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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA  
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in National Development  
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## THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT<sup>1/</sup>

### E.I. CONTRIBUTION OF ETHIOPIAN WOMEN TO THE DEVELOPMENT EFFORT

#### INTRODUCTION

The occasion of this regional meeting offers both encouragement and a challenge to all African women especially those in a leadership role, and is heartily to be welcomed.

It seems appropriate first to acknowledge with appreciation two important ECA resolutions: (1) resolution 88(V) adopted at its 99th plenary meeting in March 1963 during the fifth session, setting forth recommendations on social welfare and community development, and (2) resolution 119(VI) adopted at its 113th plenary meeting, March 1964 during the sixth session, putting on recommendations made by an expert committee on social development. Notice is also taken of the following, with full realization that the present meeting is in context and follows naturally upon what has preceded. (i) A workshop held in Accra in 1960 on "extension of family and child welfare services within community development programmes"; (ii) a study on family, child and youth welfare services in Africa (1966); (iii) a monograph on "the status and role of women in East Africa" (1967); and (iv) a meeting held in Niamey, Niger, on "youth employment and national development".

It is also noted with satisfaction that this meeting is called upon to make specific recommendations on matter affecting:

- (a) Health, nutrition and child care;
- (b) Inter-change of development and position of women in Africa;
- (c) Education and training opportunities for women;
- (d) Employment opportunities for women;

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<sup>1/</sup> Background paper prepared by: Sister Meherete Paulos, Woizero Leah Warqneh, Woizero Yewaineshet Beshawered, Woizero Wederyeleash Kebede.

- (e) Contribution of women to the development effort;
- (f) Legal status of women;

and is to consider their application within framework of national development plans.

It seems that present thinking concerning economic and social development in Africa indicates a greater need for:

- (a) Balanced economic and social development in relation to overall national development;
  - (b) Closer co-operation of effort to make possible a programme of balanced economic and social development within overall planning;
- both (a) and (b) may be said to have relevance to Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is among the nations of the world known as "developing". This means that we will need to utilize all the energy, the skill and devotion of all our people if we are to bring about changes in attitude of mind conducive to rapid development where the majority of our people will earn an adequate livelihood and live in relative comfort.

#### I. PLACE OF WOMEN IN ETHIOPIAN SOCIETY

Women occupy a very significant and decisive place in the social, cultural, economic and political life of Ethiopia. Their importance is evident both in modern and traditional sections, not only as housewives and mothers in society a para-eminent role, but also by their contribution to the quality of day-to-day life. Ethiopia being predominantly an agricultural country, most of the people live in rural areas. Farming is the primary occupation that determines the rhythm of economic life. In such an environment people live modestly, dedicating themselves mostly to traditional occupations. Since farming is a family enterprise, women in Ethiopia help in agricultural activities and have a quasi-equal social status with men. A farmer's wife is his chief adviser and helper, and it may well fall to her lot to be responsible for the marketing also. However, most of her time is spent as a housewife and mother, carrying out an arduous round of daily tasks leaving her little leisure for other pursuits. Children in a traditional household are also involved in the family enterprise - they too, from an early age, were and are expected to help their parents.

It is widely expected of Ethiopian girls that they will assist their mothers in household duties and in the care of younger children. This means that in many instances a girl will not be free to attend school until there is a younger sister able to take her place at home, or until the younger members of the family are mature enough to care for themselves during the hours that the elder children are away.

Hence, there has been a definite tendency for girls to start their schooling at a more advanced age than boys, and their education is too often cut short by the reluctance of their parents to have them remain

beyond a certain age in the mixed society of a school. Fortunately, this traditional outlook is rapidly changing and parents are not only demanding more schools but contributing to the building of them.

In urban situations the pace of change is greatly accelerated making an impact on home and family, as well as offering greater opportunities for advancement.

It is a notable feature of modern government that women of Ethiopia enjoy equal rights, privileges and obligations under the law, and they have not been called upon to fight for these rights as have most women in the past or as women still continue to do in many countries of the world.

