

## UN Activities on Women

### UNDP's Water Advocate

A women's advocate has been appointed by UNDP to mobilize women's groups in developing countries as a lobby for improving, operating and maintaining water supply and sanitation systems. The water advocate will travel to selected countries to promote discussions on successful technologies and the development of project proposals. Workshops on water supply and sanitation will be organized, too. At the end of a year, it is expected that the work will continue through the sponsorship of participating organizations.

### Women and World Food Day

The FAO has described World Food Day as an ideal time for women's groups at national and international levels to spell out the importance of rural women in growing, processing and preparing food. As FAO's Director-general Edouard Saouma says, 'Improvement of woman's life needs to be a constant objective of agricultural and rural development'. This demands a clear perception of the needs and roles of women in rural communities; in many instances women's organizations will help to promote this greater understanding.

### ILO's Fuels Project

A project focusing on the relationship between changing rural household fuel availability, women's work and family nutrition, has recently been established by the ILO. Its long-term objective is the incorporation into government and non-governmental planning and programmes of the impact of the changing availability of household fuel on poor rural women and their families.

### UNICEF and Women

In recent years, UNICEF's policy towards women in developing countries has undergone an important evaluation. Recognizing the increasing numbers of women who are heads of households in the poorer parts of the world, and the vital economic role which women play in many societies, UNICEF established, in 1980, a new set of guidelines for programmes benefiting women. This gives more emphasis to income-generating activities, including the training of women in marketing skills and management, and making available cash grants for credit schemes.

## Women's Self-help Efforts for Water Supply in Kenya

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*In few other countries around the world have women worked so intensively together to improve their lives as in Kenya, where the tradition of mutual help has led to the creation of over 5,000 women's associations. The self-help efforts of these associations were highlighted during International Women's Year. At the same time, regional seminars and a survey revealed water to be the women's major concern. A score of NGOs and UNICEF decided to create a joint Water For Health Programme to support the initiatives already undertaken by the local women. Eddah Gachukia, MP, former Chairperson of the National Council of Women of Kenya and of the UNICEF/NGO Water Project Steering Committee describes the important role of NGO support.\**

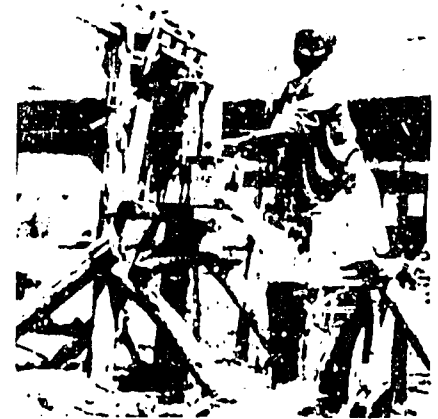
### Tradition of mutual help

The spirit of co-operation — *Harambee* — among the women of Kenya is not new. Traditionally, the women worked together in cultivating their gardens, thatching their houses, and ensuring that when one of them had a baby she was never in need of food, water or firewood over the following weeks. Co-operative efforts were especially prevalent in thatching; the women would cut the grass together, then some would climb on to the roof, while others tied the thatch into bundles and threw it up to them. Smearing of the walls with clay or cow-dung was also a collective operation.

This established system of co-operation perhaps accounts for the solidarity that has been evident in the women's movement in Kenya since independence, and which has been symbolized in particular by the various endeavours of the Mabati' women's groups.

### Pooling financial resources

Initially, the most urgent priority of the women's groups was permanent roofing for their members' houses, as thatch was becoming scarce due to the widespread cultivation of land. The women each contributed 5 K.shs (Kenyan shillings) or more every week, depending on their financial capabilities. This money was given to the member whose lot had been drawn, until the sum required for aluminium sheeting had been collected. The process was then started over. In some groups, the contributions the members could afford were so low that little progress could be made, so the



UNICEF photo

*This chain pump made by UNICEF is a very effective appropriate technology.*

women sold their labour, too, cultivating or harvesting other people's land. The money earned went into the groups' savings.

The success of the Mabati women's groups is evident in the impact they have had on the improvement of their homesteads and on the quality of life in general. Gradually, the groups have moved on from roofing to save for water tanks, school fees for children, grade cattle, and even furniture and cutlery, depending on the priority need of each individual member.

