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REPORT ON ATTITUDES INFLUENCING WOMEN'S INTEGRATION

by

COMMITTEE NO. I

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Attitudes Influencing Women's Integration

The meeting opened, with a brief introductory address by the Chairman in which she outlined the points of reference for the Commission as being the following:

- (a) The image of women in employment:
 - (i) sick leaves - too many
 - (ii) lazy spend too much time gossiping
 - (iii) are not capable of doing certain jobs
 - (iv) women are only good for house work.
- (b) Women's attitudes towards themselves
- (c) Women's attitudes towards other women
- (d) Attitudes towards women as public servants
- (e) Role of the educated and trained women.

The Image of Women in Employment

The Committee discussed at great length the whole issue of the women in employment.

The general concern was that the attitudes of the public regarding women as listed under item (a) could partly be accepted to be true. There were however detailed proposals justifying most of the points of reference under item (a).

On the issue of sick leave, members of the Committee corrected the wrong impression that sick leaves are only taken by women. The committee agreed that even though sick leaves are taken by women, sometimes they are taken for specific reasons, particularly in expectancy cases.

Members of the Commission at this juncture gave examples of rules and procedures in their countries that regulate and govern maternity leaves for expectant mothers. The general harsh and unbearable undertones of most of these regulations as applied, to expectant mothers, where they legitimately go on leave were pointed out by a number of Committee members.

Even though the Committee established the legitimacy of women's sick leaves, yet it was noted with concern that a rather very unfortunate impression on a woman seeking employment was created by virtue of her sex, inter alia, the foregone conclusion that they will take maternity leaves or take more sick leaves than their male counterparts.

The Committee established that sick leaves should be distinguished and treated separately from maternity leaves, and leaves taken to submit a sick member of the family to medical attention, especially where the women have no child sitters or are not in the proximity of a daily care centre, because a combined consideration of all together creates the falsified impression, that generally women take leaves or offs more than men. These and others create the unfavourable and biased attitude towards women in employment of any kind. The effect of this impression is most felt in their promotion prospects and advancement in their work.

Discussing the impression that women are guilty of spending too much time gossiping in any employment situation. The Committee pointed out in no uncertain terms that both men and women gossip, and this was an inborn instinct. They treated the difference as being in the gossip material in that whereas men gossip about more vital issues of interest to them and society as a whole, women's gossip is devoted to trivialities. This attitude was deplored by the Committee member and as being responsible for allegations of the inefficiency of women at work and proposed that women should brush off this allegation by occupying themselves in more worthwhile talk involving at least issues of cruciality in society.

The committee was of the opinion that it is a normal characteristic to clarify certain jobs as capable of being performed by women while other supposedly could only be performed by men, such jobs as secretarial work, telephone operating; and other considered simple mechanic operations, sales woman ship and work performed by airhostesses as women's job. Managerial duties engineering service and other more challenging academic pursuits demanding higher degree of intellectual manifestations are supposed to be prerogatives of men.

The committee, ironically pointed out the fact of women having excelled in such even higher jobs of national importance by illustration, they quoted examples of women doctors, judges, journalists, parliamentarian, engineers and many others.

This categorically proved beyond reasonable doubt that women given the chance and the necessary pre-conditions could fully be integrated in society development and national development. The ideal that women are only good for house work is absolute.

The committee discussed at great length the plight of women who are self-employed. It was observed that these women were usually labelled prostitutes and their work termed a "cover up" of the reality. The committee found it difficult to reconcile the various types of prostitutes, hence difficult to justify its existence. They pointed out that initially prostitution was indulged in by those women who had no means of support but that in some countries women who were well employed and school girls have been guilty of prostitution. It was thus suggested that before we could indulge in an argument for abolishing or legitimization of prostitution, it was necessary to collect research into the factors which bring about this practice.

It was the general view that at whatever cost prostitution had to be curbed for it is immoral, a threat to family life and proper upbringing of children and responsible for presentation of a distorted and unpleasant view of women in society.

It was suggested that one way of curbing prostitution was to provide more chances of employment to women in rural areas and in the urban areas. This was in preference to any act of apprehension of the prostitute and committal to prison or confinement of any kind.

It was further moved that the government should recognize the legitimacy of women's presence in towns, so that they can go to all places by themselves without being looked at as strangers. Attention was drawn to the plight of women in urban areas of stress as being even more catastrophic than that in rural areas, hence a call for contemplation on this issue along with those posed by the situation of rural women.

The committee in light of the above reflections stated the following as possible solutions to wards changing the images of women in employment as discussed here above/;

1. that the erradication of the images was an action that ought to be started at an early age, hence that there should be an emphatic approach towards creating an atmosphere in which boys and girls or male or female children view each other as equal and co-existent human beings regardless of their sex. This meant starting in the homes and therefore the burdensome responsibility of parents.
2. that the women get organised and hand in hand with other classes of society struggle for recognition of their opposition to impressions as herein discussed.
3. obiter: (by the way) that where the imbalances are common to both women and men in society there should be an overall change of political, social, cultural and economic system, furthermore that the legal system should legislate on provisions establishing an equal status for all people women inclusive.

Focusing on item (b) women's attitudes towards themselves. The committee was of the opinion that the whole issue was that of a class struggle and certain women who by virtue their attainment of certain positions in society hierarchy elevate themselves and think of themselves as the sophisticated and therefore of a higher status vis-a-vis others in their societies. Women in this calibre are normally those that have returned from studies abroad or have been to high institutions of learning.