It is likely that in the urban situation, where more women are better educated, they have a fuller realization of how these laws are in their favour and to their benefit.

In the urban sector where educational opportunities have been greatest, women are becoming more conscious of the new demands being placed upon them: and also of their own abilities to contribute to the growth and development of a new society.

In accordance with Article 38 of the constitution promulgated by His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I on 4th November 1955, it provides that there shall be no discrimination amongst Ethiopian subjects with respect to the enjoyment of all civil rights, and this provision applies equally to men and to women. It is, however, only a restatement of the traditional position of women in Ethiopia. Long before the first Constitution was promulgated, women enjoyed equal rights with men. For example, they managed their own property and often achieved high position in government.

Ethiopian women are indeed making significant contributions to the growth and development of national life. As professional women, they are serving in administrative positions, in the medical and teaching professions, as social workers, community development workers, and even as members in both houses of Parliament. Women are now employed in a variety of jobs and are making careers in business, commerce and in some sections of industry. More recently women have been trained for military service.

Women have also exercised their rights to form mutual aid associations and there are a variety of women's groups throughout the country. The successful functioning of these traditional institutions, such as mutual aid associations, is a tribute to the women's capacity to organize for their welfare and indicates their sense of social responsibility. In addition, there are several national welfare associations, notably, the Ethiopian Women Welfare Association which is the oldest, and whose purpose is to work for the advancement of women in Ethiopia as well as to channel efforts to help the poor, disabled and needy. It is responsible for the Princess Tenagne Work School for adult women and the Tensaye Berhane Children's Home amongst other institutions. This organization has made

a great contribution to national development and has encouraged the formation of similar groups in the provinces. Ethiopian women have taken this type of initiative for many years and helped themselves and others this way.

Ethiopia has realized that modern development does not take place without involvement of women, has seen their potential and significance of their contribution to the country and has thus placed greater emphasis on training and the inclusion of women in all spheres of national development.

## II. RESPONSIBILITIES OF WOMEN WITHIN THE FAMILY CONTEXT

When one starts to analyse what a woman does for her family, one is immediately stuck by the wide sphere of her responsibilities and the depth of devotion required of her.

The family, being the basic unit and institution of society, it has been and still is the main concern of our women. It would be impossible in this paper to do more than touch upon some of the more important aspects of families' needs and women's role in this context.

### Child rearing

In areas where traditional patterns of living still prevail, very few mothers are giving the post-weaning, pre-school years of their child's development the attention they deserve. In such a setting, the child's diet is likely to be inadequate both in quantity and quality. Traditional mothers are usually offering to the young child a certain degree of emotional security, but in urban areas the structure of the family is greatly weakened. In such a situation the child is exposed more to emotional and social hazards that exist in such environment. The mothers are often ill-prepared to cope with the adjustments required by city life and cash economy. Even children still protected by the extended family system might not be getting the best psychological start in life. Women with more education wish to practise modern child-rearing methods over and above traditional ways. There are many mothers too who have fed, bathed, and seen to their child's safety, who feel quite erroneously that they have accomplished their role as mothers, and feel that all aspects of their child's growth and development process is complete. Children coming from such homes are usually expected also to share in adult tasks from an early age, they are "children without a childhood", lacking the important preparation for later development which is provided by the experience of gradual growth in childhood.

If Ethiopian women are to understand the basic principles of child-rearing and if they are to become good mothers, the education of mothers in this respect becomes very essential.

Throughout Ethiopia traditional eating habits and customs are usually adhered to strongly, and are based upon the foodstuffs most available to the family. The rural family's food at meal times usually reflects the farmer's produce, and subsistence farming is likely to provide a diet lacking some

of the essential components. Even with a market economy, the food items which sell best may also be those most needed but least available to one family. This is where a housewife needs to show real common sense and forethought in marketing: if she has only a little money to spend, a little must go a long way; she needs to consider what she must buy, needs to be familiar with current prices and know the kind of foods necessary to maintain the body in good health.

