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WOMAN POWER, SOCIAL IMPERATIVES AND HOME SCIENCE

by

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WOMAN POWER, SOCIAL IMPERATIVES AND HOME SCIENCE

This is a rare and wonderful opportunity for me to have the privilege of meeting with you and sharing some points of view and ideas about a subject that has been brewing in my mind for a long time: Woman Power. This subject in my opinion should be considered along with agriculture and population control as a priority concern as development plans are being made for the future. Woman Power is already making a significant contribution to the nation. If this power is put to maximum use with help from formal and informal educational programmes it could help change the status of Ghana from a less developed to a developed economy. Some people have said that the greatest source of power in Ghana is the Volta Dam but actually the Volta can't light a candle compared with the light and power that can be generated by women if they are freed from the shackles of low educational attainment.

My interest in Ghana's women began in 1965 when I attended an international conference at Iowa State University where I met a very charming and beautiful Ghanaian woman from the Embassy

in Washington who delivered one of the keynote lectures. Her diction and masterful use of the English language attracted everyone's attention and the erudite way in which she analyzed situations in Ghana which called for the attention of Home Science made a deep impression on me and I started dreaming about making a visit to Ghana some day to find out if she really represented Ghana's women. The gods must have heard my prayer for the following year the opportunity came for me to spend a year in Ghana. The one-year commitment quickly extended to three and I am on this occasion celebrating the 1000th day since my arrival.

During my thousand days I've become acquainted with hundreds of women; some of the urban elite, village women working in agriculture, women engaged in various crafts from Navrongo in the north to Keta in the south, teachers and students in secondary and teacher training schools, community development workers, T.U.C. women, and members of the Y.W.C.A. Market women have become my friends and have kept me supplied with textile materials and other necessities. It has been my privilege to work with large groups of women from various disciplines including health, education, housing, community development and agriculture who have attended our annual Home Science conferences. At the first conference I was very apprehensive about whether or not the women would participate in discussions and make constructive suggestions about improving conditions for Ghana's children—the subject of the conference. But to my astonishment and delight they were full of ideas and without hesitation freely expressed themselves and made recommendations that will keep Home Scientists well occupied for at least a decade ahead. This experience convinced me that Ghana's professional women are indeed extraordinary and have potential power beyond any calculation. The students enrolled in Home Science at Legon have of course been my main concern

during my 1000 days, but now that they are doing some educational work in a village and are beginning to close the gap between Legon and rural Ghana; they are becoming my pride of joy. I've found that Ghana's women are indeed worth writing home about.