### Water — a priority need

It was in a survey carried out during International Women's Year through regional and national seminars that water was established as a priority need for women in Kenya. Reports from both districts and provinces indicated that the provision of water in or near the home would considerably relieve women of a tremendous burden in their daily lives. It was discovered, too, that many women's groups,

UNICEF photo



The cement jar described below in use.

having experienced success in other minor projects, were now embarking on more ambitious schemes such as the purchase of large commercial farms and water supply. A number of groups had already started saving money in an attempt to solve the problem of travelling long distances to fetch water.

#### Assistance from NGOs

The UNICEF/NGO Water for Health Programme<sup>2</sup> is a joint effort aimed at assisting community water projects already initiated by the women. Some 15 projects were first identified, at least one in each province, the only criteria for selection being that they were initiated by women. The areas of Kenya which are frequently stricken by drought were, however, given special preference. The objective was to boost rural women's efforts in alleviating the basic problems facing them in their daily lives and hindering their full participation in all aspects of development. The projects were thus widely conceived so that they embraced all aspects of basic services, including water, health and hygiene, nutrition, sanitation, and education in these and other related fields.

#### Piping water to drought areas

##### *Five miles uphill for clean water*

Each project took on a form related to the specific needs of a given area. In Olosho-Oibor, for example, where the Masai population had suffered a three-year drought and where women had to travel well over

five miles, mostly uphill, to find clean water for drinking, the UNICEF/NGO Committee did not need to be persuaded that clean water was urgently needed for domestic use. In addition, an easily accessible water supply would allow the women more time for activities aimed at supplementing the family diet; many animals had died during the drought, thus causing an acute shortage of the milk and meat that form the Masai's basic diet. The women had taken up beadwork as an income-generating activity through which they could manage to buy maize meal and beans.

With the help of government experts, a water source was tapped in the nearby hills, which enabled the Committee to supply 13 Masai homesteads along the valley with clean water, collected in conservation tanks donated by the Zonta Club and the Kenya Association of University Women. Prior to involvement in the area, the women had managed to save K.shs 600 for this project from the sale of handicrafts. The Committee's interest in their work attracted the attention of the men in the area, who donated K.shs 5,000, which was used for the purchase of pipes.

##### *After the water supply*

With the provision of clean water, it made sense to talk to the women about cleanliness and hygiene. The Ministry of Health, officials from the Family Planning Association of Kenya, and the Co-operative Education Officer have since been holding regular educational sessions

in the region with the help of an American missionary and his wife who have contributed a great deal to the marketing of the women's beadwork. At the Committee's request, the Ministry of Health agreed to post a full-time nurse to the area because of the acute need for immunization and other services, as well as for education in sanitation and the construction of latrines. The community was only too willing to construct a clinic and a house for the nurse. A market garden established in one of the homesteads is, in addition, opening up to the Masai alternative sources of food and cash through the sale of quality onions and other vegetables.

#### *Training of local village women*

An important aspect of the work in Olosho-Oibor was the training of two women to work with the women's groups in the area, under the sponsorship of the Associated Country Women of the World. These were local women, recognizing the importance of training people to work in their own area, rather than sending in outsiders. The results of the Committee's efforts began to show within a period of only one year; the scabies that were so common among the children were disappearing, and

### How to Make a Cement Storage Jar

This cement jar was developed by UNICEF in Kenya. Apart from collecting rainwater, it can also be used to store grain. The jar makes the water more accessible; it is cheap and simple to build, and by keeping it covered water can be kept pure.

#### Materials (for a 300-litre jar)

3 metres of coarse cloth, 1/3 bag cement, fine river sand, string, needle and thread, water. (Greater quantities of all materials are required for the 1,200-litre jar, including chicken mesh and wire. Also piping and a tap.)

#### Construction

A large bag is made from coarse cloth or several sacks. This is packed with any convenient material, such as grass, leaves, chaff, sand or wood-shavings. A circular object is placed in the neck of the bag to make a large opening. The bag is moistened with water and a thin layer of cement (2.5 cm thick for a 1,200 litre jar) is plastered over the outside.

a significant immunization coverage had been made.

### Cement jars for rainwater collection

Lusigitti is barely eight miles outside Nairobi, yet the women living there are desperately in need; without land, their poverty is acute, and in addition there is little rainfall. The women are now being assisted in the construction of cement water jars, an innovation of the UNICEF-sponsored Village Technology Unit at Karen. Each woman contributes K.shs 260 towards her jar, and UNICEF provides the other K.shs 240. The women earn their living by producing items made of banana fibre, but their work has suffered due to a lack of marketing facilities. The Co-operative Officer put them in touch with the National Christian Council of Kenya, which is involved in the marketing of quality handicrafts. It is important to note that this Co-operative Officer was seconded to the Committee by the Government through the Ministry of Co-operative Development, in recognition of the value of the programme.

