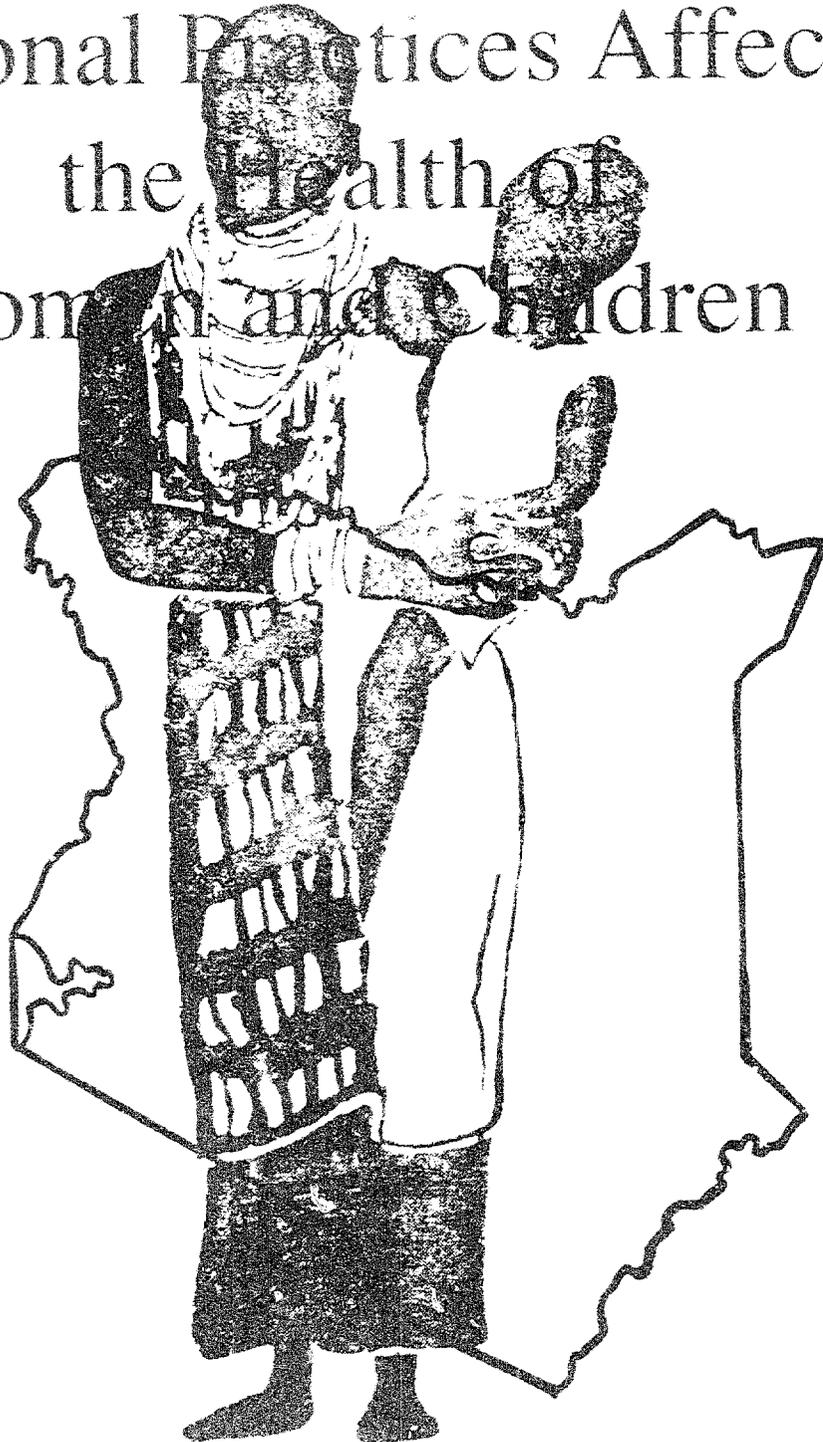
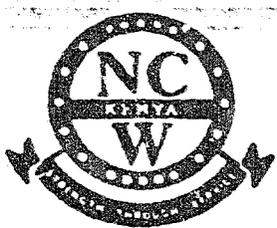


REPORT ON THE
NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON

Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children



A PROJECT OF THE
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF KENYA



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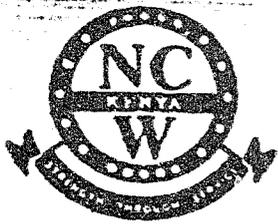
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TRADITIONAL PRACTICES AFFECTING
HEALTH OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN
WORKSHOP HELD IN MERU FROM 13TH
- 14TH DECEMBER, 1991

SPONSORED BY U.S.A. ID.

ORGANIZED BY:- NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF KENYA
P.O. BOX 43741,
NAIROBI.

TELEPHONE: 224634



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We wish to register our gratitude to USAID for without their financial support, NCWK would not have been able to organize this workshop. The project was previously sponsored by NORAD but when the diplomatic relationship between the Kenya Government and Norway broke USAID came to our rescue.

We are also happy to note that our field co-ordinator Mrs. Eunice Gitonga has kept the candle burning. She has worked tirelessly and within a short notice managed to organize the workshop. To her wand Mr. Mbaabu of Family Planning we say "ASANTIA SANA".

We are indebted to the Principal kaaga Rural Training Centre for the warm hospitality he accorded to us.