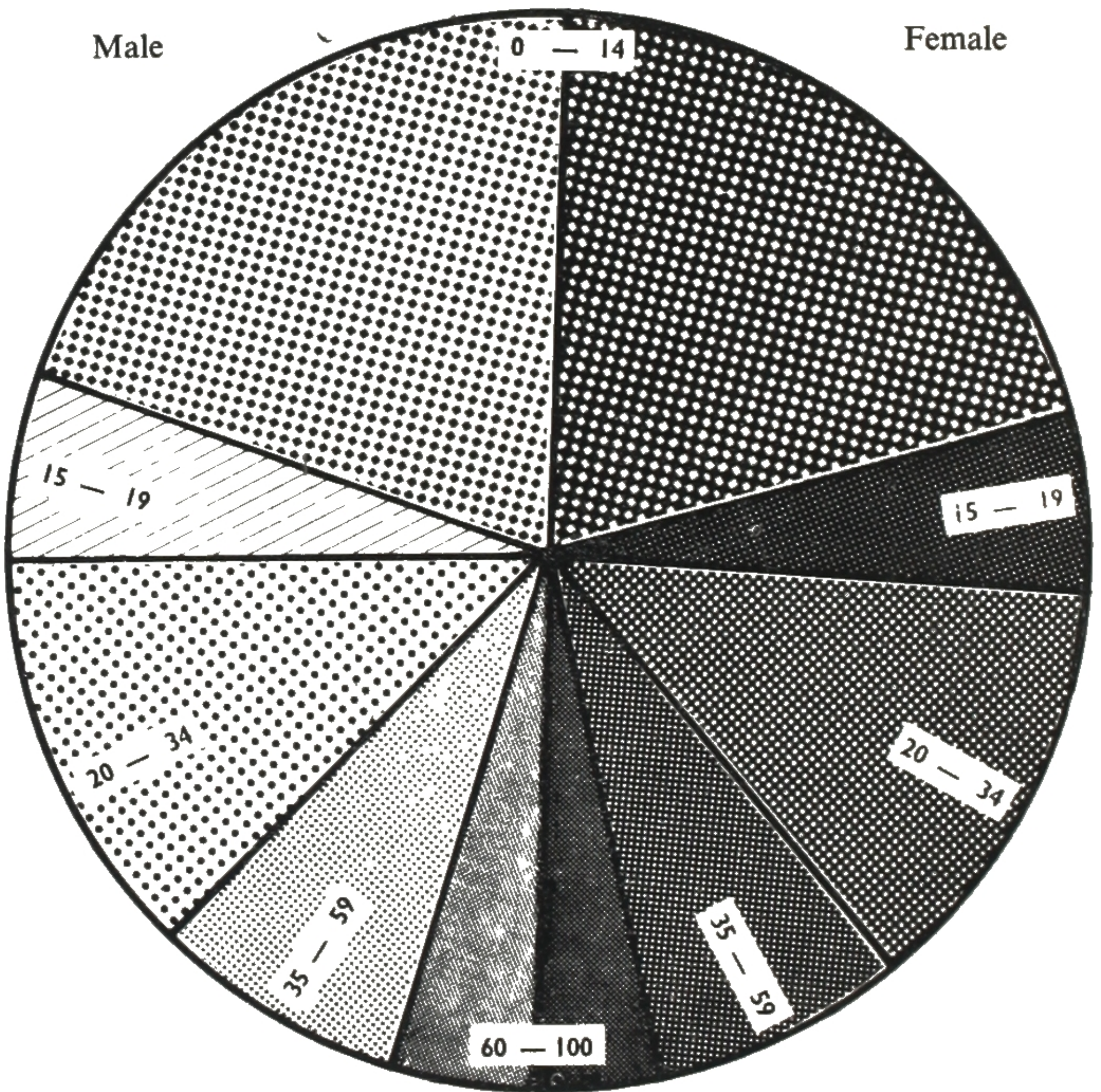
What I have to say about Woman Power is not only based on impressions gathered from these many encounters; I have drawn heavily from your 1960 census reports and from the very excellent post enumeration surveys and studies made by Addo and Gaisie. Lower Volta studies by Rowena Lawson and the study at Cape Coast by Breuner and Wagenbuur have provided helpful background information. I hope you won't conclude that my concentration on women means that I am not interested in men— for indeed I am. Your men are so affable and have such a remarkable sense of humour that it would be easy to shift the emphasis were there not a firm resolve. But wherever the emphasis is given—it is understood that men and women must work together for the common good of the family, community and the nation.

Educational Attainment

The cultural level of advancement of a society is greatly affected by the educational attainment of women. To see more sharply the picture of educational attainment please note the chart which represents the total population of Ghana in 1960. Starting with birth at the top we can trace the path of women around to the right through the several age groupings to the sunset years. On the left for comparison we have the same groupings for the male population. The first grouping from birth to age 14 is the age when the roots for all that children might some day become are planted. These are the preparation years—the most intensive learning years of one's lifetime. I assume that you would agree that every child as a human being male or female should from the very beginning have the chance to develop whatever talents and abilities he or she might possess

and be equipped with the most basic skills and understandings about his world as required for 20th century living. The home environment is the most important place where this learning takes place but the school must make its contribution too. The census reports indicate that girls are not getting the same schooling opportunity as boys for this preparation.

POPULATION CHART



In spite of the 1951 Education Act only one-third of the girls at age 15 in 1960 had been to school, 66% had never been to school. By contrast more than half of the boys at age 15 had been to school, 46% had never been to school. When the 1970 census reports are in, the situation for this age grouping may be improved but spot checking at village schools indicates that rural Ghana still favours boys for educational opportunities. The famous educator Kwegyir Aggrey made the statement, "When you educate a man you educate an individual but when you educate a woman you educate a nation." He felt that the education of women makes a more far reaching impact on community organization and moral development than does the education of men.

As we follow around the circle the 15 - 19 year old girls suffer a greater disadvantage than the younger group with 71% never having gone to school as contrasted with 41% of the boys not having had such opportunity. Moving to the next age grouping 20 - 34 please note that 89% of the women have never been to school whereas the percentage for men is 65. Then, for the age grouping 35 - 60 with 95% of the women never having gone to school and 82% of the men never having had the opportunity, the problem of educational underdevelopment is potently epitomized and from 60 years on the deficiency continues.

Ghana's women constitute 49.5% of the total population. About three-fourths of them have never been to school; their low educational attainment has a retarding effect on the whole economy of this nation. Their potential power is great and if developed through educational programmes designed to better equip them for carrying their heavy loads an impact of incalculable worth could be made. This is social imperative number one.