This attitude of mind creates a circumstance in which there is disregard and contempt for women of lower classes. This further complicates the situation among women of supposedly lower classes and ultimately generates a gap between the literate and illiterate. Further, the committee agree that another factor which creates this type of attitude of mind by women towards themselves could be seen from the point of view of their cultural backgrounds within which a particular woman is born and bred. Certain are born into cultures which recognize them as naturally secondary and subordinate to men, such a situation automatically creates an inferiority complex by such women for themselves. Finally the committee agreed that the physical appearance and power of men and quite often in a situation where women have to depend on men financially, have in so small way also contributed to a women's belief in dependency on men.

After a very careful and critical analysis of the foregoing the committee decided on the following as some of the possible solutions to the above said anomalies:

1. Need for intensification of women's education.
2. Need for influencing the abolishing of unnecessary and yet obnoxious culture practices which impede the progress of women in society.
3. The need to correct the imbalance which creates the situation of economic dependency of women on men. This in its logical conclusion might mean changing the economic structure with a view to integrating women in the new economic order.

view

To further supplement this points, it was a general/ of the committee that women's research units formed by their various organisations should study the situation of women's economic dependency and come out with the correct view of picture and extent of this economic dependency. This is necessary as some women are not aware of the extent of their economic dependency on men, such research therefore should be able to present convincing facts to be able to orient the attitude of such women from further economic dependency.

Addressing their minds to the general attitudes of women towards other women (item c), they expressed a fear that women often did not readily give moral support to their counterparts in position of responsibility. It further emanated from the discussion that in various countries they are too many independent women's organizations unrelated to each other and perpetuating useless competition and struggle for power. It was thus suggested that various countries should consider the possibilities of establishing an umbrella body for their numerous women's organisations to streamline the women's activities. This should be in the form of national commissions. It was generally felt that this would mitigate the gap between the individual woman and between various women's organisations. It was further proposed that a change of attitudes would necessitate an extensive educational programme for all women, with a view to awaken them to the bad images cast on women by the public and those created by women themselves, with hope that when made conscious of these they would reject them and work to establish other and better images. The mass media was singled out as a would be effective means of mass education.

Reflecting on attitudes towards women as public servants (item d) various problems were detected namely that society expected higher moral standards and a greater sense of responsibility for women public servants than from their male counterparts.

The commission while endorsing the idea that women must have good qualifications in order to be considered for posts in the public and private sectors, they emphasised that a woman's private life should not be a consideration for employment chances and should it be so, it should be so for both women and men. It further emerged that to most women a steady marriage ranked higher than a steady job, and as the result of this a lot of manpower was wasted as a result of transfers of husbands, which work to separate the wife from the husband. In the final analysis, it was observed the women give up their jobs to move with their husbands. Hence a suggestion that husband and wife should be considered in the event of a transfer of one or the other. It was further added that the view that women should not work at all was a result of a traditional belief that a woman's place was at her home. This was however castigated as a foreign view in an African mind because time immemorial women has always gone out in search of food, water, firewood and other provisions for her family. To day women work out of an ardent necessity in order to provide for their families and these should not be a new trend.

It was pointed out that women's problems of reconciling her official duties with her home duties were further aggravated by the fact that there were no adequate assisting provisions for the working women particularly as regards child care, hence children were stumbling block to her progress at work. There was a general consensus that children should no longer be an excuse for holding back a woman from work. It was therefore suggested that the establishment of day-care centres in every country where children can be looked after by qualified personnels while the women at work, was a must rather than an act of choice.

The commission was called upon to cast its views on the role of educated untrained women (item e). It was observed that there was a tendency for the educated and trained women to migrate from rural areas to the urban centres. Further it was held that this migration was a result of the over centralization of various activities, and it worked to the detriment of the rural areas which were bereft of all their brains and lagged behind in terms of development. The committee members were agreed that the educated and trained women were agencies of change. This role it was felt was to be achieved partly through machinations of women in places of influence and thus called for women's acceptance of challenge. It was thought and noted that the burden to change the attitudes was on both the urban and rural women and that in bridging

the gap between the two groups. The urban women ought to address themselves carefully to problems of rural women and try to understand them. It was suggested that in approaching the rural women it was best to identify some source of leadership amidst themselves through which changes could be effected more easily.

In conclusion it was suggested that a survey be carried on to find out what benefit accrues to a woman by virtue of her taking on her husband's name on marriage. It was felt that this was responsible for the snobish associations of women such as doctor's wives, lawyer's wives, ambassador's wives and so on and so forth.

The committee did not overlook the various achievements that have been already obtained in integrating women in development, it single out inter alia the following:

1. The trends towards employment in public and private sectors, though still limited.
2. That women had proved their worth, prudence, honesty and integrity and capability as parliamentarians, judges, teachers, engineers, doctors and have been professionally qualified in many other fields.
3. The women have proved their capability to be both housewives and public offices as well as private employees.
4. That various governments are increasingly showing an interest towards bettering of women's welfare, they have considered better provision for maternity leave and have in some cases provided that maternity leaves should be accompanied by full working payments. It was applauded that in some countries a woman who was breast feeding was allowed to go at least one hour or two before the others to feed her baby - a recognition of the importance attached to child care.
5. That there was a trend towards equal pay for equal working hours and equal taxation and that these should be encouraged further.

The committee emphasized the need for further and more through going programmes and changes towards integration of women in development.