To the Office Bearers of NCWK:

1. Mrs. Rahab Wanjiru Mwatha
2. Mrs. Mary W. Kamau
3. Mrs. Jane W. Ngugi

Who since the project was launched in January, 1988 have shown total commitment to the project.-

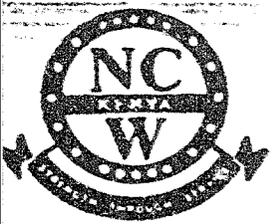
Finally our thanks to the following for their support and assistance:-

1. Jane Wachira - The Executive Secretary
2. Joan Wanjiku - The Assistant
3. Jean Wangechi - The assistant
4. Mary Waithera - The assistant
5. The MOH Meru for closing the workshop
6. And to all the participants, facilitators who gave their time and contribution to make the workshop a success.

LILIAN W. MWAURA
CHAIRMAN - NCWK



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INTRODUCTION

Meru district is one of the six districts in Eastern Province. It borders Embu and Isiolo districts. The district has a population of 1,138,000 people (according to the recent population census of 1989). About 55% of the total population are women and about 40% are children below age 15 years.

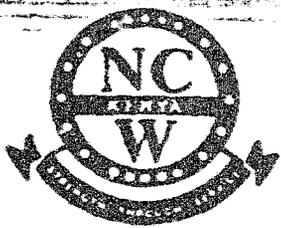
Meru district is very rich agriculturally. The soils are favourable for agriculture and also there is enough rainfall. The major cash crops include coffee, tea and Miraa Food crops grown include maize, beans, potatoes, yams tomatoes and others. Dairy keeping is also practiced in the area.

The inhabitants of the area include the Meru, Kikuyu and Kamba ethnic communities.

Christianity is the dominant religion.

In Meru district female circumcision is widely practiced, in a tradition that is deep rooted in the Meru community. It is practiced openly. Those who fail to get circumcised are ridiculed in the society. Indirectly female circumcision is responsible for the high rate of early marriages and pregnancies. This is because after circumcision girls change psychologically. They tend to get a false sense of independence. This makes them engage in sexual activities after circumcision and results in early pregnancies. On the other hand it is only after circumcision that girls are considered mature in the society. Ages for circumcision range from 9 to 15 years. Circumcision is usually practiced during school holidays i.e. April, August, and December.

According to reports from Meru hospital, female circumcision is



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district. Many cases of death are reported in the area. This is usually because of the use of unsterilized equipment and severe bleeding.

The number of young girls moving into the urban areas is high. These girls engage in prostitution and other immoral activities. Reasons as to why they move into these areas are many. The major ones include rejection by members of the society after they deviate from the societal norms i.e. getting pregnant while still in school which results to rejection by their parents.

The aim of the workshop was to identify those practices especially the traditional practices which have negative effect on the health of women and children; to identify ways in which they can be eliminated and ways in which the health of women and children can be uplifted.

The workshop was held at the in Kaaga Rural Training Centre and was attended by women leaders and some men from different areas of the district. It was organized by the National Council of Women of Kenya and sponsored by the U.S.A.I.D.

Guest speakers for the workshop were drawn from women leaders from the district, lawyers and representatives from NCWK. It was an occasion in which women problems were discussed openly and freely and a plan of action was proposed.



WORKSHOP ON TRADITIONAL PRACTICES WHICH
AFFECT THE HEALTH OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN
HELD AT KAAGA RURAL TRAINING CENTRE IN
MERU ON 13TH - 14TH DECEMBER, 1991

P R O G R A M M E

THURSDAY 12TH DECEMBER, 1991

5.00 p.m. - Arrival of Participants
and Registration.

FRIDAY 13TH DECEMBER, 1991

8.00 a.m. - Address by NCWK Chairman
- Opening Remarks

10.00 a.m. - Cultural Values in a Changing society
Facilitator - Rev. Alice Mwenda

11.45 a.m. - Early Childhood Marriages & Pregnancies
Facilitator - Mrs. Kamau - NCWK

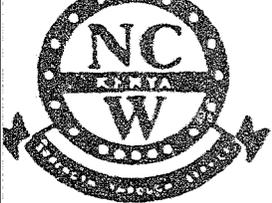
1.00 p.m. - Lunch

2.00 p.m. - Domestic Violence against Women and Children
Facilitator - Mr. Kariuki, Lawyer - Ms. Mwaura

3.00 p.m. - Legal Rights of Women
Facilitator - Mr. Kioga, Lawyer - Ms. Mwaura

4.30 p.m. - Tea Break

4.40 p.m. - Female Circumcision
Facilitator - Dr. Mutwiri, District Public



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- 5.30 p.m. - Maternal Child Health and Family Planning
Facilitator - Mrs. Charity Kainanda, Nurse
- 6.00 p.m - Film

SATURDAY 14TH DECEMBER, 1991

- 8.00 a.m. - Sexual Transmitted Diseases
Facilitator - Dr. Mutwiri, District Public
Health Officer
- 10.00 a.m - Tea Break
- 10.30 a.m. - Nutrition Taboos
Facilitator - Mrs. Aida Mbiru,
District Nutritionist
- 12.30 p.m. - Income-Generating Projects
Facilitator - Mrs. Mwatha, NCWK
- 1.30 p.m. - Lunch Break
- 2.00 p.m. - Resolutions
- 3.30 p.m. - Official Closing by MOH Meru
- 4.00 p.m - Vote of Thanks



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WELCOME ADDRESS

BY

LILIAN W. MWAURA

CHAIRMAN-NCWK

Dr. Mutwiri, District Public Health Officer Meru,
Mr. Koiga, Legal practitioner in Meru
Mr. Mbaabu, District Co-ordinator Family Planning Association of Kenya
Mrs. Eunice Gitonga, Field Co-ordinator Meru,
Office Bearers of NCWK,

Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to be in Meru today to participate in this workshop. I would like at this juncture to register our appreciation to USAID for sponsoring this workshop and six other such workshops throughout our Republic. USAID have given a grant of US\$25,000 to hold workshops in Kwale, Tana River, Mandera, Meru, Kisii and Uasin Gishu and to produce Newsletter after such workshops.

