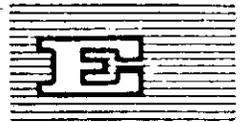


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FAO ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF HOUSING

(Note prepared by FAO)

FAO ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF HOUSING

1. Within FAO the subject of housing is of concern primarily to the Forestry Division and to the Home Economics Branch of the Nutrition Division. This note concerns the activities of the Home Economics Branch.
2. Realizing the importance of satisfactory housing conditions for the healthy development of the family, FAO home economists are encouraged to give all possible attention to the problem of housing and home improvement in their training programmes for teachers, community development personnel and social workers.
3. Home economics teachers and extension workers, as well as personnel in related fields who are working in close contact with families and aware of the existing housing problems and the effect of these conditions upon the health and well-being of the family, can be of great assistance to families in planning new houses, in improving old ones, and in advising on the proper care and maintenance of different types of houses. They may help families to understand the purpose and advantages of perhaps unfamiliar building designs and construction methods and they may thus help to prevent that families, due to ignorance, counteract features that were aimed at the improvement of the housing conditions. As an example, may be mentioned obstructions preventing air circulation.
4. In designing new houses it is important that the families who will be the future occupants of these houses are in full accord with the new designs and that these meet the needs of the families in their particular situation.
5. Housing schemes launched by governments and private companies have not always taken into consideration the needs and wishes of the people, and rather than fit the needs of the people, the people have had to fit into the houses. To avoid this, studies of patterns of living as a basis for housing development are called for. Home economists in collaboration with sociologists and anthropologists have a contribution to make to ensure that housing meets the needs of the people and that they are helped to make the best use of their new houses.

6. Home economists can help families to determine some of their most essential needs and how best to meet these needs. As examples may be mentioned the need for a certain amount of privacy for the members of the family, the need for sanitary facilities, a safe area for the children to play, and a sheltered place for the preparation of the food. Home economists can, on the one hand, serve as spokesmen for the families and bring to the attention of the housing authorities the requirements and views of the families, and make suggestions as to how these can be met; on the other hand families sometimes need help in adjusting to new types of housing that may be introduced in conformity with new housing codes and housing regulations (which ensure, for example, a greater measure of safety and protection against fire hazards). With such adjustments, home economists can sometimes be of help.

7. With the acute housing shortage in many places, the demolishing of old, dilapidated dwellings will not take place as rapidly as one might wish. Many families must be helped to restore and repair their present dwellings. For this they need encouragement, ideas and guidance. Personnel working with families, such as home economics extension workers, community development workers, etc., can do much to stimulate self-help and give guidance.

8. To ensure a more effective approach to the problem of family housing there is need for close collaboration between the housing authorities and agencies working with families, such as community development, social welfare, home economics education and extension workers. Working together they will be able better to appreciate the many problems that need to be considered in developing new housing and the limitations involved. Close collaboration is likely to result in improved housing standards, in housing better adapted to the needs of the families, and in better care and maintenance of the houses. This will help to preserve the value of the property for a longer period of time and prevent houses from deteriorating

into new slum quarters. Home economists are in some places attached to housing projects as housing managers. This gives them also an opportunity to launch educational programmes for the tenants. As members of housing boards, home economists have a special opportunity to influence housing developments.

9. To be able to render effective service, home economists and related personnel need to be trained. They need some basic knowledge about building construction, the proper height of ceilings, methods of insulation against solar radiation, ventilation, protection against dampness and cold, the characteristics of various building materials, etc. They also need to know about the existing building codes and regulations. They need to be able to read a blueprint and to discuss various designs with technicians, and they need experience in planning and arranging houses to meet changing family needs.

10. With a lack of trained personnel in many countries, it is not always possible to find home economists and social workers able to render assistance for the improvement of housing conditions. The Home Economics Branch of FAO, therefore, proposes to give increasing attention to practical training in housing and home improvement through the organization of workshops, seminars and training courses for home economists and related personnel especially concerned with the welfare aspects of housing, and for leaders of women's organizations who are actively interested in housing improvement. Seminars of this type would deal with topics such as:

- (a) design of the house to meet the basic needs of families in accordance with their patterns of living;
- (b) use of local materials for construction and furnishing;
- (c) best use of available floor space;
- (d) furnishing and equipping the house for healthful living;
- (e) maintenance and care to prevent deterioration of new houses;
- (f) programmes of tenant education;
- (g) social and community aspects of housing (self-help, mutual aid, motivating factors to improve low cost housing, etc.).