Homemaker Load

Now let us consider the various loads women carry—first, the

homemaker load. A statement made recently by Dr. Susan de Graft-Johnson in the Constituent Assembly deserves serious thought. She said, "The failure of the old regime was undoubtedly due to the childhood background of some of the people in responsible positions." The amendment to the constitution adopted by the Assembly "guaranteeing the right of women and children to such special care and assistance as are necessary for the maintenance of their health, safety, development and well being" will help ease the heavy homemaker load of women.

As background for consideration of the homemaker load it is well to remember that preparation for the role of wife and mother begins very early in life and gradually through the growing up years attitudes and understandings about responsibilities of parenthood and home building take root. The Akan word "Fidua" well describes what the home should provide during the growing up years: a place where love and security and a feeling of belonging are nurtured; a place where mastery of self is encouraged and where one learns to make decisions and meet life on one's own terms; a place where honesty, integrity and fair play are caught as well as taught. Ghana's children are singularly blessed in regard to love and security with their very close association with their mothers and loving care given by all the relatives. The ability to make decisions based on logical thinking is more difficult to attain because of out-moded customs and traditions that are deeply ingrained and religiously followed. Unschooled parents even though many are aware of the need for change are often unable to effectively plan for a better path consistent with the needs of a modern Ghana. The privileged children who go to school, in discovering a broader world and finding there is more than one way to solve a problem, are discouraged from applying their new-found knowledge at home because of lack of understanding by the elders. At the time of

marriage therefore young people have had little or no experience in exploring other than traditional ways of living and the drudgery of the household with no labour saving devices, no electricity, no safe water supply continues into the new generation.

The average age of girls at marriage is 17.9 years, 70% of rural girls are married by age 20 and have had their first child. By age 34 the average woman has 4 children and by the end of the child-bearing years 6 plus.

A child belongs more to the lineage than to the parents, thus many members of the family assist in the care of the child. But in addition to baby-bearing and rearing women do hard manual labour on the farm, head loading of produce to and from market, preparing and serving the meals and performing numerous other household chores.

The work load of women is often much heavier than that for men yet they have less to eat, for men are always fed first and given the highest portions of protein-rich food. The daily calorie requirement of 2960 as recommended by F.A.O. is only partially met which results in abnormally high pregnancy failures according to the report from the recent Home Science conference on Management of Energy.

The conference recommended that training in management for the efficient use of time and energy is essential, that labour saving devices to cut down the tedium of domestic work be introduced and that homemakers be helped to use time saved for family activities and for improving their economic skills.

All accounts from Africa point to the hard work of women and particularly to the heavy homemaker load. Thirty-seven per cent of Ghanaian women from age 15 are full time homemakers and the 58% who are gainfully employed assume the dual role of helping

to support the family economically and caring for the family as well. Woman Power now used for drudgery should be released for individual and family development and economic activities. This is social imperative number two.

Dependency Load

Please note by the chart that about half the population is below age 15, with 22% girls and 22.5% boys. While every young children in Ghana assume some responsibility for their own and younger siblings' care all the children in this age grouping are considered to be dependent on adults which means principally under the care of women. Mothers of Ghana are assisted by grandmothers and aunts and cousins but women for the most part shoulder the burden.

With a decreasing infant mortality rate, because of the excellent work being done by midwives, nurses, nutritionists, community development, public health and medical officers, life expectancy at birth is now 40 years. Child survivorship is greater than ever before and the trend will continue as parental education levels rise. By the end of the century life expectancy might well be 60 instead of 40. The power of Ghana's women covers many fields and one of the most significant is the power of fertility. The average number of children per woman of child-bearing age is 6.9 which gives Ghana one of the highest birth rates in the world.

Rural families are larger than urban families for the custom is to raise one's own help for the farm. However, taking the average of 6.9 children per mother and considering mortality there would probably be two girl children of a family to survive to replace their mother and they would eventually give birth to 14 children. With this rate of population growth the dependency rate will increase and considerably more than half the population will be dependent

if one adds the aged and incapacitated. Women's burden will be greatly increased, the food supply will have to fill more mouths, it will be impossible for education authorities to have a sufficiently large budget to provide enough schools and teachers for the burgeoning population. All community services will be strained. It is highly possible that persons alive today will live to see 50 million people trying to eke out an existence in Ghana where resources available could perhaps adequately take care of half that number.

Women will be the final arbiters in determining the size of their dependency load. They will need much preparation to help them think through the problems as to whether it is better to have fewer children and provide well for them or to have many deprived children. And if the decision is to reduce the dependency load they will need to be prepared to make maximum use of their released energy. This is social imperative number three.