National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK) which was founded in 1964 as a co-ordinating body and has currently 44 women organizations affiliated to it provides a permanent forum for discussions, seminars, workshops on matters concerning women, children and society in general. In January, 1988 NCWK launched the project "Traditional Practices which affect the health of Women and Children". NCWK felt concerned about the traditional practices which have adverse effect on women and children namely:-

(1) Female Circumcision



- (d) Child Abuse
- (e) Maternal Child Care and Health Planning
- (f) Women's Legal Rights etc.

Some traditional practices such as female circumcision are deeply rooted in our society and in order to eradicate some of these traditional practices the council felt that the best way was to create awareness amongst women.

This project takes the form of seminars and workshops and aims at reaching women leaders at various levels who are then expected to disseminate the information downwards in their localities by educating women through workshops, seminars and public barazas.

Since the launching of the project, NCWK has held seminar/workshops in various districts in our Republic namely:- Samburu, South Nyanza, Kericho, Kiambu, Nairobi and Kwale. This is our first workshop in Meru and we hope that the participants will be able to keep "the candle burning" as the field co-ordinator for Meru has over the years. Your field co-ordinator attended the National Workshop on Traditional Practices which affect the health of Women and Children which was held in Kikuyu. During that workshop women leaders from all the 41 districts were represented. It is during that workshop that a Plan of Action was agreed upon i.e. to hold a series of district workshops to discuss those traditional practices which are practiced in the particular district. As you know not all the tribes in Kenya practice female circumcision.

In Meru those traditional practices which are of concern to us are mainly:-

1. Maternal Child Care and Family Planning
2. Nutrition Taboos
3. Female Circumcision



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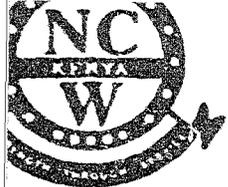
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5. Women Legal Rights etc.

I do sincerely hope that at the end of the two days workshop you will be more enlightened and more aware of the adverse effects of some of the traditions on women and children and that you will be good disciples to spread the "Gospel".

I wish you very fruitful discussion and successful deliberations.

THANK YOU.



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OPENING REMARKS

- 8.50 a.m. - Mr. Mbaabu, District Co-ordinator Family Planning Association of Kenya introduced the guests.
- Eunice Gitonga NCWK Co-ordinator in Meru explained how the seminar was organized. All major Womens organization in Meru were represented. She also requested the participants to introduce themselves.
-
- ~~9.18 a.m. - Ms. Mwaura Chairman NCWK introduced the~~
assistants and the panel of guests. She said that workshops had been held in other districts like Samburu, Maralal, Kwale etc. Further she also introduced the NCWK to the participants explained it's goals, it's structure, the procedures of being affiliated to the NCWK, benefits of being affiliated. Briefly she also discussed projects the Council has started and is involved in i.e.
- Green Belt Movement which is a community tree planting programme to combat decertification and provide rural areas with woodfuel.
- Nairobi Girls Centre for training school leavers for self employment.
- Water for Health Project
- The current project on the eradication of Traditional Practices affecting the Health of Women and Children. Ms. Mwaura stressed that the council's main objective is to act as women's forum especially on issues affectino them and children. She described



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nutrition taboos etc.

She decried the lack of a burial law in this Country and stressed on the role which the NCWK played in 1987 in campaigning for such law to be effected. She noted that to date no such law has been enforced. She urged the participants to be free and honest in their discussions.

9.40.a.m. - Mrs. Mary Kamau, Trustee of the National Fund for the disabled took this opportunity to brief the participants on the National Fund for the Disabled. She advised women leaders on how to apply for funds for the disabled.

9.45.a.m. - Ms. Mwaura listed the discussion topics.

9.50 a.m. - Mrs. Mwatha encouraged the participants to relax and greet one another. There was joyous commotion as women rose to greet one another. Mrs. Mwatha further praised Eunice Gitonga for the role she played in organizing the workshop. she encouraged women to be self-reliant and to be ambitious in women's programmes especially in educating their daughters.

10.45 a.m. - Tea Break.

11.00 a.m. - Ms. Mwaura resumed the programme - she introduced the first speaker Rev. Cecilia Mwenda who dwelt on Cultural Values and



CULTURAL VALUES IN CONFLICT WITH A CHANGING SOCIETY

Facilitator: REVEREND ALICE MWENDA

Culture consists of traditions, religious beliefs and customary beliefs. Culture unifies different people. It also distinguishes different groups of people from others i.e. through religion one can be able to identify different groups of people like Christians, Muslims or others.

In the world today different types of cultures have intermingled to form the present cultures. In Meru this is evidenced in both urban and rural areas. However some traits of traditional cultures can be identified i.e. female circumcision, traditional dances etc.

