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## COUNTRY REPORT: LIBERIA

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### I. HEALTH IN LIBERIA

Good health is both a personal and social asset. It is not only important in itself as a quality of life which makes for richer and more joyous living, but it is important to the individual so that he may function to his fullest capacity as an effective citizen in a democratic society. Believing in this, the budget for the Department of Health in Liberia is very large.

Besides the medical centres, already in use, which I shall refer to later, there is a newly built Medical Centre named J.F. Kennedy Medical Centre which will serve as the focal point of the health services of the country, providing two hospitals (maternity and general) and training paramedical personnel for the needs of the country. This hospital is administered under a Board of Directors (Hospital and Training Board) and will begin operating by the end of this year.

There are presently many large hospitals which take care of different kinds of ailments. Besides these, there are scores of clinics and dispensaries throughout the country which serve very useful purposes. There is a large hospital in each of the 9 counties and this has greatly improved the health condition of these areas. In these women are actively engaged. For this, the people of Liberia are grateful to the present administration for its deep concern for the health of its citizens.

In terms of training of professional manpower there is a Government programme which makes it possible for students to study in foreign parts of the world. Prospective medical students are among the scholarships which have priority. Scholarships are also offered by agencies and other friendly nations under their technical assistance programmes in favour of developing countries.

Of course every year personnel of the Health Education Department convenes educational conferences and public relations activities on all levels in co-operation with government agencies, schools, the YWCA, girl guides and other institutions.

There is also a programme on radio and television called "Roadways to health". Initiated in 1964, this programme has met with much success. It gives valuable information and builds up a high degree of health consciousness both in adults and children. A real health education programme seen and heard on television and radio influences the attitudes, habits, customs and knowledge relating to individual family and community life.

But regardless of all this, protein malnutrition seems to be a problem of greatest magnitude in the health service of our country and I think in all developing countries. And although I may not be able to discuss malnutrition from a professional or technical point of view, yet from a layman's point and as Chairman of Senate Committee on Public Health and Sanitation, I can. I am kept informed by yearly reports from the Department of Health about the operation, as well as the problems of the hospital, among which is protein malnutrition.

In view of this problem of protein malnutrition, an active and more intensive programme of health education is indicated in the report. Already efforts have been made by the establishment of several mother and child clinics. These are of course in many parts of the country but will be expanded so that maternal and child care may be available to all expectant mothers and children.

The Department feels that there is a need for the establishment of an organization which will concern itself with all aspects of nutrition and advise the Government as to appropriate measures to be taken in connexion with nutrition deficiencies. Legislation is also sought by the Health Department for the establishment of a National Nutrition Council with responsibility to formulate standards of nutrition, promote research and co-ordinate all nutrition programmes in Liberia.

A statistical report, I am sure, which time will not permit, would be of interest. However, in all phases of our medical programmes, women play an important role and are very conscientious, and consequently have a deep sense of obligation to humanity, which is the keynote of their profession.

## II. ROLE OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In terms of national development, women the world over, with special reference to Africa, are admired today for their courage and enthusiasm. And even though political changes involving legislation are by and large responsible, but it seems to me, that the background or moral truth is, world situations have developed to such an extent that it is obvious that women are making great contributions by sharing public and political responsibilities, some of which are so complex that it is evident that the womanhood of any nation is a necessary factor, or fabric, for nation-building.

That the women are justifying their existence with the men in almost every sphere of life can be seen, particularly that the age demands it. So, realizing this, governments in many parts of the world are undertaking every legislation to ensure equal rights of citizens, regardless of sex. And it is marvellous to see how women are adjusting and have adapted themselves to this revolution, when years ago, the general function of a woman was the home, and her main office the kitchen - from one extreme to the other. Not that we hold no obligation, nor devotion to these old landmarks, the women have just improved and are going along with the requirements of the age. This is an age of changes.

### How women came in public and political life in Liberia

As you know, historically there have been women's clubs or organizations for hundreds of years. For you will recall that matrons of ancient Rome often met in discussion groups, or clubs to talk about matters of etiquette. But the purpose of women's organizations since those days have been diversified, one of the most important being politics - political responsibilities and rights. And in Liberia, although the women realized that the attributes for good citizenship were many, and not circumscribed to the house, no woman was prepared to take the harsh criticisms then by going beyond the limits of the home, by taking the initiative especially when the move of woman suffrage flopped in the beginning, except for the late Sarah Simpson George. This was one of the rough spots of her life.

