 1970: The results of the qualitative analysis of the content of the interviews show how the community ties between the people of the same village facilitated the process of women's involvement in voluntary activities. Thus, rural women performed many distinctive individual voluntary roles that were largely linked to the daily lifestyle and strong social relations among the members of the community or tribe. We can classify these works according to their organized or urgent nature as follows:

Organized Individual Voluntary Work

Omani women performed many organized or arranged voluntary work, such as taking care of the neighbors' sheep and protecting them from dangers (attacks by predatory animals, snakes, or birds of prey). They also participated in providing some individual assistance related to agriculture to neighbors, such as collecting and cleaning crops and organizing farms, which are works that support the rural economy. The Holy Quran had a large impact on the individual, organized voluntary work of Omani women. The memorizers of the Holy Quran volunteered to teach young girls and even village women the Holy Quran and to teach them ablution and prayer. Some women also volunteered to teach and train girls in some handicrafts, such as knitting women's clothes. Omani women also had a large share of voluntary work on occasions. Experienced women would prepare the bride for the wedding, set up the wedding tent, and offer advice to the bride to use in the marital home. In addition, some women would donate various types of household items as a form of support for newlyweds. The results of the qualitative analysis also show solidarity and compassion in rural communities, as rural women used to care for the daily lives of their neighbors, giving priority to poor families. They provided many foodstuffs, products, crops, and vegetables to these families to help them overcome the difficulties of daily life.

Urgent Individual Voluntary Work

The results of the analysis also indicate the diversity of urgent voluntary work carried out by rural women, as their voluntary role emerged in times of disasters and crises such as heavy rains or fires. They would rush to the aid of neighbors by helping to evacuate damaged homes, then preparing shelter, preparing food, and providing it to those affected. The response was spontaneous, expressing the feeling of solidarity, belonging, and social responsibility of rural women toward their neighbors and the local community. Their role was also evident in urgent medical cases, as many of the female respondents reported that they were taking care of the

children of sick women or in cases of childbirth. Voluntary work at these times included cleaning the house, caring for the children, preparing food for them, and preparing the needs of the newborn. In cases of illness, they would quickly provide the patient's family with medicinal herbs or traditional supplies used in treatment, all without expecting any compensation.

Through the previous analysis, we conclude that rural Omani women practiced many types of voluntary work before the Renaissance era, and these practices were in many fields, such as volunteering in the educational, religious, agricultural, pastoral, and health fields that formed an essential part of the daily rural communities, which contributed to strengthening social solidarity in these communities.

Regarding the results related to answering the second question, which is represented in identifying the patterns of group voluntary work of rural women in the Pre-Renaissance era, the results of the qualitative analysis of the interviews show that Omani rural women played a crucial role in those communities through the group voluntary activities in which they participated. These activities included collective cooperation in various social occasions (joys and sorrows), as well as in religious, national, and economic occasions, where many situations imposed the necessity of cooperation and community solidarity to ensure the continuity of daily life in the face of harsh living conditions. Accordingly, these group voluntary works can be classified into the following groups:

Group Voluntary Work in Social Occasions Events

The results of the qualitative analysis indicate an increase in the rates of group voluntary participation of women in social events. For example, on wedding days, group voluntary work was more common, as a significant number of them described it: *"If there were guests in a house, the most beautiful dishes were collected from the neighbors' houses to serve food in so that it would be appropriate for the presence of the guest."* Another added, *"The women would gather at weddings and prepare food, drinks, coffee, and dates for the guests"* Others confirmed that *"several women would clean and prepare the marital home, and others would participate in arranging the wedding party to host the women"* and that all of these voluntary activities were done willingly and with satisfaction and without expecting anything in return. In conclusion, each woman participated in the group voluntary work according to her skills in cooking, arranging, cleaning, sewing the bride's clothes, etc.

Similarly, on sad occasions such as death or accidents, women would participate in providing various types of assistance to the family of the deceased. One woman, and many others agreed with her, said, *"We would prepare food for the mourners, and rush to the house of the deceased to prepare the house to receive the mourners, and to offer condolences and receive the mourners."* These voluntary activities demonstrate the social cohesion and solidarity between families in traditional rural communities that enjoy the characteristic of mechanical solidarity, as described by Émile Durkheim in his book *"The Division of Labor in Society"* (Nickerson, 2024).

Group Voluntary Work During Religious Holidays and Festivals

Rural communities witnessed many kinds of group voluntary work during religious holidays and festivals, as many women confirmed their participation in preparing traditional meals during holidays such as *"Al-Arsiya Dish"* and other local dishes served to poor families and neighbors. One of the respondents mentioned that *"women used to gather in each other's homes to help prepare the food and sweets needed for the celebration."* One indicated that *"we used to*

participate in groups in preparing and setting up the (Eid Oven),” and another added, “And cooking special foods for the holy month and celebrating the birth of the Prophet.” Some stated, “We used to prepare the Iftar food and deliver it to the mosque for passersby and strangers who were in the village at Iftar time to eat from it.” All of these voluntary participations contributed to strengthening solidarity, cohesion, and familiarity among all members of the rural community.