There are also some traditional practices which are positive and should be retained in the modern cultures i.e. roles played by Traditional Birth Attendants (TBA's). The speaker said that in Meru the importance of the role of TBA's has been recognized and sometimes ago they were taken to Limuru for training. They were trained on how to receive a baby at birth, problems of circumcision etc. During the training the speaker said that it was emphasized that if possible a mother should not give birth at home because she can also have difficulties in giving birth which the TBA would not be able to solve. The TBA's were also told to take those mothers with birth related problems to the hospital. The speaker further advised women leaders to help those mothers who give birth at home and could not reach the hospital during this time because of transport problems. She identified Tigania West as one area with transport problems. She also advised pregnant mothers to always carry basic first aid necessities such as strings to tie the placenta and for the baby tube to be used



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Other practices which were identified as positive was the Meru practice in which after the age of fifty years a woman could not be divorced by her husband. The couple can live in different houses but on the same piece of land.

Further the speaker urged the women participants to eat a system of balanced diet and not to be carried away by the present commercial business in which women sell all the food and deny themselves good diet. They were also advised to talk to and counsel their children instead of using a third party to talk and advise their children. ~~"Women should work together and help one another"~~. They should visit the poor, assist them and also appeal for help on their behalf if they are unable to help them single handedly. This will make the lives of all mothers and children worthwhile and will also help to uplift the women's standards of living in Meru and Kenya in general.



EARLY CHILDHOOD MARRIAGES AND PREGNANCIES

Facilitator: MRS. MARY KAMAU - NCWK

The speaker introduced the topic by identifying the development stages of human being i.e.

Early Childhood	- 0-5 Years
Late Childhood	- 6-12 years
Adolescence	- 12-18 years
Adulthood	- 18-55 years
Old age	- 55 - Death

During the adolescence stage body changes are observed in a normal human being i.e. in girls such changes include receiving monthly menstrual blood flow, breasts and hips develop, pubic and armpit hair start growing. She said that it is during this stage when there is transition in the body that counselling of the child should start. It is during this period that most young girls get pregnant. These pregnancies are either planned in cases where there are early marriage for young girls and for unmarried young girls unplanned.

The speaker identified and explained the complications and problems brought about by such early pregnancies. She said that during the adolescence stage the young girls have not completely developed physically and therefore their pelvic bones are not big enough for pregnancy and therefore the unborn baby will become a perfect parasite. Psychologically the young girls are still immature and need maternal care hence they are not ready for parental responsibilities.

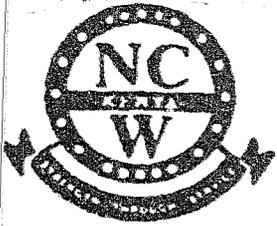
The young girl then becomes an outcast among her age mates and classmate. A school teacher who was a participant in the workshop confirmed this to be true and revealed the plight of young school girls who become pregnant in Meru. She said that



students. At home the parents refuse to support their daughter and her child and this leads to frustrations and demoralization among the young girls. The young girls seek refuge in urban centres where they engage in such immoral activities as prostitution. This happens because the young girls are ostracized by the society. It is because of these reactions that the young girls contemplate abortion which can have serious effects like illness and infertility. Abortion is also one of the commonest causes of death among teenage girls it was observed. The speaker further said that young girls may contemplate committing suicide.

Further the speaker, explained complications which occur when the young girl is giving birth. The birth canal of the young girl is very small hence she cannot give birth normally and a caesarean operation may have to be performed. Risks are involved in this operation and the young girl can die, incase of normal birth there is prolonged labour which results in infant mortality and morbidity. The prolonged labour can also result in infections, and fistulae complications of birth become more serious in cases where the young mother is cicurmicised. The speaker said circumcision may lead to prolonged labour obstruction which may result in operations in the hospitals. In Meru, it was revealed that the number of girls who drop out of school because of such pregnancies is very high. These girls have flocked into the urban centres where they engage in such immoral activities as prostitution. This is responsible for the high number of people with Aids in the district.

Childhood marriages are also common in the area. These marriages are usually between young girls and affluent old men. Young girls are attracted to the old men because of the gifts they receive from them. The girls are as young as 15 years old. Later in life when the husband becomes too old to perform his



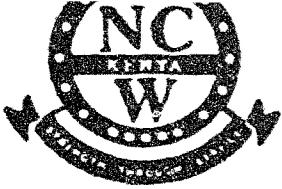
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The speaker requested women to educate and counsel their daughters to minimize these problems.

Contributing to the discussion Ms. Mwaura explained the legal aspect of abortion. She said that in Kenya abortion is illegal. She also told the participants that the legal age for marriage in Kenya is not 10 years but 16 years although the age of voting is 18 years.



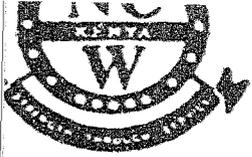
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Facilitator: MR. KARIUKI (Practicing lawyer in Meru)

The speaker started by defining violence and woman. He defined violence a state of being violent. This can be in form of great force, utterances, or threats against a person. The term woman was simply defined as the female sex. Violence on women can be in the form of rape, beating, assault or any violation of the right of a woman. Causes of violence on women may be due to social economic or political reasons. In African societies wife beating was very common. This practice was traditionally accepted. ~~it is still practiced even today although it does not~~ have the support it had traditionally. Economic reasons are other causes of violence on women. Men usually consider women as the weaker sex who are defenceless, hence it is not uncommon to see men preferring to steal from women rather than from men.