The women's social and political movement was organized in the early 1920's, under the name Women's Culture Club, the main purpose of which was city beautification and cleaning. But as time went on the Club began to take on a political aspect. Due to the composition of the Club, which involved ministers' wives, some had to sever their membership, but a few continued.

Mrs. George later mobilized the women of Liberia, and convinced them of the necessity of woman's suffrage which had been in agitation from one administration to the other. Her political activities extended to all the counties where she organized the women's social and political movement, explaining that such a movement would bring much advantage to the women

of Liberia. And her leadership was influenced by personal persuasion. Her political influence travelled from her family circle throughout the entire country. She was naturally endowed with rich and varied gifts, strong and dynamic personality, steadfast in her purpose and rich in her resources.

In 1930, during President Barclay's administration, a delegation of women, of which Mrs. George was a member, called on the Legislature in an appeal for full suffrage for women. They were thanked for their speeches, and that was the end. And although the women were engaged in other activities in the organization, they still had women's political rights as their main objective.

The struggle continued and fortunately emerged into the administration of one who had fostered woman suffrage on the floor of the Senate as a senator.

Consequently, a Referendum Act was passed during President Barclay's administration granting women the right to vote at city elections. This limitation was not well taken but we were on the threshold of a new administration which favoured woman suffrage, and so the women decided to wait.

A joint resolution to amend Section II of Article I of the Constitution entitled, and I quote, "election and qualification of voters", which in the Constitution previously read, and I quote, "All elections shall be by ballot, and every male citizen of twenty-one years of age possessing real estate shall have the right of suffrage", was amended to read, quote, "All elections shall be by ballot and every citizen, male and female, of twenty-one years of age possessing real estate shall have the right of suffrage".

Section II of the Act shows that amendments were submitted to the people for adoption on the first Tuesday in May 1946. And Section III of the Act shows that the joint resolution became effective immediately, and was approved 11 December 1945. The inhibitions which prohibited the women from voting on national conventions was immediately corrected as I said earlier through legislation which gave women full voting rights in 1953.

The women of Liberia have no idea of taking over from the men, but only want to assist and co-operate in the church as far as the canons permit and in the State as the Constitution allows. And our attitude is understood because in a statement made by our President in a speech during a Women Lawyers' Convention in Monrovia which brought women from many countries, and I quote, "There are many great women in the world today, but unlike the past, they do not stand out individually". The Liberian woman finds it a joy to share equally the demands of the present age, morally, socially, intellectually, spiritually and economically. This builds up a great sense of pride. Realizing that the womanhood of Liberia is capable

of making concrete contributions towards national development. This is how we appeared on the political scene. The present administration believes in the man and woman who can work together for a common good.

In view of the foregoing, the women of Liberia have a claim on the Government, consequently we have women in Executive, Legislative and Judiciary branches. We have women also in foreign service with top positions. But regrettably, we have not been able to procure top positions as yet in the Judiciary branch, but we hope to do so as soon as we can, because we have several women lawyers who are watching for an opportunity.

Although there have been so many unfavourable comments on women's equality with men, such as those made by a Roman statesman, Marcus De Cato, called Marcus De Censor, who said, and I quote, "Suffer women to arrive at an equality with you and they will from that moment become your superior". Or another unfair impression about women in a reported conversation among a few men, when one asked the other quote, "Do you ever take the last word in an argument with your wife?" "Yes," he replied. "For God's sake how do you do it?" And he said, "Well, to everything she says is 'yes darling'." We resent these impressions because they are all misinterpretations.

Even Queen Elizabeth in one of her Christmas messages which she devoted to women said that women are beginning to play their full part in public life and that the opportunity for them to give something of value to the human family is greater than ever. Added to this, it seems to me that the rulers of the world are beginning to feel that the peace which most of them are clamouring for and the world needs, regardless of arms, one of the most effective instruments through which that peace can be achieved, is the womanhood of the world.

In fact the significance of woman's role in national development nowadays is of such that there must, or to put it mildly, there should be not only some recognition, but some reckoning with the women of the world at a reasonable rate, for that matter, considering their various influences. We hope to continue to justify our existence with the men, who in the face of a certain amount of scepticism, have given us a place beside them in the political arena.

Added to this, this is an age of great changes, and human beings must have along with and be involved in the changes as situations present themselves. For new ways of living and new experiences are characteristic of human beings. Especially so that change is taking place now at such a very terrifying rate, it is not surprising that the very tempo of the change in the new era should include women, particularly in developing countries for the enhancement of related situations. And the women of Liberia are seizing every opportunity to become an integral part of national development. Because the present administration has given us much light and requires us to use it wisely to our advantage.