Group Voluntary Work in Economic and Environmental Activities

Rural communities in the Sultanate of Oman before the Renaissance relied heavily on agricultural and pastoral activities. Many of the study participants confirmed that they cooperated in many field activities, such as planting and collecting crops, and that these tasks were carried out continuously. They also played an important role in preserving the community’s natural resources providing assistance that enabled men to maintain the Aflaj (*traditional irrigation system*) and even clean these Aflaj themselves if needed. This type of work was done voluntarily by the participants with the aim of preserving vital water resources in rural communities.

From the previous discussion, we conclude that the results of the qualitative analysis of the interviews demonstrate that the group voluntary work of Omani women in the Pre-Renaissance era addressed the social, economic, agricultural, and service needs of the rural community. Accordingly, women played an important role in creating a continuous social cooperative environment that was appropriate for all the circumstances, conditions, and social and religious occasions experienced by the rural community. This cooperation and social solidarity formed an inseparable part of the culture of the Omani rural community, which led to strengthening and reinforcing the bonds of social cohesion.

Voluntary Work Associated with Economic Activities in the Pre-Renaissance Era

Regarding the results related to answering the third question, which is to identify the patterns of voluntary work related to the economic activity of rural women during that era, the results of the qualitative analysis show the increasing voluntary role played by Omani women in rural communities in the Sultanate. They participated effectively in economic activities to support the economic and social life of the members of rural communities. These voluntary activities focused on the economic activities of rural communities that relied heavily on agriculture, herding, and handicrafts. In addition, many of them volunteered to provide various efforts that maintained the continuity of economic activities and enhanced them. Based on the qualitative analysis, we can obtain the patterns of economic voluntary work that prevailed during that era as follows:

Voluntary Participation in Agricultural Activities

Most of the respondents of this study confirmed that the voluntary participation of Omani women in the rural community was greatly flourishing through participation in group farming during the agricultural seasons, where some volunteered to help in plowing the land, planting crops, collecting and harvesting crops, especially participating in the process of picking dates and preparing, cleaning, and drying dates. Some respondents confirmed that cooperation in the agricultural field was essential, as women participated in cultivating each other's fields collectively to ensure better crop productivity and meet the needs of different families, especially the poor and needy.

Voluntary Participation in Sheep and Cattle Care

Since ancient times, rural women have cared for their sheep and cattle and even extended care to neighbors' sheep and cattle, all of which was done voluntarily. Such work was active in the unusual circumstances that some families in the village went through, such as the absence of sheep owners or during their illness, or other circumstances such as their absence due to their traveling to perform the Hajj rituals or the absence of the family provider working abroad. In addition to these activities, they played a vital role in strengthening the bonds of cohesion between the members of the rural community. Therefore, they maintained the continuity and sustainability of rural economic activities, which depended heavily on agriculture and herding.

Voluntary Participation in Handicrafts and Local Product Manufacturing

Rural women have participated voluntarily in the production of many goods that suit the nature and consumption patterns of rural communities. Their most prominent economic participation was represented in the manufacture of ropes from palm fibers and the manufacture of household tools, which were made from palm derivatives, clay, or pottery. All of these were distributed without financial compensation, motivated by the need to preserve compassion and cohesion among members of the same community.

Voluntary Participation in the Food Industry

Omani women had participated greatly in the food industry and production, which contributed for a long time to satisfying the needs of the rural community members. Consequently, some respondents indicated that they participated in all stages of the manufacture and drying of dates, in addition to preparing and grinding grains and preparing flour using mills, as well as making henna and sorting and purifying grains for use in social occasions or storing them for a later time. All these economic activities were carried out cooperatively, as women cooperated in preparing and producing these materials and their derivatives and distributing them among members of the community.

As previously stated, rural women contribute to many aspects of rural economic activities, such as managing natural and environmental resources, maintaining and cleaning aflaj, collecting firewood, and drying tree branches to use in cooking and heating. These activities are carried out not only for their own homes but also to share with neighbors and the poor or to prepare food and sweets for religious occasions and holidays.

From the above, we conclude that the results of the qualitative analysis of the interviews display that the aspects related to the economic activities of Omani rural women in the P-Renaissance era were effective voluntary contributions in supporting the local community in many areas: agriculture, herding, food production, and handicrafts based on environmental resources. Hence, these developmental activities contributed to the utilization of natural resources and the environment and their sustainability. These activities also positively reflected in strengthening social ties and achieving cohesion among the members of the rural community, which enabled them to overcome the difficulties and harshness of life during that difficult period in the history of Omani society.

Based on the qualitative analysis of the interviews, the voluntary participation of Omani women in the Pre-Renaissance era was characterized by diversity, harmony, and deep voluntary involvement in all aspects of the social and economic life of the community. Omani women in the countryside played a vital role in providing all kinds of family support to neighbors, the poor,

orphans, the needy, and passersby through individual and group voluntary work that contributed to strengthening the ties, cooperation, and cohesion in the community.