Economic Activity Load

Women aged 15 and over constitute 38% of the total labour force. Their activity rate by world standards is very high. This is true for all of Ghana except in the north where the majority of women (73%) marry early and become full time homemakers and remain so for life. In Accra 29% of the women and in the Volta Region 23% of women are so engaged. The average for the nation as noted earlier is 37% who are full time homemakers. Women employed in some gainful occupation constitute 54% of the population of women aged 15 and over. By contrast the Sudan has 7% so engaged, Canada 16%, India 28%, Japan 34% and Belgium 45%.

Women work to supplement the family income and care for personal needs. Their concerns are rearing their children, providing educational opportunities for them, improving their homes

and having a taste of a few luxuries for themselves. Of those economically active - 58% are engaged in agriculture and 27% are petty traders. Nine per cent are in manufacturing industries and 3% are performing various services in education, government, medicine, research, welfare and religion.

The astonishing fact is that Ghana's women never know when to quit. The government rule is retirement at age 50, but the great majority are self employed and thus are not affected by the government decree. The peak years of employment are between ages 55 and 60 with all who are able continuing on past 60. Peak years of employment for women in other countries are in the twenties and thirties and there is an almost complete work stoppage after retirement age. Ghana's women who survive the child-bearing years without extreme disability seem to be as tough as iron and continue working to the last breath—many widows who might be cared for through the family security system think otherwise and go on supporting themselves.

Another significant feature about economically active women is that marriage does not affect their activity and fertility has little effect except during the early twenties.

The majority of economically active women are employed in agriculture. Most of them have never been to school but this does not mean that they are not intelligent nor that they cannot learn. Woman Power could be a deciding factor in bringing about the ten-fold increase in food production which so far is a dream on paper. Education is the key factor. Agriculture and home extension programmes could be the means through which on the job training could be given. Our third year Home Science students have made a survey of a nearby village and have been conducting an educational programme for women based on results from the survey.

The eagerness of these village women to learn, and their response to new ideas, suggest that they would quickly catch on to new methods in agriculture and could work along with the men to modernize farm operations and increase crop yields. Formal education in elementary and middle schools, should also strongly feature agriculture and home science subject matter to prepare both girls and boys for improving the farm and the farm home.

The 27% of the population engaged as traders constitute one eighth of the total labour force. Ninety per cent of the group are women with 86% of them self employed. They deal in local food stuffs, crafts and imported goods. They start their business with a small capital outlay and make a small profit. Some very thrifty and enterprising mammy traders become wealthy and invest in lorries. The 325,000 traders in Ghana through this system help to distribute foods and other commodities by transporting their 60 pound head loads through the markets to their customers. Market mummies have become a real institution in Ghana and are a principal attraction for the tourist trade.

Woman Power in Ghana reaches its zenith in the field of economic activity yet the majority of the women have never been to school. If help were given to them to upgrade their competence and to opening the doors of opportunity for them at all occupational levels the feminine half of Ghana's people would be able to demonstrate to the world that one should never underestimate the power of a woman. To open these doors of opportunity is social imperative number four.

Home Science And The Social Imperatives

Now as to the part that Home Science might play in solving the social imperatives delineated, let us first define Home Science.

I must admit that whenever I'm seated next to an Oxford or Cambridge educated intellectual I cringe at the thought of being asked what I do—and momentarily wish that I might say that I'm a classicist, a zoologist or a mathematician. This would avoid the long explanation needed about why Home Science is taught at this University and why I do not spend most of my time over a coal pot. In my country one still might have such questions but for the most part Home Science is thought of in university life almost simultaneously with agriculture for in 1862 the Land Grant Act which was signed by Abraham Lincoln opened the doors for Home Science to be taught at all the Land Grant Universities. In addition today most of the other Universities have Home Science as part of the curriculum. It is generally called Home Economics but may be called Family Studies, Human Ecology, Euthenics or Human Development. Regardless of the name used, the focus is on the family. It is usually closely allied with agriculture; for the farm, the farm home and its occupants are part and parcel of the same thing. The major problems related to the family that Home Science deals with are food, shelter, clothing, housing and the use of family resources. It is an applied field drawing from the major disciplines in the physical, biological and social sciences for its roots.

It is not my objective as I suggest ways in which home science might assist in dealing with the social imperatives enumerated to proselyte but rather to enlighten. I seek not converts but friends. I'm not trying to describe all that Home Science is or what it can do but that it is and that it has a significant role to play in modern day Ghana to assist in mastering some of the social imperatives of the day.