### III. EDUCATION IN LIBERIA

One of the greatest advances that the present administration has made is its emphasis on education. And this has brought a great advantage to us, and in turn to the nation. This has alleviated to a certain extent in many of our job sites today, the just feeling or unfavourable reaction of there being more foreigners than Liberians doing very simple jobs that could otherwise be done by Liberians in general.

Before this administration there seemed to have been a consensus of opinion, although not altogether true, that Liberia lacked qualified women in various fields, but this has been proven to the contrary.

This administration believes in the aristocracy of talents and gives financial and moral support, not only to government-sponsored institutions of learning, but any institutions of learning whether philanthropic or private.

The educational system of our country has improved greatly over the years, and as an incentive for the citizens you will find in the Liberia Code of Laws, Section 56, "Liberian employees to be preferred". You will observe when you read that section that where Liberians of equal competence can be found there is no problem.

As Africans we have great faith in education and I say this with special reference to Liberia. We in Liberia strongly believe that a democratic society rests upon the wisdom and intelligence of its people. This administration makes us feel that each person should have an opportunity to acquire the kind of education best suited for him, regardless of sex. We realize that human society of whatever stage, could not exist without some education of some form or kind. Likewise, an individual could not be a member of society without being educated in the ways of that society. In fact it goes without saying that the level of life in any country rests upon the level of the education of its people.

Now, one could never make a comprehensive and convincing reference to the changing role of women in Liberia, in the field of education without a retrospective view.

Years ago, the highest ambition of Liberian women was to marry. The average age was 16, and a very ripe and logical age was 18. It was an absurdity for a woman to think of any other activity beyond her home other than the church. The education she did not acquire before marriage was lost; not as today where women continue their education even after they have married. Even though there were institutions of higher learning in Liberia in the 1800's, women were never encouraged along this line. The number of women in higher education was very small. However, the beginning of the 1900's saw women in higher education when they caught the idea of the advantage of higher education. They discovered that that was the only

basis upon which equal recognition and opportunities could be achieved in a democracy. The men were convinced by this time that there were potentials in the womanhood of Liberia. Consequently, in 1905, four female students graduated in higher education. The female enrolment statistics of the university show that from a total enrolment of 46 in 1965, 123 in 1967 and 176 in 1968, the academic year of 1969 is estimated at 225.

The women of Liberia realize that education is like most other aspects of life. The more you put into it, the richer will be your reward. And they are learning in order to prepare themselves for greater service to their country and not only to gain special privileges and prestige to make life easier or enjoyable. The achievement of women in education in Liberia thus far has been beyond the most ambitious expectations because they have taken advantage of various fields in education. This will give you an idea that education along all lines is well in hand in Liberia, and by this we are sure that the purpose of the Liberian women will be adequately met in the near future.

Having come from obscurity it gives the women of Liberia great pleasure when they recall the historical background of women in higher education, especially when they think of the medieval prejudice against women's education. As you know, history on the education of women in the continent of Europe, Asia and even Africa, reveals for example that while Oxford and Cambridge Universities had been founded as long ago as the 12th and 13th centuries respectively, the earliest women's colleges in England were not founded until late in the 19th century. And none of the women's colleges was incorporated until the beginning of the second quarter of a century. Likewise in West Africa, Fourah Bay College, founded in 1876, produced its first woman graduate only in 1938, the second in 1939 and thereafter few others. In Liberia it was not until 1905 that four female students graduated from Liberia College, now the University of Liberia. The women realized long ago that education at all levels is important, and that those who have the intellectual attitude without any social distinctions would definitely help to build a good society in any country, especially since all nations are concerned with economic growth. Economic returns for capital outlay for a dam, for example, can be measured fairly easily in kilowatt hours of electricity, or in production of certain industrial goods. But the return on a comparable investment in education cannot be calculated so precisely. And I am sure no economist, nor anyone who has given this a thought doubts that trained manpower is the fundamental ingredient for economic development. With it, the other necessary elements such as capital, natural resources and trade cannot be exploited. Thus any nation, rich or poor makes two major kinds of investments to promote its wellbeing and growth by wisely investing in people and things.

Therefore, Liberia has made and is making adequate investment in the field of education with special reference to, and keen interest in, her womanhood.

### Training and employment of women

Nothing has been more forceful in man's life than work. By work he has been able to supply his needs and even his wants because there is an increase of the latter according to the age or time. What this age presents in terms of necessities of life is far more than years ago. Man realized in the beginning that work was the only means by which he could obtain the necessities of life which would be conducive to good living.

