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COUNTRY REPORT - UGANDA

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The women of Uganda form half the population and are anxious to make their full contribution towards national progress, so providing a strong force in national development and reconstruction.

Throughout Africa people are recognizing that without the full participation of women in the social, economic and political fields, a country cannot develop satisfactorily to full maturity. Uganda is no exception, women are taking an increase interest in its progress, and are making a fuller contribution than ever before.

It is essential for women to take part in public life, to understand politics, the way their country is governed and world affairs. Women have a special contribution of their own to make to public and political life. We must have the courage of our own convictions, for the future holds everything for us. Women in Uganda are having a fuller share in public life and making themselves heard by participating in the political arena not only to vote, but to be elected to represent their people. Whenever political, economic and social thinking takes place, women are playing a vital and important part in the development of the home, the community and the nation. Despite the fact that many of our women received only a little education in the past and some had none at all, many have still been able to do a lot through self education and are, therefore willing and ready to put whatever education they have into practice starting at home.

Coming to the subject of this seminar, I would say briefly on each topic how the women have been involved and the part they are trying to play.

Health, Nutrition and Childcare

The health of the nation falls under the Ministry of Health. Most of the hospitals are under the control of the above Ministry, and a few hospitals are run by either the church of Uganda or the Catholic missions. It is the responsibility of the said Ministry to vaccinate all children under five years of age free of charge against, tuberculosis, typhoid, tetanus, whopping-cough, measles and diphtheria. If there is an epidemic of any sort, inoculations are given free to the whole population. But when an adult would like to be vaccinated against typhoid or yellow fever they pay a small fee.

In the field of health women are playing a vital part in their various roles as doctors working in the hospitals and training young doctors at the University, others are matrons, sisters, tutors, general nurses, midwives, paediatricians, psychiatrists, laboratory technicians, dieticians, ward attendants, cooks, sweepers, etc.

Nutrition is not just the concern of one Ministry, but involves other Ministries and organisations. The Ministry of Health is very busy on the research side, while the Ministry of Culture and Community Development is trying to wipe out ignorance regarding the deficiencies of protein among children.

This is done by instruction women in their clubs about the right type of food that should be given to children, pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, putting emphasis on our local foods. Such instructions are given by women either through their voluntary organizations or government officials.

The Ministry of Agriculture plays an important role by instructing women in the best methods of farming and encouraging them to grow more of the vegetable protein foods to substitute for the animal proteins some may not afford to buy. The Ministry of Animal Husbandry and Fisheries help women to rear children so that they can have eggs to supplement the vegetable proteins, and to encourage people to have their own fish ponds.

Often these various Ministries work as a team and run courses for the rural women, either at the rural training centres, or even in the homes of the members themselves. This did not quite solve the problem and Save the Children Fund Organization set up a nutrition rehabilitation unit to help with the malnourished children and where more concentrated practical work is given to mothers.

The purpose of this unit is to instruct and teach mothers how to prepare the food that will cure and keep their children healthy, and to encourage them by example and word, to pass this on to others. The doubtful mothers are encouraged largely by the striking evidence of healthy children and the teaching that the mothers give. The means are simple, practical and within the reach of any home, and these form the basis of the teaching demonstrations.

Continuous three week residential courses are conducted at this unit for club leaders, who observe the changes in children who are suffering from kwashiorkor, so that they can learn and teach through their clubs the striking change in the children admitted to the unit.

Many groups visit the unit every week including professional people and students. There is a daily out patients clinic dealing with the malnourished children who go to Mulago Hospital. These are all attempts to make the community aware of the problem of kwashiorkor, providing a simple and practical answer to it, one that mothers desperately need to know.

Groups from different parts of Uganda have attended the residential course at this unit, and the teaching programme includes agriculture and this is being managed by the Department of Agriculture, Makerere University, through their extension officers: the aim is to help mothers to improve their own gardens and grow more of the foods that their children need. Of course it is not only mothers who are involved, it is just as important for fathers to become aware of the problem and of how they can help. The unit is under the direction of the Department of Paediatrics of Makerere Medical School, financed through the Save the Children Fund.

The teaching of nutrition is extended to schools and there is a School Meal Section in the Ministry of Education which sends out dieticians to advise the various schools in supplying the right type of foods to children, making use of the local foods in the various regions.