In a country where economic development is based on agriculture no subject after the root disciplines has a stronger claim for being

included in the University curriculum than Home Science, that is, if the role of the University is not only to push back the frontiers of the known but to refine knowledge which already exists and carry it into new spheres. Home Science is interdisciplinary in scope. Its students must be well grounded in the root disciplines to be able think creatively about family resources and ways in which they might be used for family development. At this moment Legon Home Science students are suffering as they prepare for six examinations instead of the usual three required for areas lacking this interdisciplinary approach.

It is undeniable that a great part of Home Science was born and lives in respect and admiration for no other reason than that it is interesting, interesting in itself for it deals with human beings and their every day living experience. There is a body of theoretical knowledge in each subject area but the application of the knowledge to the situation of a subsistence farmer and his family is very different from its application to the family of affluence. Interest is stimulated by the dynamics of each situation—no two individuals are alike—no two families are alike nor is an individual the same from one day to the next. Groups of families might be categorized by income level, social status, occupational pursuits or educational attainment and some general predictions made about trends but any one individual or family is unique in itself and may develop capabilities beyond any statistical picture or prediction. As in Ghana one might be a hero today and an outcast tomorrow. The factors that make prediction difficult only add to the challenge and interest in the subject and point out the fact that Home Science is an art as well as a science.

The Imperatives

Now let us consider social imperative number one—to increase

the educational attainment of women. Home Science can assist those engaged in literacy campaigns by providing materials to read that deal with improving the family dietary, providing a more sanitary and healthful environment and caring for young children. Home Science can make a significant contribution to all informal types of education carried on by agencies whose concerns are agriculture, community development, housing and health. Multiplier methods must be further explored so that efforts of the relatively few Home Scientists can be expanded to serve millions rather than dozens. The electrification scheme as reported this past week will greatly aid the multiplier approach for there can be some co-operative planning to make possible television viewing and listening centres in every village. Locally recruited forum leaders responsible for leading discussions about ways to implement the ideas presented would insure effective follow-up.

Formal educational programmes in Home Science are being carried on by the Ministry of Education and reach into primary, middle and secondary schools and into the teacher training colleges. Considerable thought is being given to new concepts of teaching home science with greater orientation to the needs of Ghanaian families. Boys as well as girls should profit from home science instruction at all levels of the school curriculum. It is conceivable that with such instruction substantial improvement in standards of living would be possible in one generation. Ghana is very rich in resources, the people are eager to learn and new ideas through formal and informal education could take root if the instruction starts where the people are and in a step by step process introduces new concepts and ways of meeting age old problems.

In consideration of the second imperative—to reduce the homemaker load—let me remind you that disability among women is

significantly greater than disability among men. The drudgery of carrying head loads beyond the limits of human energy plus the drudgery of household chores take their toll as the years go by. Such drudgery could be largely eliminated if inventive minds would concentrate on the development of labour-saving devices. Home Scientists in co-operation with the engineers should be able to make a significant contribution toward this goal.

After reducing the drudgery load which now takes most of a woman's day should the released time be spent on going to more funerals and festivals or lazily sitting in the compound watching the hours go by? This obviously happens to many men as they inveigle women into being their labour saving devices and it could happen to women too unless they are helped to see how their energy could be spent in improving the environment for family living or by preparing themselves for embarking on some small industries or going to night school to upgrade their literacy or engaging in some volunteer work to help improve the village. Home Scientists, of course, do not have all of the answers but their approach is always interdisciplinary and perhaps they could spearhead this project and recruit help from several agencies to work toward the goal of making maximum use of the released woman power.

The third imperative—to reduce the dependency load—brings to mind the statement made by H.G. Wells that “Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.” As people become more knowledgeable about maternal and infant care, about protective measures against disease and about better nutrition - survivorship will be greater in the first five years which now take the largest toll of life and the dependency load will become greater than the economy can support.

If comparable attention is not given to reducing the dependency load through population control as is given to reducing the morta-

lity rate the race may be lost with catastrophe as the winner. Home Scientists are in a most favourable position to assist in enlightening women about this problem. And women after all bear the heaviest part of the burden of the dependent population and will have the most to gain if the load is reduced. Studies of attitudes and modes of living must be made and changes brought about that recognize achievement of family members rather than numbers of children born.

The final imperative—to upgrade and increase the economic activity load of women—takes account of the talents women have already shown in this direction. Home Science being so broadly based can give assistance in preparing women for roles in the professions, in business, private enterprises and service occupations. Perhaps the greatest impact of Home Science will be the economic impact it makes on the homes of Ghana, where families learn to work together toward common goals, where resources are pooled to achieve their objectives and where the most is made of indigenous materials. When families learn to earn and stretch and save a cedi and put their own energies to maximum productive use the economic impact will help the nation recover its losses and take its place with honour and dignity in the roster of nations of the world.

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