Therefore vocational training has had a great impact on educational systems, even during the early days of life. And especially now, in a scientific and technological age which has definitely changed our way of life where the development of human activities in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding is very necessary.

For it is an absolute fact that the success of a nation's economy depends by and large on the proficiency of its workers. And these workers must have various ways that are most convenient to acquire proficiency. Of course in the early days of man, proficiency was considered gifted. But the world is so advanced in science and technology that nothing can adequately provide the type of workers needed for this age but organized vocational education for its workers who do not only need vocational training but general abilities.

Formal training as you know is organized instructions given by teachers or their designates, but we cannot lose sight of informal education which involves learning from people, or maybe agencies for that matter, whose purpose and/or process is different from organized instruction, but learning from other groups or society. In Liberia the Government helps to facilitate on-the-job training by ratification or agreements with companies and concessions. In these the women employees also participate and are gainfully employed. In the concession and companies, there are many centres of on-the-job training and this has helped also to raise the economic status of women in Liberia. The Liberian woman realizes that she is an essential element within the manpower of the country, so that training of some kind at all levels is very important.

With equal rights, the employment of women in every field of endeavour presents no problem, especially if they are prepared. There are as many women in this field as there are men. There are also many women in the Executive branch. The Judiciary still remains a man's world in terms of top position; nevertheless, women are employed in this branch. The Legislative branch has less female employees, as well as representation. Among 18 Senators there is only one woman. Among 52 members of the House of Representatives there are only four women. We are hoping that the number will increase.

I hope this information will give an idea of women in education, training and employment.

#### IV. WOMEN IN DOMESTIC LIFE IN LIBERIA

Wifehood and motherhood are the big things in a woman's life from the natural point of view, and according to the old landmarks. Her whole world usually centres around her home and family.

Of course to be a wife and mother is the function of a woman, and as such, she reaches her highest development, renders her greatest service to humanity, and attains her greatest joy and happiness in life. So the idea of a homemaker has a place among the women of our day. Regardless of the vast changes of the modern times in which women are actively involved, domestic life still occupies the same place; and its appeal is as powerful as ever.

Therefore, certain women prefer to remain in that original orbit. They still feel that although according to Divine Injunction man and woman are equal, yet, their spheres of activity in life must naturally be different and each must be true to that.

In view of this, many women in Liberia have not found it convenient to carry their interest beyond the home, barring church, and maybe civic and social activities. They believe in the philosophy that a woman's home is said to be her own creation. Some of the women feel that it is not possible for a woman to maintain two loyalties. However, most of the Liberian women feel that these loyalties are not divided and regardless of different schools of thought on equality of women, the men in Liberia have accepted and recognized us. Their interpretation of this equality could never mean usurpation on the part of women, or else their reaction would be unfavourable.

Women have to be in various categories of their choice, and some Liberian women do prefer to be typical housewives. Mark you, this does not mean that women in political and public life are not devoted to family life. Most women in Liberia welcome the idea of women's participation in public and political life which they feel reflect creditably on womanhood as a whole. But some of them feel that the result of this change poses a hardship with many complications. But regardless of our public status, for which we are grateful, we still have a deep sense of obligation and responsibility as wives and mothers. We have to necessarily accept the constitutional opportunity made available through legislation so as to make it possible for us to make our contribution towards the national development of our country. We feel that this revolutionary change places great opportunities at our door which we can use to help our men, since world situations have developed to such an extent, and are so complex that the men do need the co-operation of the womanhood of their countries. And especially so that they have discovered the courage and enthusiasm of the women of today. So those of us who have accepted public life feel that nothing can replace, or mar, our ambitions, as is characteristic of the age, but ours is guarded ambition; and we have no problems with our men in this new field of political equality.

Women in domestic life are making valuable contribution also. They are able to follow up the day-to-day activities of the home as they affect members of the family due to the time at their disposal. They feel that domestic life is a career, and this is more evident with women who have built large families where there is no alternative but to make a sacrifice; in other words, providing the greatest good for the greatest number.

However, women in domestic life are just as dynamic as those in public life. They are not seen but felt because they serve as powers behind the throne. For some of the greatest men of the world owe much of their success in life to their wives.

Women have taken their places everywhere alongside of man. Not only in this modern day; she has gone with him all the way in the home, outside the home, in the schoolroom, on the platform, even in olden days on the field of battle, as well as in all peaceful pursuits. And even though women are in domestic life, they are ready to make any contribution for the enhancement or development of their countries.

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