In the political field especially in the political set up of Kenya women who decide to contest for a political position are assaulted and abused often. Recently Reverend Samuel Kobia the Secretary General of NCCK was quoted in the Daily Nation as saying that our society is slowly getting engulfed in a culture of violence directed at women the speaker said. He supported this statement with the recent incidents in the country i.e. Prof. Wangari Maathai's case where her views to preserve Uhuru Park was not respected by the male politicians. She was abused because of her views.

In the social set-up, in the African traditions man is seen as the head of the family. He has the right to discipline the wife. The main excuse being the fact that he has paid dowry for his wife. Hence women must always submit to their husbands. This trend has continued even in the present situation.



by the recent case of St. Kizito where young girls were assaulted and molested by their fellow male students. The rape, assault led to the death of 70 young girls.

Violence against women is also manifested in wife beating. The general belief that men have the right to discipline women and can determine the future of women is the major factor behind this violence. Other reasons why women are assaulted by men include domestic reasons i.e. in cases where men misuse the family finances and do not account for the money. If questioned about family finances this usually leads to wife-beating. Now and again men subject their women to sufferings so as to demonstrate to the other members of the society how powerful they are. Women on the other hand divorce their husbands when the violence they have been subjected to becomes too much.

Children in most cases happen to be victims of situations where women are subject to violence by men. They are beaten together with their mothers. They also suffer when men misuse the family finances on drink, they are neglected, some of them move into towns in search of greener pastures and they end up becoming parking boys, prostitutes and thieves in towns. Others move out of home to look for employment in the rural areas and also in towns in which case they are underpaid and exploited by their employers.

Rape is another common type of violence that men subject women subjected to the speaker said. In Meru district rape cases are common. The victims of rape are usually young girls who are raped by older men. Violence against women is committed in places of work, at homes, in towns i.e. streets, even in buses where women are abused by men. The speaker said that this habit can be cured by creating a law which will punish a man who indulges in such habits. In Kenya the penal code cap 63 of the



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against morality i.e. rape, attempted rape, abduction, indecent assault defilement of girls below 14 years old and others. The penal code provides penalties for these offenses. Different penalties are given for different offenses i.e. a person convicted for rape is liable to be punished with a maximum imprisonment for life with hard labour with or without corporal punishment.

The speaker further said that it was time society shifted from the tradition of demeaning women. He called upon women to stand up and be counted by forming associations which will protect their rights and educate them on issues concerning themselves.

In the course of discussion women participants wondered whether it was possible for a woman to accuse her husband of raping her and yet they were legally married. The speaker in his reply said that this was a Western idea which was developing in our societies slowly. He further said that it is possible in cases where the husband does not seek the consent of the wife and also in cases where the couple do not live together i.e. in case of separation. However in Kenyan laws consent is assumed to be there from the onset of marriage.



LEGAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN

FACILITATORS: MR. KIOGA - Senior lawyer
MS. MWAURA - NCWK

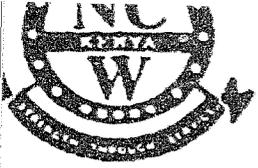
Law is neutral. It does not discriminate against women or men. Mr. Kioga said that when we talk about legal rights of women it simply means the obligation of men towards women and obligation of women towards men. Further he asserted that the bible in Genesis 3:16 which says:

"To the woman, God said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in child bearing, in pain you shall bring forth your children yet your desire shall be your husband's and he shall rule over you".

Gives men power over women. He dismissed the statement legal rights of women as a western concept which had selfish motives and coined a new phrase obligation of women to men and vice versa. "obligations that women and men owe towards each other are of two types. (1) There are the natural obligations i.e. it is a natural right for a woman to give birth although in the family, generally, children are said to be men's.

This is especially very true in African families i.e. one is called son or daughter of the father and not of the mother. Women also expect protection from the men. This the speaker called primary obligations from men towards women. There are also social and legal obligations. The speaker argued and said that in his study of societies there is no consent theory of how a man came to live together with woman except the story in the bible which he dismissed as unbelievable and fantastic.

However by observing nature it becomes easy to trace how men and women came to live together. "Men are always fighting for women"



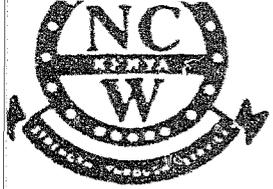
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over others, he creates the right to himself of keeping a monopoly over females. However there exists no such battles among females for males. The speaker identified these occurrences as the beginning of polygamy. He qualified his statement in African societies by saying that it is only the courageous men who owned many wives. The wealthy men used their wealth also to get many wives. Women's rights and freedom was curtailed by men in the process.

The economic development of societies also curtailed women's rights and freedom. This came with the development of proto-capitalist society. Parents and relatives of girls and young women took advantage of men's battle for women. They put a price over the hand of each girl or woman in form of dowry or bride wealth. Women hence were seen as commodities to be bought and sold. Further the speaker continued and said that in Kenya the common law of England has substantial glory and reverence among Kenyan lawyers. He said that this law was developed during the period of servitude; slavery and feudalism. This law he said discriminated very much against women and was only amended in C18th and C19th when women were allowed to own property; despite this fact however Mr. Kioga said that discrimination against women has persisted in African societies, for instance women are not allowed to own land.

This he said is common in Meru. Traditionally also women were not allowed to sit in the council of elders like "Njuri-Ncheke". However today women have freedom to sit in any Council of state. Discrimination of women is further manifested in marriage when after a couple weds their daughter it is only the father who receives the dowry. However in Meru the dowry is divided into three and the mother is given her share, he said.