To most Ethiopian families, a meal is considered good if it is well prepared and there is enough of it to satisfy hunger. There is little realization that "quality" of diet is just as important as quantity. Food in relation to its function in the human body is seldom well conceived. The woman does not understand the fact that in all types of food there are "hidden" substances which affect the growth and health of family members, and thus is unable to make a wise choice of food to provide a well balanced diet for her family.

Nutrition education of mothers and housewives is urgent throughout the developing countries, in both urban and rural areas. The theory of foods and nutrition is well understood by specialists but unfortunately not by the average housewife and mother whose responsibility it is to put theory into practice.

#### Maternal and child health

In Ethiopia the most important centres to measure the health of population and reduce mortality rates in infants are the maternal and health centres in the rural areas. The main bulk of these services in the rural area is carried out by these centres. They are manned by units of middle-level health workers, health officers, community nurses and sanitarians functioning as a closely integrated health team under the leadership of the health officers. The major concern of the health centre is to control communicable diseases, promotion of maternal and child health, improvement of sanitation, nutritional values and promotion of health knowledge.

As from July 1968, 64 health centres exist in the rural areas. The ultimate goal being to have one health centre for about 5,000 inhabitants.

The establishment of health centres are for development of decentralized, generalized health services, which may be done in the following three major ways:

- (a) Objectives and work plans;
- (b) Relationships with local governmental officials;
- (c) Health centre staff and job descriptions.

### Objectives and work plans

The World Health Organization defines the word health as a state of complete physical and mental as well as social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmities. In broad terms, the objectives of our health centres is to try and achieve this health goal for our communities, by:

1. Control of communicable disease;
2. Organization of medical and nursing services;
3. Education of the individual in personal hygiene;
4. Improving the sanitation of the environment;
5. Development of the concept of positive health among residents of the community.

### Anti-epidemic services

The health centre teams also investigate and report of any outbreaks of illness in a community, using appropriate methods to try and determine the cause, then follow up with treatment and prevention of spreading.

In the cities child health is undertaken by physicians and nurses in various hospitals, as well as in the maternal and child health centres. The activities of these clinics include health control at regular intervals, health education in groups, vaccination and treatment of sick children, and the distribution of supplementary UNICEF drugs and other commodities, including antinatal and post-natal care.

### Well baby clinic

The well-baby clinic is intended only for healthy children born at the delivery centre which serves the public twenty-four hours per day. These infants are checked once a month and the mothers have an opportunity to discuss their problems.

The social aspect of the community is managed by social workers in the clinics. Some of our centres have a community centre where handicrafts and home economy are taught.

Mobile child health clinics meet the demands of mothers who cannot attend the centres which are too far from existing centres. However, additional new centres are already within the reach of the five year plan.

### Making the home a better place in which to live

Ethiopia is comprised of a large number of tribes with different customs all having different kinds of houses to live in. The housing situation in rural areas varies from that of the traditional circular-

shaped hut thatched with grass, to the more modern-type house with corrugated-iron roof. No matter what the type or size is, Ethiopians all love their home. Outstanding needs are for adequate water supply, sanitation and proper planning to allow healthy family living, e.g., kitchen facilities, cattle sheds, etc.

The rural housewife needs technical knowledge and guidance in the performance of all jobs which turn a house into a "home".

Home management has many facets, and a good housewife has endless opportunities to improve living conditions of her family; she does this according to the level of her knowledge and understanding of what is required. Keeping the home clean, washing the clothes, arranging for the comforts, convenience and attractiveness of all physical aspects of the house, etc., are some of her duties besides being a wife and mother - no wonder she is the hardest working member of the family.

Home improvement might seem to be beyond the capabilities of most Ethiopian women; but when they learn that the improvements make their job easier, lessen the drudgery and at the same time help them to do a better job, no doubt they will be anxious to learn how all this can be achieved.

#### Activities to enhance family income

As a rule Ethiopian women are very clever with their hands, and eager to acquire new skills. Most of them possess skills in pottery making, basketry, spinning, weaving, etc., but the items which they produce are usually for their own domestic use and not so much for sale. What they need is some encouragement and guidance as to how their own crafts could be used as a means of increasing their family income.

