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PRESENTATION OF A PAPER SENT IN BY MRS. G. WULKER OF THE
GERMAN FOUNDATION FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, WITH COMMENTS

BY DR. O.A. JAGER

M69-984

Madam Chairman,

Ladies,

Mrs. Wülker, I feel sure, would have had the greatest pleasure in presenting in person the paper which has been distributed to you all in extenso. I think there is no point in my reading it out, since you all have it before you in English or French. Allow me to quote just a few passages from this excellent paper, and to add one or two quite personal words.

On the subject of mobilizing for development, Mrs. Wülker points out that the disparities between the wealthy and the poor, between towns and villages, between university towns and the high illiteracy rate in the rural manifest the wide gap between highly-developed and under-developed societies within one and the same country.

All are seized by a certain dissatisfaction with this situation.

May I just mention here the definition of the word "development" as we understand it in the international seminars department of the German Foundation for Developing Countries in Berlin-Tegel? This is our definition: "Development is a cultural and social change that requires initiative and guidance; a change towards which a growing number of people contribute, and which therefore benefits a growing number of people in a given society. Development is an indefinite human process in industrialized and unindustrialized countries alike, a process that will continue until the end of time." I think that in this definition the operative word is "culture", which is better than "change of civilization" or "economic or technical change", since economic and technical changes are often the results rather than the root causes of cultural and social change. Culture should be understood as the attitude of a given population, an attitude whose artistic, social and human implications are reflected in the history of that population, as opposed to a civilization which leaves but few traces in history.

Next, we must realize that this definition of the word "development" stresses the growing number of people who are contributing towards and participating in this development. That is its democratic aspect.

Now I would invite your attention to the subject of urbanization and migration, in connexion with which Mrs. Wilker says that in Europe, as in Africa, too many voices have been raised deploring urbanization as a main cause of social unrest and disintegration. A rapid urbanization certainly increases the tensions and frictions of adjustment in value systems different from pre-urban ways of life. However, this negative attitude does not pay due tribute to the positive aspects of urbanization as a means of mobilization for development.

On the education of women for new responsibilities, Mrs. Wilker says that the mother must be enabled to make a fruitful contribution to society in that period of her life, usually beginning in the middle forties, when her children have left home and her responsibility as a mother has ended.

It is perhaps a moot point whether a woman cannot already contribute towards cultural changes at an earlier period, while her children are still young. It is for you, Ladies, to debate this point. As a man, I do not feel qualified to offer a definite opinion.

To my mind, there is no such thing as an international development concept that can be applied to all countries. It is probable that each nation will have to find its own path to cultural changes in keeping with its history and traditions, its individual characteristics and its basic conditions.

Again, I feel it is for you to discuss this point: Is it possible to find an African path for the whole continent, or are there only national paths.

Towards the end of her paper, Mrs. Wilker mentions the need for an African concept of development. The urbanization and gradual industrialization will impose similar demands on women in Africa as has been the case in the highly industrialized countries. Women, who are more inclined to cling to traditions, will be the promoters of a synthesis between the past, the present and the future.

Here I should perhaps point out that not only the developing, but above all the affluent countries are running the tremendous risk that man may allow himself to be mastered by technique, instead of just benefiting by the advantages of technical development. This very primordial danger in the highly industrialized countries might perhaps be mitigated by the common-sense of women, who know better than men how to combine the values of cultural tradition with the advantages of modern technical development. In that way, your power and your obligations seem to me to go beyond the limits of this conference, and may indeed exercise a favourable influence on the world future of the human race.

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