11. A few examples of activities that have been undertaken by FAO home economists may be mentioned. Between 1952 and 1958 a number of training courses organized in the Caribbean area dealt to a considerable extent with the problem of housing and how to improve present living conditions. The effect of existing housing conditions on the moral and physical health of the family, as well as upon the relationship between family members made it essential to include in every home economics programme, consideration of the ways in which housing conditions could be improved to safeguard the needs of families. A textbook, "Housing and Home Improvement in the Caribbean", prepared in connexion with these activities is now available in three languages (English, French and Spanish). Though written with the conditions of a specific geographical region in mind, this book has been widely used in South America, the South Pacific islands, and in some parts of the African continent, and has stimulated home improvement projects and self-help activities in these areas.

12. In one of the islands of the South Pacific, the Women's Interests Officer is using her own living quarters as a demonstration house to the women's groups with whom she works. She has with the help of local labour and with the use of local materials used the ideas in the book mentioned above ("Housing and Home Improvement in the Caribbean") to furnish and fit the house. It is visited by people from all over the region who are interested to look and learn from this practical demonstration.

13. Some home economics projects in the Caribbean and elsewhere have given special consideration to the need of children in the home for restful sleep, for play and for work. In Ethiopia, close collaboration has been established between the FAO/UNICEF-sponsored home economics programme and the Ethio-Swedish Building Institute. Graduates from the Home Economics School in Addis Ababa are now working with the Building Institute on low-cost housing projects and home economics training courses have given considerable attention to housing and home improvement in their programme.

14. In Senegal, as part of a Special Fund project for training monitrices for work with rural women, there are plans to construct at the national training centre a house modelled on the lines of a typical Senegalese village house, to be used as a guest house and also as a "housing laboratory" for the trainees.

15. In recent years an FAO home economist working in Tanganyika has been instrumental in the erection of demonstration houses that provide a good example of suitable design and lay-out for a family house in that area. These houses offer an opportunity to demonstrate different ways of utilizing available floor space to good advantage; the need for allocation of space to the different functions to be performed by the family members in the home; the arrangement of sanitary facilities and provision for satisfactory working conditions in the kitchen. The houses are equipped with the most essential furnishings for satisfactory family living with emphasis placed on sturdy, inexpensive items which meet essential needs and yet are within the resources of the family.

16. The construction of such model or demonstration houses in connexion with training programmes or community development activities, offers those participating in the project an opportunity to discuss building plans, designs and lay-outs, allocation of space, furnishing and equipment of the house, the essential needs of each family member, and housing in relation to established patterns of living. The project also offers an opportunity to demonstrate the care and maintenance of the materials used for the construction of the building and its furnishings. With the usual "wear and tear", repairs and renovations will be needed. How these can be taken care of by the family itself with the least expenditure of money can well be demonstrated in a "model" house where families come to learn how to plaster the walls, repair the floors and coat wooden materials as protection against weather and insects.

17. The building of a model or demonstration house gives the people in a community ideas, knowledge and skills for the improvement of their own houses. It creates interest among the families for the proper care and maintenance of their houses and also stimulates self-help. All this contributes to the well-being of the family and the development of the community as a whole.

18. In Ghana and Sierra Leone, an FAO home economist has been actively engaged in self-help projects for village development. These projects have been concerned with kitchen improvement, building of latrines, baths and soak-away pits, construction of windows, plastering of walls, fencing around the compound, protection of water supplies, etc. In starting these village and home improvement projects plans provided by different government departments have been discussed with the householders. Necessary modifications have been made to ensure that plans for the improvement of the houses would meet the particular needs of the family and could be achieved within its resources. These simple home improvement projects carried out on a self-help basis have aroused considerable enthusiasm among the villagers and have led to a chain reaction, ideas spreading from one home to another, leading to other improvements to homes and communities.

19. Other home economics projects in Africa have given special consideration to the need for improving the working conditions of the home. Emphasis has been placed on ways and means of providing adequate storage space in the house; sanitary and convenient working arrangements in the kitchen; the building of stoves at the correct height which are safer and more convenient than the open fire place; the provision of water and sewage disposal. Satisfactory working arrangements and sanitary conditions in the home have a direct effect upon the health and well-being of mothers and children. Such arrangements result in less strain on the women performing their various household tasks, a matter of special importance to women of child-bearing age and in particular to pregnant and nursing women. In those

countries where many women work not only at home, but also in the fields or markets or factories, it is important to ease their workload at home and reduce undue strain to the greatest possible extent. Improved housing conditions mean that women remain healthier, preserve their strength and better fulfill their roles as wives and mothers. These are all factors worth consideration in planning new housing projects and of great concern to home economists.

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