For the rural housewife it may be easier and more realistic for her to earn money at home; so-called "cottage industries" may suit her situation best since she is somewhat tied to the farmstead. Since many of our women already possess a skill in local crafts, it may be helpful to set up some type of credit unions and co-operatives to assist them make in quantity for sale and to find a market for their crafts. Backyard or market gardening and poultry raising might be other activities for rural women living within easy reach of a suitable market.

The urban situation presents a much wider spectrum of opportunity for women wishing to earn, either as self-employed workers (tailoring, vending food etc.) or for the labour market. Illiterate and semi-literate urban women need some training in vocational occupations for which there is a demand (e.g., housemaids, baby-sitters, chamber-maids, or suitable industrial employment (textiles) and, no doubt, many other fields): With training, women and girls with a little education may be employed in the business and commercial fields, as clerks, copy typists, secretaries, nursery school attendants, hairdressers, hotel employees and so on. Both levels require vocational training opportunities to meet the current situation. As more girls stay at school, there will be more women in professional positions, and there is no barrier to prevent this.

## III. EDUCATION AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

Elementary and secondary schools following a western type system of education were introduced into Ethiopia some sixty-four years ago, and the spread of modern instruction under both official and private auspices has been greatly accelerated as a result of the policies initiated and the guidance given by His Imperial Majesty and our late Empress.

Before the aggression on Ethiopia perpetrated by Fascist Italy in 1935, day and boarding schools for girls had been established and girls were already participating in the opportunities for foreign study sponsored by the government.

All education in Ethiopia suffered a severe reversal with the partial occupation of the country by the Italians, but upon the liberation in 1941, priority was given to the reconstruction and the further development of the nation's schools, and definite steps were taken to encourage the enrolment of girls in government as well as church, mission and private institutions.

To date, these steps have included:

1. The issuance of policy directives specifying that up to 50 per cent of the places for beginners in government elementary schools were to be reserved for girls and that by bringing this fact to the attention of parents, local authorities were to see that wherever possible the quota was achieved;
2. The provision of separate elementary schools for girls in areas where co-education proved to be unacceptable;
3. The revival and expansion of girl's schools which had been inaugurated before the Fascist aggression, and the provision of free boarding places in secondary schools for girls whose homes were in the provinces;
4. The extension of secondary level education for girls to include nursing, teacher training, secretarial, home economics and specialized vocational programmes as well as the academic courses leading specifically to college entrance;
5. The provision of full maintenance as well as free tuition for girls entering college in Ethiopia; the introduction of college courses to meet their special needs, and the granting of opportunities for advanced study abroad under governmental sponsorship;
6. The giving of encouragement and assistance for the establishment and operation of private schools for girls;
7. The launching of a woman's education project by the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts in collaboration with the Ethiopian Women's Welfare Association and with different national and international bodies. Under this programme, schools providing full-time and part-time instruction in academic and vocational subjects have been set up.



### Organization and enrolment

To date the government school facilities reach only a small proportion of the population, and the number of girl students is still far from achieving parity with that of boys.

The system is expanding, however, and year by year there is a marked increase in the proportion of girls enrolled at each level. The total enrolment in the government schools in 1961/62 was 237,336 (of which 59,823 or 25.2 per cent were girls). In 1967/68 the total number of students was 452,457 of which 134,370 or 29.5 per cent were girls.

In the middle or junior secondary school level the total number of students enrolled in 1961/62 was 18,099 out of which 3,446 or 19 per cent were girls. Enrolment at this level increased to 44,777 in 1967/68 out of these 11,952 or 26.7 per cent were girls.

At the senior secondary level the total number registered in 1961/62 was 8,695 of which 1,189 or 13.6 per cent were girls. The total for 1967/68 was 26,690 of which 4,883 or 18.1 per cent were girls.

At the university level women average 6 per cent of the total student body. It can be seen that despite the difficulties to be surmounted appreciable progress has been made in women's education.