Other than identifying ways in which women are discriminated and



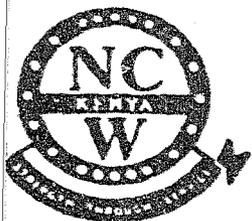
which men are discriminated against by the law. This he said is common during divorce and separation periods. In Kenya under the matrimonial causes Act as in the common law, it is always the woman who is supposed to be paid maintenance or "alimony", he complained and said that men are never given right of being maintained by the divorced wife even if the wife is richer than him. In the children's and young person's acts and custody of the children it is assumed that the mother looks after the children better. Among Meru people however children always belong to the man in cases of divorce or separation.

Further the speaker said that the law discriminates against men at times because it always assumes that it is only the woman who is subject to assault and batter by the men. He complained that this assertion has been proved very wrong many times.

In open discussion the participants wanted to know whether there is a law which dictates as to who is supposed to move the matrimonial home after divorce or separation. It was noted that Kenyan laws do not specify, however in most cases it is the woman who moves out. Among the Meru people however it was noted that there is a certain age when a woman cannot be divorced. The speaker identified this as a positive tradition which enhances the continuity of the family.

In cases where divorce or separation occurs children always have right and access to their father. Divorce also does not affect their right to inheritance, "the speaker told the women. However the speaker said that by law in case a woman kills her husband she is not allowed to inherit his property.

In conclusion the speaker discussed the various types of marriages and their advantages.



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any advantages to a woman. She advised women to seek separation instead of divorce in situations where their marriage fail to work. Ms. Mwaura also distributed a book written by the International Federation of Women lawyers (FIDA) Kenya, "A Kenyan Woman's Guide to the Law" (English Version and Kiswahili Version). The booklet focuses upon the areas which women are most likely to come into contact with the law i.e. marriage, divorce, death and inheritance, violence against women, children's care and status, Education, employment and credit availability.



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FEMALE CIRCUMCISION

Facilitator: MR. MUTWIRI
DISTRICT HEALTH EDUCATION OFFICER
MRS. KAMAU NCWK

The speaker first commented on the previous topic of the legal right of women. He gave his own input.

Female circumcision is an age old tradition which involves cutting and removing certain parts of the external genitalia of women and female children.

In Meru district this practice is widely practiced. It is estimated that about 90% of the population engage in this practice. In Tigania and Imenti divisions female children, as young as 9 years old female children are circumcised. Traditionally a large part of external genitalia of women used to be cut and removed but today only a small part is removed.

Circumcision in the area is practiced because of many different reasons.



Reasons why Females are circumcised in Meru

- Circumcision is seen as a rite of passage which members of the society have to undergo.
- It is seen as a traditional ritual which is deep rooted among the people of the area.
- It is believed that female circumcision reduce women's sexual desire hence reducing cases of prostitution and adultery.
- ~~It is a cultural obligation of the people. One who is bound to the culture of the people living in the area has to do it.~~
- Marks initiation i.e. transition from childhood to adulthood.
- Those who are circumcised in the area are respected hence people do it so as to gain respect.
- Circumcision also makes a woman marriageable. Those who are not circumcised cannot be married in Meru. In case the uncircumcised girls get married dowry is not given.
- Circumcisors on the other hand encourage their practice because it is a form of business.

Circumcision periods marks a very important celebration in the area. It is done mostly during school holidays.

The speaker argued that female circumcision was started by men because of their own selfish motives. They did this so as to reduce the sexual urge for women. Traditionally also men were the circumcisers hence they encouraged this practice among women



Female circumcision has different impacts on women, he said. Psychologically the woman believes that after circumcision she has become an adult, girls feel that they have a right to have sexual intercourse since they have become adults.

This is responsible for the high rate of the number of girls who get pregnant outside marriage, the speaker said.

"The health hazards of female circumcision can only be understood after one understand the anatomy and physiology of the female vagina" (vulva), the speaker said.

The speaker demonstrated on a blackboard the functions of the various parts of vagina. To make the points clear he used a model of the female vagina provided by the NCWK. He identified the various parts of vagina and the functions of each part. The functions of the vagina were discussed as:-

1. It is a birth canal
2. Has the function of sexual intercourse (heterosexual).

Further he said and demonstrated to the participants the simplest circumcision which is done. This involves mutilating the clitoris. Other types of circumcision identified are cutting the clitoris, labia majora and labia minora, cutting the clitoris and labia majora. These types of circumcision are practiced in different parts of the country.

Traditionally immediately after circumcision the candidates used to have sexual intercourse with a man chosen for her by members of the family, however presently this is not done. The speaker also discussed with the participants the reasons as to why female circumcision is bad as follows:-



REASONS WHY FEMALE CIRCUMCISION IS BAD

- Female circumcision leads to a lot of bleeding which can lead to death. Blood comes from the two blood vessels on the clitoris after circumcision. The speaker said that several deaths have been reported in Central Imenti because of bleeding after circumcision.
- Infections which may lead to barrenness. This comes because of the use of unsterilized instruments.
- Psychologically young girls view circumcision as a gateway to adulthood. Psychologically they get convinced that after circumcision the society allows the girl to engage in sexual intercourse. This results to a large number of these girls getting infections of sexually transmitted diseases and also getting pregnant.
- Circumcision also leads to scar formation. This scar makes expansion of muscles difficult and when delivering or giving birth most circumcised women do not give birth normally.
- Circumcision can also lead to sterility.
- Dyspareunia, painful sexual intercourse. This usually happens if one is not circumcised properly and further in marriage it can lead to divorce or to girls refusing to get married.
- Keloid formation due to the failure of the wound to heal properly.
- Incontinence of urine. After circumcision the candidate feels pain when passing urine hence she may decide to retain the urine in the body and this can cause more health



