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WOMEN'S RESPONSIBILITIES IN HEALTH, NUTRITION  
AND CHILD CARE

## Women's Responsibilities in Health, Nutrition and Child Care

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I. The vicious circle: illness, poverty, ignorance, more illness, more poverty, no progress must be replaced by the chain: less illness, more manpower, higher productivity, sufficient nourishment, greater social security, better housing, maximum of health according to up-to-date knowledge, courage, enterprise, confidence in the future and progress.

- a) In the past decades great success has been made in the control and eradication of infectious diseases. Infant mortality has dropped to remarkably low figures in many developing countries. Quantity and quality of nutrition have been ameliorated, and kwashiorkor, the worst picture of malnutrition, has nearly disappeared. Life expectancy in many regions of Africa has nearly doubled. But lots of measures still have to be taken in order to overcome the traditional dangers to health.
- b) It is an important question, to which extent new dangers will arise by the wake of urbanization and industrialization. The problems of dissolution of the family, uprooting, and psychological disturbance are well known. Changes in nutrition, ceasing of breastfeeding, insufficient protection of working mothers, and accidents play an important role for the situation of health and well-being. These dangers must be faced as early as possible.

II. What kind of assistance do women need who want to function as health promoters?

- a) Women must have the chance to be educated in the fields of hygiene, nutrition and child care. Health education must be an obligatory part of school education.

- b) Information and education will be efficient only if women are willing to change their own attitudes concerning traditional methods of nutrition as well as prevention and cure of diseases. At the same time they must be informed about the imminent dangers of industrialization. The question of family planning comes into consideration.

III. Which are the possibilities for women to gain influence in the fields of health, nutrition and child care?

- a) On the community level a woman can act as health educator in the family, in schools and in the market, where her influence is important. It was the market women in Lagos, Nigeria, who initiated a case-finding campaign against TB. Illustrated material can be a valuable help. The influence of an intelligent and well-informed woman cannot be overestimated.
- b) On the national level women should use their influence by giving priority to plans and projects in the fields of health and social welfare. Usually women are more aware of the necessity of ameliorating the infrastructure in their country than are men, who are extremely interested in the technical progress.

IV. Experiences gained in many countries of the world show that women are very efficient in meeting these needs.

- a) Women have an easy approach to many kinds of people. They have no difficulty to meet officials on each level.
- b) For all women the challenge of industrialization and urbanization is of equal importance. Each woman feels her responsibility for happy family life. Each woman wants to have physically and mentally healthy children. She is willing to fight for their well-being.

V. In highly industrialized countries the changing role of women in the sense of promotion of self-confidence and independence is not accepted by men without critic and partial refusal. It is important to examine carefully the attitude of African men and husbands. There will be no progress without real partnership.