### Teacher training

The participation of women in the teaching profession although especially desirable, is severely limited. At present, women make up only 1.3 per cent of the total teaching force in the primary grades.

The enrolment of women in teacher training institutes has never been remarkable. At present in primary teacher training, 203 or 10.6 per cent of the trainees are women. A more significant percentage have participated in the UNICEF assisted in-service programme for the upgrading of teachers. At the higher level however, the number of women has usually been negligible.

### Technical and vocational education

Specialized full-time technical and vocational high schools attempt to meet the growing need for skilled and semi-skilled workers in industry and commerce. There is also a polytechnic institute at the junior college level with 588 students (4 women enrolled this year for the first time). In addition some selected general secondary schools offer technical and vocational education with programmes in home economics, technical, mechanical and commercial education.

Women are eligible to enroll on the same terms as men and the total number of students currently attending such schools is 6,252 of which 31.8 per cent are women who generally attend the programmes reserved for girls such as, the home economics course, and the commercial course, which because

of the high employment opportunities is very popular with women. It has been noted that in at least one instance (the Commercial High School of Addis Ababa) women comprise about 46.4 per cent of the total student body. In contrast there are only 13 girls out of a total of 608 in the Technical High School of Addis Ababa. In general, high dropout rates in the earlier grades hinder their full participation in this as in other secondary school training.

#### Adult education

Illiteracy among women is very high and the figures available suggest that 80-90 per cent of women are illiterate. This is a determining factor for education in general and the role of women in public life in particular.

Several government and private organizations including the Ministries of Education, National Community Development, the National Literacy Campaign have consolidated their efforts in the fight against illiteracy.

Literacy programmes are popular and relatively well-attended by women who constituted 21.8 per cent of the total attending literacy classes in 1968. But mere literacy is of no consequence unless its practical applications to everyday living can be demonstrated.

The joint Ministry of Education and Special Fund project (UNESCO) is part of this national effort and is concentrating on a work-oriented approach: home making and other subjects of particular interest to women are to be a focus of its programme for women.

#### Training of women community development workers

The Awasa Community Development Training and Demonstration Centre, the only one of its type in Ethiopia, was established in 1961, following the destruction by earthquake of the Majete Training Centre for Community Teachers which was started and operated with UNESCO assistance.

The training centre is a co-educational programme the requirements for which is the completion of grade 11 to 12. The course covers two years of training in group dynamics, community development methods and techniques, rural economics and co-operatives, agriculture; social welfare; home economics and handicrafts; health education; and communication media.

The first batch of women trainees were recruited for 1964 enrolment.

#### A national advisory council for women's education

Draft proposals have been outlined for the setting up of an advisory council for women's education. The council will consist of various government and private organizations under the chairmanship of the Ministry of Education.

The chief aims of the council are:

- to co-ordinate the work of these agencies with regard to the employment, education and other services for women;
- to encourage greater participation of women in community and public affairs;
- to encourage and expand social welfare services for women and children;
- to establish relationships with international agencies interested in the total development of girls and women.

The general functions of the council will include:

1. The co-ordination of the work of these agencies with regard to the employment, education and other services for women;
2. The encouragement for greater participation of women in community and public affairs.

Specifically, it will among other things, encourage enrolment and attendance of girls at all levels of the education system: set up a women's employment service and ensure the setting up of conditions and standards of employment. It will also assess various programmes and provisions and make appropriate recommendations.

#### IV. PROGRAMMES TO STIMULATE GREATER INTEREST, INCENTIVE AND ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN IN BOTH HOME AND COMMUNITY

If what has been said thus far has been convincing, there can be few doubts about the need for suitable designed educational and vocational type programmes for our women. Programmes not only to benefit them and their families but to assist our national development effort by equipping them to play a more active and effective role. It has been noted that Ethiopian women are already contributing in many ways at various levels of society and in both urban and rural setting.

There are several programmes at present which attempt to meet the various needs of Ethiopian women. These programmes should be expanded greatly if they are to meet these urgent needs of our women.