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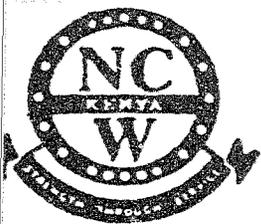
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the disadvantages of female circumcision. She identified them as follows:-

- Prolonged labour during delivery period which may cause the rupture of the vagina wall and the bladder or rectum producing an opening between these two organs. This may cause urine and faeces to drop out of the vagina uncontrollably. Because of prolonged labour prolapse of the uterus may also occur.

- Recurrent urinal infection. This occurs due to damaged urethral meatus during circumcision. This infection may spread upwards into bladder, uterus and to the kidneys. Mrs. Kamau further argued that young girls die because of shock after circumcision. This usually happens if the girls are very young i.e. 9 years old.



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WHY FEMALE CIRCUMCISION HAS PERSISTED IN MERU DISTRICT.

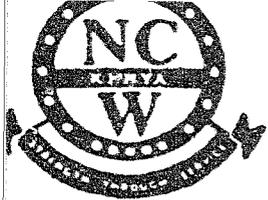
Some participants argued that this practice is very much deep rooted in the area, and even when they do not give their girls permission to get circumcised, the girls do get circumcised without their knowledge and with the assistance of grandmothers, aunts and friends. Others complained that those parents who are christians circumcise their girls at a tender age in and then they encourage the others not to do it thus setting bad examples to the others.

Men also encourage this habit. They refuse to marry uncircumcised girls and when they do so they insist that the dowry of these girls is less because they are uncircumcised.

The girls on the other hand have promoted the survival of this practice. They make demand upon their parents to allow them to get circumcised. This is partly due to influence of the society and friends. Those who fail to get circumcised are mocked by those who get circumcised.

The district Public Health Education Officer complained that they have tried to eliminate this practice with no success. He praised the NCWK members because of their efforts in organizing the workshop for women leaders in the area. Later in his closing ceremony the Medical Health Officer Meru said that he had never participated in such a well attended women workshop like one at the the Kaaga Rural Training Centre Workshop.

In her comments Mrs. Aida Mbiru the District Nutritionist discouraged women from circumcising their daughters. She asked



MATERNAL CHILD HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING

Facilitator: CHARITY KAINADA (NURSE)

"Without the mother there is no child" the speaker said.

The health of the mother should be well taken care of because it is from the mother that we get a child. A pregnant mother should visit the antenatal clinic regularly and should also eat a balanced diet and do exercises (can be in form of normal work in the house.)

After delivery, the mother and the child should go to the for post-natal clinic regularly for check-up which involves checking the size and position of the uterus of the mother, check whether she has anaemia, check on her blood pressure, whether she has enough milk for the baby etc. The child's weight is also taken and she is given immunizations.

Before six weeks are over the mother should visit the family planning clinic said, the speaker. This would ensure that the mother does not get another child before she has weaned the other one. Women were also advised to breast feed their children properly. The speaker advised those mothers who are working to plan and arrange their time so that they can get time to breast feed their babies.

Family planning ensures good health for the mother and the child in the family. Traditionally men used to have many wives which made it possible for them to plan their families and ensure that the health of the mother and the child is well taken care of.



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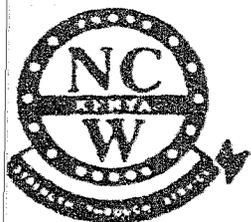
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Today environmental and social-economic conditions have made these practices impossible. As a result some other methods of planning the family have come up.

The speaker discussed and demonstrated the various methods of family planning to the participants. They included pills, condoms, the coil, injection, cream diaphragm and vasectomy. The method of family planning one uses depends on one's individual choice. At the end of the discussion motivation on family planning a film was shown to the participants. The film showed how important a mother is to the family yet nobody takes care of her health although but she is the one to take care of all the other members of the family.



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NUTRITION TABOOS

FACILITATOR: MRS. AIDA MBIRU

DISTRICT NUTRITIONIST - MERU

In Meru there are no food taboos, the speaker said. However, there are conditions which determine the main food of the people. People grow alot of potatoes and tend to eat so much of them thus forgetting to eat other types of food. The speaker argued that the word 'custom' should have been used in the case of Meru people instead of 'taboos'.

These customs are responsible for the nutrition problems in the district, traditionally however, there were nutrition taboos but they have been abandoned.

The speaker argued that many health problems in the district are as a result of improper diet. These problems she identified as mental problems which she said result because of lack of vitamins (obesity among children).

Kwashiorkor she said has been minimized in the district. Meru is a productive region and cases of malnutrition are very scarce. The speaker told women to eat cereals and legumes and also eat alot of fruits and vegetables to minimize the health problems which are very common in the area.