The East African Women's League also helped the women of Lodwar, who had raised

K.shs 5,000 for their water project, though a donation of an additional K.shs 20,000 enabling them to qualify for the take-over of their project by the Government. The Turkana region is another very difficult area where the provision of water will revolutionize the daily lives of women, enabling them to attend to more productive activities and to better utilize the health education gained in their women's groups.

In Kitui, the Catholic Relief Services and the IPPF are assisting in the provision of water tanks to schools, especially nursery schools, in an extensive exercise to improve water sources so that women do not have to queue long hours for a mere trickle. The idea is to construct conservation tanks where water can collect in the night, so that the women and children find an ample supply in the morning.

### Water for increased cultivation and better nutrition

In Kandara where the community, through a massive *Harambee* programme, managed to obtain a water supply, vegetable seeds were distributed in an effort to improve the standard diet, which is dominated by starchy foods — maize, potatoes and bananas. Hundreds of women are now growing tomatoes, carrots, cabbages and spinach and even selling surplus supplies on the market.

In South Nyanza a water project intended to serve a school and a health centre, apart from the local community, has been assisted by the Zonta Club of Nairobi. The Club has also donated funds to a market-gardening project for a group of poor urban women in Kisumu; the women had been given a co-operative plot by the town council, but each time they tried to grow vegetables, they were eaten by hippos from the adjoining Lake Victoria! The Zonta Club gave the women K.shs 9,000 towards fencing for their plot and the purchase of seeds. The Club has also donated K.shs 10,000 to a women's group in Baringo, which needed to buy water tanks for their co-operative poultry projects, and who had previously spent a great deal of time travelling to and from the river to draw water for this purpose.

### Initiatives still unsupported

The work of the Committee has been to identify specific needs which, if met, will allow women more productive lives. Many projects remain unsponsored or inadequately supported. The Committee's experience has been that a little assistance injected into a project is a tremendous motivation for the women to undertake and achieve more and more improvements in their everyday lives. ●

#### Notes

1. *Mabati* means corrugated aluminium roofing sheets.
2. Tremendous support has been received from the Government of Kenya, IPPF, the Carnegie Foundation, the Canadian Government, the Catholic Relief Services, the Australian Government, the American Peace Corps Volunteer Service, the Kenya Dutch Club and the women of the Danish Royal Embassy, besides Kenyan NGOs who have supported many other projects not described here.

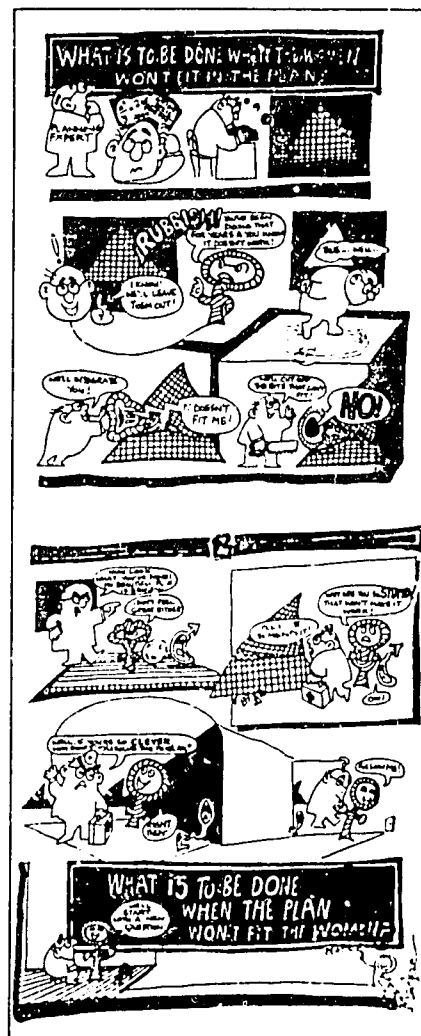
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Chicken mesh and wire are wrapped around the bag on top of the cement; another thin layer of cement is then applied.

When the cement is dry, the bag and contents are carefully removed. The jar is then plastered inside with waterproof mortar and left to cure for 10 days. The jar can be made on the ground or placed on a raised platform so that a pipe and tap can be fitted to enable water to be easily removed.

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