The Ethiopian Women's Welfare Association and the YWCA run a variety of programmes which include education and training for women in answer to their special needs, the latter being mostly in an urban situation. Whereas the EWWA has a number of branches at provincial level. The Princess Tenenge Work School of Adult Women in Addis Ababa, under the EWWA was opened in 1957, and continuously has offered education and training to mothers and housewives; about 200 women attend daily over a 2-year period,

and evening classes are also offered. Courses include Amharic, Arithmetic, English, Citizenship, Child Care, Personal Hygiene, Home Nursing, Home-making, Sewing Crafts, and Nutrition. Some of the graduates from the school have been employed by the Ministry of Community Development and Social Affairs to serve as low level homecraft workers in its urban programme.

The Aware Community Centre in Addis Ababa, which comes under the help and guidance of the Social Service Society, has a programme very similar to that of the urban community centres under the Ministry of Community Development and Social Affairs. It does however have a special and pioneer programme to train women as housemaids, baby-sitters, etc. About 15 women attend at a time for a period of 3 months. The programme has thus far been so successful that there is a waiting list of employers.

However, the programme under the Ministry of Community Development and Social Affairs is the only government programme at present seeking to meet the specific needs and aspirations of Ethiopian families, and the programme operates at both rural and urban levels.

That women must be a part of the community development process goes without saying, and it is often claimed that they are most effective motivators in a community. Amongst the several components which help the development of a community are health, education and social welfare; in these spheres women can make as great, if not a greater, contribution than men. Centred around the home, these are subjects with which women are familiar and spheres in which their influence has always been and continues to be predominant. As the prime responsibility for the welfare of the family depends on women, their education and active participation in the socio-economic development of the community is of paramount importance. The Ministry of Community Development and Social Affairs is amongst other government agencies which have realized it and has responded to this need by training and involving women within its programme.

The present participation of women in community development (C.D.) programmes dates back to some very humble beginnings initiated by the wives of the men community development workers in 1961/62. During that time some efforts were made by the men to organize women for educational purposes, and they tried to involve their wives to assist them in carrying out a programme for women in the rural areas. Women were encouraged and helped to form their own informal groups so that they could meet and discuss their problems, as well as to learn some simple embroidery and knitting skills. At first the majority of the rural women were not attracted by the idea, and were reluctant to join. Later, however, when they witnessed what a small number of women were learning and the noticeable improvement that they were making, interest was created and more women began to attend the formed group meetings. More and more the desire to learn new skills began to increase. It thus became evident that trained women workers were required to satisfy this need and to strengthen the community development programme in rural areas.

The involvement of women trained field workers in the community development programme is only a period of four years. Within such a short period and despite the limited number of workers relative to the country's total needs and the numerous problems (i.e. scattered population and lack of adequate communications such as roads, etc.) it may be said that promising results have been witnessed. In their respective districts, the workers have been responsible for helping to form and organize a large number of women's clubs to act as a channel for a broad educational programme, and to foster functional leadership amongst the women themselves.

This good beginning though insufficient must continue and more women must accept this as a career and come forward to serve their country, if the needs of rural families in Ethiopia are to be met and permanent advance is to be achieved.

A successful field operation of this nature depends on good planning, administration, supervision and general co-ordination of efforts both with other government as well as non-government organizations and agencies having similar objectives. The Ministry therefore recently decided to strengthen its urban and rural programmes for women and amalgamated them under one section referred to as "the Family Development and Welfare Programme".

The Family Development and Welfare Programme of the Ministry is responsible for farming specific programmes for women, children and young girls in both urban and rural situation, with the family as its focus. The programme is now and will be carried out within the total Ministry's programme. It is and plans to work as closely as possible with all other programmes directed to the advancement and welfare of the family.

It may be seen then, that there are several programmes currently being conducted in Ethiopia which are of great benefit to our women-folk and the community at large. Since the need is urgent and the country large, all such efforts need to be streamlined and co-ordinated by working as closely together as possible, and every effort made to expand these programmes as quickly and as widely as possible.

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