Women play another important role in caring for babies who are in desperate need of care and protection regardless of their colour, creed or belief. There are three established voluntary organisations, the Samgu Babies Home, the Save the Children Fund and the Children Adoption Society. Children in these institutions are usually referred to them by a relative in cases of the death of the mother (and where there is no relative capable to look after such a small baby) or by any of the child care agencies, by police, or hospital authorities in the case of an abandoned child who badly needs nutrition rehabilitation. Women are in the forefront running and administering the above organisations, trying to find foster homes for such children so that they can enjoy a family life, like any other normal child.

Education and Training Opportunities for Women.

The women in Uganda are conscious of the wide gap in education that exists between themselves and the men. They wish to narrow this gap if not to close it altogether, so that they can be better companions. They also see in education a door to greater opportunities in life and wish to have some education so that they can better understand their own children, many of whom have had or are receiving formal education.

In Uganda school education is still the privilege of those who can pay fees. Opportunities are open to both girls and boys; but most parents especially in the past, preferred to further their sons education to that of their daughters. If the family had not enough money to go round on the education of their children, the girls were always the ones to suffer even when a girl was more brilliant than her brother. As the future bread-winner and head of the family, the boy must be given all possible assistance to improve his earning capacity. This is changing especially in the urban areas and among the well to do families, but still predominant in the rural areas.

In the primary schools enrolment of girls is high because fees are within the reach of most parents; but secondary schools are more expensive, and the enrolment of girls is correspondingly lower than that of boys. The opportunities for women are open and equal to those of men in any field they wish to take, provided the money is available. Scholarships are awarded on merit and not based on sex. The voluntary organisations especially the University Women Association and the Uganda Council of Women award bursaries to brighter girls whose parents cannot afford to pay for their school fees, either due to poverty or having too many children going to school. Many girls have benefitted from these two organizations, but the number is so great that still there are many drop-outs.

The number of girls enrolling in the nursing field has increased greatly. In the past there used to be only three training hospitals for nurses and midwives, now the number has increased to 7 so that many of the young girls with a vocation to nursing can join any of the hospitals. Others continue to fill the Teacher Training colleges and may take up clerical training, the ones with a higher education take a secretarial course whether at home or abroad.

University

The number of women has steadily increased both at the home university and those abroad. Here you find many women in the field of medicine, others taking law many taking general degrees in the various subjects. The picture is not so dull as it used to be, and many are trying to take up specialist courses after their general degrees, those who do not continue get jobs in the existing firms or join the civil service.

There are now possibilities for adults who left school years back, with qualifications to enable them to join a university to enroll either for a degree course, diploma or certificate, this has been an opening and women used the chance to join such courses as they wish.

Home Economic Educations

The Ministry of Education deals with the direct formal Home Economics education in schools and colleges. Here we have:

- (a) a health education programme for all Primary Schools which is planned for both boys and girls;
- (b) Home Economics planned as a basic course for the first two years of Secondary Education for girls. This basic course has been planned to cover the primary needs of all aspects of all family life, i.e. from the family circle to its influence on the community.
- (c) Following this a girl may choose to take the subject to a higher level for an external East African Certificate of Education in the fourth year.
- (d) After the fourth year there is a three year training course for teachers at the National Teachers' College. Here students take two main subjects one of which can be home economics.
- (e) There are no university courses in Home Economics yet at the home University, but most of the students who require Home Economics education at University level have to go to Nairobi or abroad.
- (f) There are regular follow-up seminars for teachers of the subject.

The Ministry of Education employs a full-time Home Economic Teacher and Dieticians who are responsible for planning and working out school meals programmes. These specialists, besides giving guidance and training on institutional catering connected with schools, are often requested by other institutions, organisations and ministries to give them advice on the subjects. Parents also through the Parents Associations are advised on the feeding of school children.

The women in the rural areas who are illiterate have the opportunity of becoming literate, through the literacy classes run by the Ministry of Culture and Community Development, together with some of the voluntary organisations. They also get training in nutrition, childcare, home management, simple

budgeting, dress-making, home improvement, cookery, etc. It is so far up to the women to use the chance available to them, for the door is open.

Employment Opportunities for Women in Uganda.

The majority of women continue to be home-makers whether or not they also have jobs. Women's representation in different types of work varies considerably throughout the country, depending on their education. The highest number employed are found in urban areas or in new industries, commercial firms or doing domestic work. Opportunities in rural areas are very few if any. The women would normally be occupied with their homes and with agriculture, growing cash crops or food for subsistence.

