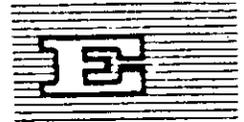


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MAENDELEO ACTIVITIES IN KENYA

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MAENDELEO ACTIVITIES IN KENYA

FORMATION of the Maendeleo organisation in Kenya has served one very important purpose, namely to fill the vacuum left by the absence of feminine projection in the efforts of nation building in the country. Credit in the formation of this body goes to the administration and local authorities and to the numerous women of all races without whose voluntary services the work for which the organisation was formed could not have been advanced so far. The organisation has now well over 45,000 members throughout the country.

Today thinking and the trends in the activities of Maendeleo Organisation have been transformed very tremendously. Originally we were a body sponsored and financially fully supported by the Government as well as the various local government bodies; this has changed until now the organisation is responsible for mapping projecting and carrying out all its activities.

Ours is a countrywide democratic organisation, catering for women of various descriptions in numbers of clubs and centres spread throughout the breadth and width of Kenya. It is essentially non-political in that its membership as also officialdom are drawn, without any distinction, from all political parties. We are essentially a women's organisation dedicated to the cause of helping to build a modern country.

Maendeleo began its activities in the villages where women needed to learn something about home-making. At our clubs women were taught how to cook, how to sew and stitching, simple homecraft, gardening as well as playing games and other recreational activities. Now these activities have been advanced into the towns and sub-urban areas, instead of reducing the problems which were faced at the beginning, now we face new and even more complex challenges.

Urbanisation, in general has not been a very simple process at all in Kenya in that it reflected all the complexities of detribalisation. Detribalisation entails fraternisation of the diverse interests and outlook. The two processes have in the past offered limited opportunities for the women to play their actual role in the life of the urban community. For instance, except in rare cases, educational opportunities for women in urban areas have been very limited if not actually wanting.

This precluded the opportunity for women for further studies, for training and ultimately for equipping themselves for better employment in the cities and towns of Kenya. One other exception which must be mentioned here that some girls in the urban areas have been able to take their education at schools which were otherwise predominantly for boys.

Thus our first task in the urban areas is to make sure that there is increased opportunity for education and training for women. This is carried out at Maendeleo clubs by providing lessons in literacy in addition to the simple tuition offered in mothercraft, homecraft, needlework, nutrition as well as in some areas as sewing, gardening and this

includes the sports and games which women take as their recreations which have lately become very popular.

The number of women drifting to the towns is increasing at full speed. In most cases the number of women who enter urban areas has so very seriously outbalanced that of the men that there has been the constant threat of serious outbreaks of social ills. In Kenya, since the last State of Emergency, there have continued to be great numbers of unmarried women whose husbands were murdered or killed by security forces. Such women, some mothers while others are spinsters, find it difficult to earn their living in one way or the other. In the absence of proper employment many of them have drifted to prostitution for a living.

Moreover, in cities like Nairobi there has continued to be the shortage of suitable housing for men as well as women. This shortage has affected women more because in seven cases out of ten where there could be found a house, they have turned out to be unable to meet the tendency requirements.

In urban areas Maendeleo faces other difficulties. These emanate from the desire to take proper care of the children whose mothers are unmarried or are widowed. Our organisation would be failing in its multiple responsibilities if it closes its eyes to the serious situation which is bound to be bred in the future of children who, owing to lack of parents or proper parental care, have turned into thugs, spivs or lawless. We realise that in order to build a peaceful and progressive society in Kenya, the future of all children must be properly guided.

Therefore the Maendeleo organisation has engaged itself in setting up Nursery Schools at which children are taken care of while their mothers attend courses at Maendeleo clubs. In all these cases our surest problem has continued to be the possibilities and the means with which to expand and improve those services which are now provided for by the organisation.

It would be difficult to give an accurate view of the facilities for house-keeping in urban areas. In the main there have been a number of cases of temporary marriages which have ended in complete failure. In such cases the offsprings have been left in a condition which demanded our immediate intervention. But as also it must be appreciated our facilities and means have not been very much in favour of this step.

Recently there are increasing openings for women in government services. Previously, women could only be found in the teaching profession, in the Medical services and in the Community Development and Social services; today the opportunities have extended to embrace a number of other government departments and there are now a number of women at the Royal College in Nairobi and Kenya Polytechnic, who are undergoing training in order to qualify as secretaries and stenographers in order that they may take definite duties in various government departments and commercial organisations.

Only a very limited number of African women own business in the urban areas; and those who do are rarely successful because of financial limitation. The very few who have been successful have shown outstanding ability in conducting their business; there have been various cases of remarkable achievement on the side of certain women in business. Only a very small number of our women play any real part in the industrial development of the country.

Until a very short time ago politics were left to men; but nowadays our women have been known to strive hand in hand with their men-folk in all efforts that have been carried out towards bringing independence to Kenya. In various cases women have been elected to minor political positions of leadership in the various political organisations. The Maendeleo Organisation is conscious of more responsibility ahead.

In order to revitalise this organisation, we are planning to intensify our activities all over the country and to broaden the scope of our intake in the training facilities for more commercial and technical workers. We have urged that definite opportunities should be made available to women to train in such field as agriculture, veterinary and in the various fields of industrial development.

The organisation have been campaigning for the establishment of more and better women's hostels in order to facilitate better living conditions for African women in urban areas. It is important to mention here that facilities for accommodating women in these areas have been increased recently when the Y.M.C.A. opened the doors of their hostels to women of all races as they have made more facilities for women living in various African localities in the urban areas.

We realise that our tasks are numerous and onerous but we are determined to use all our abilities, possibilities and know-how to make our fullest contribution to our legitimate efforts of building one healthy society in Kenya.