Discussion

Volunteers in any society are people who seek to make a positive difference in the lives of their community. This is what the qualitative analysis of the results of this study reveals, as it indicates deep dimensions of social cooperation and solidarity in rural communities created by the voluntary contributions of Omani women in the Pre-Renaissance era. Omani women were considered a fundamental pillar in maintaining the cohesive social system of the rural community through individual and group voluntary work in its various forms and types. These work activities differed from individual and group voluntary work, which contributed to strengthening social ties and meeting the basic economic needs of the people of the rural community.

It has become clear in this study that these works were not just individual tasks performed by women, but rather an essential component of their unique personality that distanced them from selfishness and self-love. These works were unique and varied: breastfeeding and caring for young children, teaching and training girls on handicrafts and housework, investing in environmental resources and employing them in the service of the community and the environment, and field and pastoral participation work. All these voluntary efforts prove that rural women played a distinguished role in filling social, economic, health, educational, and service gaps in the absence of the formal state infrastructure.

Islam and its sacred religious occasions played an important role in encouraging rural women to practice group voluntary work, which reflected a distinct depth of social cohesion and solidarity. These voluntary efforts prevailed greatly in many social occasions, such as weddings and funerals, which reflected the group spirit to strengthen the rural community's ability to withstand the harsh economic conditions during that era. Women's voluntary work also extended to productive, economic, and environmental fields through their participation in supporting the maintenance and cleaning of the Aflaj. Overall, these results indicate the role of voluntary work in traditional rural communities in a past era where official infrastructure was absent, which prevented the government from providing social care services (health, education, service, social security, etc.) in Omani rural communities through its official institutions during that time.

Results Summary

- Regarding the results of the qualitative analysis of interviews about the participation of rural Omani women in voluntary work before the Renaissance era, they can be identified as follows:
- Voluntary work was part of the daily life program of rural women, and it increased greatly on social and religious occasions.
- Rural women's voluntary activities varied between individuals and groups, while the results do not indicate the existence of institutional voluntary work.
- The existence of voluntary work related to rural economic activities based on agriculture and grazing, as well as its role in preserving environmental resources, especially the maintenance and cleaning of the Aflaj, although women's contribution to some of them was indirect.
- The great participation of Omani women in providing emergency aid during disasters

and crises helped the rural communities overcome these hardships during that era.

All of the above confirms the vital role of voluntary work practiced by rural Omani women during that historical era of Omani society. Thus, this role had a major contribution to strengthening cohesion and solidarity among the people of rural communities as well as satisfying many of the economic, social, and moral needs of the people of these communities.

Conclusion

This study shows that Omani women played a vital role in voluntary work in the Pre-Renaissance era. This role contributed to strengthening the ability of rural society to overcome risks and difficulties in normal times and in times of disasters and crises. It also led to strengthening the values of cooperation and solidarity among the members of rural society. Women's voluntary activities were also diverse, including individual and group work. These activities covered many fields and aspects and encompassed all aspects of life: economic, educational, religious, social, and environmental, which reflected the depth of women's social integration during that era. The results confirm that this effective role of rural women's voluntary efforts contributed to building an interconnected and integrated social system based on self-help and mutual assistance at all times and in various life circumstances.

During that historical era in the life of Omani society, the state's role was absent, and its inability to bear its primary responsibility in providing basic services to its citizens was noticeable. Therefore, Omani women realized that there was no escape from dealing with the harsh reality by relying on their capabilities to satisfy basic needs and confront life's problems, especially those related to education and health (Saleh & Mostafa, 2020). With the beginning of the blessed Renaissance, institutional structures developed, diversified, and spread throughout the country, which provided government services and enabled them to meet the needs of citizens in all societies. However, this did not limit voluntary efforts but rather supported them and helped develop their rapid spread. It can also be said that these traditional values of voluntary work offered a strong foundation for developing modern and innovative voluntary programs, which enhance social sustainability in the future.

Study Recommendations

Based on the results obtained related to the voluntary work of rural Omani women in the Pre-Renaissance era, the study team presents some recommendations that can contribute to spreading the culture of voluntary work and developing it at present as follows:

- Reviving and spreading the basic values of voluntary work, such as cooperation, solidarity, selflessness, participation, and initiation, that activate and enhance citizens' participation in voluntary work and build the foundations of social solidarity
- Implementing research projects aimed at documenting the traditional voluntary experiences and practices of Omani women to preserve the intangible heritage in this framework to transfer it to future generations, which enhances its importance in social cohesion and community development
- Benefiting from the voluntary capabilities of Omani women in contemporary voluntary activities in all areas of life in a more organized manner that enhances their role in community development
- Organizing comprehensive and targeted awareness campaigns to highlight the

importance of the historical role of Omani women in voluntary work and its positive impact in creating social cohesion and community development, and how to enhance it in the current time

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