A number of girls or women if they want jobs must of necessity go to towns, and would undertake quite a number of unskilled jobs. Employment opportunities like the position existing in all the other countries depend on the type and quality of education and experience a possible candidate has. This is particularly true of administrative jobs or high paying jobs. As long as women or girls do not have the opportunity to complete their education up to the standard required for such jobs, either due to shortage of fees, or dropping out in the middle when they decide to get married, or bring up their young families. They will continue to hold middling jobs or non-permanent jobs, not because they are discriminated upon, but because of social and educational circumstances that are unavoidable.

Employment opportunities for women in Uganda increased due to the market increase in the number and variety of women's occupational opportunities, and also to the deliberate government policy of facilitating equal opportunities of education and scholarships between boys and girls. Also to the change in the attitude towards women's education in general and their status and contribution within a developing society. The big increase in the clerical women workers since independence is directly related to the expanded activities of government offices, firms, banks, embassies, corporations and other undertakings. Many women get jobs as telephone operators and receptionists, and many are now training as house-keepers in the hotels or waitresses.

It can be said that employment opportunities for women in Uganda have expanded and will continue to grow as more women specialize in various fields and use the educational opportunities available for all citizens in the country.

Contribution of women to the Development Effort

The women's role today has changed and women no longer regard themselves as if their place is only in the home. You now find them fully employed in paid jobs and they no longer depend on men for their livelihood. There is a very big number of women (married and single) engaged in nursing, teaching, clerical work, secretary and other Government jobs as well as in the firms.

The women in Uganda after being given the same training, education and opportunities as men, are achieving positions which were once considered beyond their capacity. For instance women doctors, phamacists, dispensers,

physiotherapists, laboratory technicians, lawyers, magistrates, parliamentary posts, key posts in the civil service, mayors, councillors, politicians, journalists and so forth. All these some years back were a man's world. It is now very encouraging that more girls are striving hard, having realized that when they as women gain knowledge and acquire new skills they become broadminded and subsequently gain confidence in themselves so that they can play their part in the national development on the same footing with their men folk if not more.

Women have proved that they are intellectually as good as men, and as men come to realise this they gradually become liberal minded and thus accept the situation as a fact. This is proved by the way many parents encourage their daughters for higher education and no longer give privileges to the sons only, and allow their daughters to undertake any social functions without unnecessary restriction and by some husbands who allow their wives to enjoy marriage as a partnership and to engage in activities outside the home when necessary, even up to the extent of sending them abroad for further education or in the local institutions.

Most important women are playing an equal part in planning the future of their children and the running of the families which men used to decide on their own.

Though this pattern of life has not quite been adopted in the rural areas, women have added something to their normal traditional role. The Community Development Department and now the various voluntary organisations which organize women's clubs have spread a good deal of adult education throughout the whole country, and in their small ways contribute to the development effort.

No matter how heavy the work taken on by the women in the heart of their families, other activities outside the home hold no terrors for them, but often attract them. The material reward they receive may be entirely devoted to improving the family's living standards, yet even though the work is not a source of personal income for the women, it gives them nevertheless a social standing if not financial independence. As everywhere in the world, work of this kind opens the door to true feminine advancement.

Legal status of Women

Uganda is making a considerable progress on ensuring the rights of women in all fields on an equal basis with the men. The women's organisations work hard to arouse the attention of the public to the need for reforms in the laws governing marriage and this led the government to appoint a Commission of Enquiry into laws and customs regulating marriage, divorce and inheritance in Uganda, and make recommendations for reform where necessary.

The Commission recommended that:

- (a) All marriages should be registered;
- (b) Monogamous marriage is the most suitable for Uganda;
- (c) Control over the amount given as bride wealth;
- (d) Minimum age for marriage - 16 years for girls and 18 years for boys;
- (e) Grounds for divorce should be the same for men and women;
- (f) Legitimation of children.

The Uganda Council of Women fought so hard whenever they felt that women's right was being undermined. For instance, the conditions of married women in Government employment were most unfavourable and the government used to lose trained and professional women.

In the past if a woman got married, she automatically lost her permanent employment and was put on a temporary basis where she was liable to dismissal any time and at very short notice. Married women had no chance of promotion even if they were better qualified than their single counterparts. They had no maternity leave, one had to resign and to apply again later on. But there was no guarantee of being taken back. This was lately amended and married women can be employed on permanent and pensionable terms, with a maternity leave of 120 days on full pay if they so wish, provided they conform to the terms governing the job and post which they may take up on equal terms with men, and they have the education and capability for such a job.