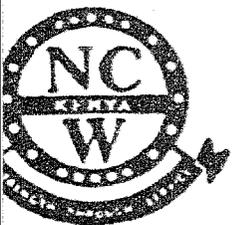


INCOME-GENERATING PROJECTS

Facilitators: MRS. MWATHA - NCWK

The speaker started by saying that women are always asking for funds for their projects yet when they are asked for their group proposals they do not submit them. The speaker told the participants that before asking for funds they should first get organized as a group. She discussed with the participants the procedures of starting income-generating activities as follows:-

- First and foremost the groups should have an aim i.e. why start the income-generating projects. The goal should be common i.e. people doing some activity should have a common goal.
- The group activity should also be related to the name of the group.
- Membership of the group. It is important to set the number of members you want in a group. Members should also agree on membership fee.
- Constitution. There should be laws guiding group activities, plans of the group etc.
- Trustee clause i.e. who should be registered on the property i.e. three or five people of the group.
- A group should have proposals of what they want to do i.e. do we have the facilities needed.
- Members of the group should also decide on the disciplinary measures to take on those who deviate from group rules.
- Accountability is very important in group activities. This can be made easy by audit records in which all expenditures of the group should be recorded.
- Members of the group should also have a small committee which should always operate and be able to co-ordinate group activities. To make this easy a certain amount of money



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- It is important for group members to be meeting regularly. Minutes of their meetings should be recorded.
- Further the speaker identified institutions which can fund group activities as:-
 1. Kenya Women's Financial Trust which helps women secure loans from Barclays Bank.
 2. Africa Finance Corporation.
 3. SIDA which is a Swedish Organization.
 4. CIDA which is a Canadian Organization can help women secure funds for water, agricultural and any other projects.
 5. U.S.A.I.D.
 6. U.N.I.C.E.F. funds projects for health care and family planning.



SEXUALY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

FACILITATOR: MR. MUTWIRI

DISTRICT PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION OFFICER.

The goal of this topic was to enlighten women leaders about the sexually transmitted disease which are very common nowadays in most areas of the country especially in the urban areas. The speaker said that sexually transmitted diseases are very common during the reproductive ages and are increasing at an alarming rate. He dwelt briefly on the various types of diseases identifying them as follows:-

SCABIES - 'OPELE'

This disease is caused by a small organism called Hch mites. This organism attacks all parts of the body except the face. It can be transmitted through sexual intercourse.

GONORRHEA

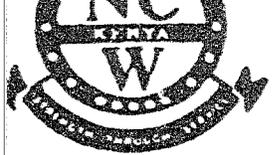
Caused through sexual relationships.

Signs and Symptoms.

In male these signs are observed within 5-10 days. In female they take one month or more; because of this females can spread the disease very fast while ignorant of the disease in themselves.

The first symptoms of this disease is pus discharge. The pus may be plenty. One passes the urine more frequently because the urinal bladder is irritated.

- Backache. This however is not very common.
- Fallopian tube may get blocked which may result to bareness. Pus may also collect in the fallopian tube and an operation is required to remove the pus. This happens if the disease is not treated at an early stage.
- If gonorrhoea attacks the Cilva a pregnancy outside the uterus may occur.
- Pregnant mothers also can pass the disease to their unborn children. This is especially the case during delivery. The child can get eye infections.



SYPHILIS

The speaker said that an individual can get Syphilis, Gonorrhoea and Aids at the same time. Syphilis is transmitted through sexual intercourse, kissing, open wounds, bathing etc.

The symptoms of the disease appear after one month. The first signs are the primary syphilis signs which are not very serious i.e.

- Painless ulcer 'Because the ulcer is painless most people ignore it.' The speaker said. Hence they do not go to the hospital. Eventually this ulcer disappears and change in the secondary stage if it is not treated in the secondary state it spreads all over the body.
- In the last stage which is the tertiary stage ulcers appear in the mouth. Other signs are also observed i.e. falling hair.

Effects of Syphilis

- Syphilis causes abortion continuously.
- It also affects the largest blood vessels and this can lead to death.
- Affects the brain and this can lead to mental problems.
- Affects the central nervous system. It gets paralysed and this can eventually lead to death.

TRICHOMONAS VAGINALIS

The signs of this disease are the same as those of gonorrhoea except that the discharge has fume. It also makes somebody to scratch many times.

AIDS

The speaker warned women leaders on the danger of engaging in extra marital sexual relationships. He told them that those with Aids are saying that they cannot die alone and so they are passing it to others. The disease also has a lot of



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MODE OF TRANSMISSION.

- Sexual contacts.
 - Blood transfusion. However nowadays blood is screened in the hospitals.
 - Through use of unsterilized tools i.e. in ovoidectomy, false plastic teeth 'Ngwani', Tattooing i.e. decoration.
- The speaker warned the participants off the practice of inheriting deceased brothers wife by a brother because if the brother dies of Aids there is also the likelihood of the other one dying of Aids too.
- Common use of toothbrushes/combs.

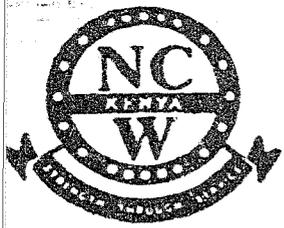
Signs and Symptoms

The symptoms of this disease do not appear immediately one gets the disease. They take a duration of about 6 months - 10 years before they appear or an average of two years.

The first signs included diarrhoea for several weeks and coughing.

- An individual also starts loosing weight tremendously.
- One also gets pneumonia.
- Skin cancer.

The signs and symptoms of these diseases are very many. The speaker said, and no cure/drug has been found but the disease continues spreading at an alarming rate.



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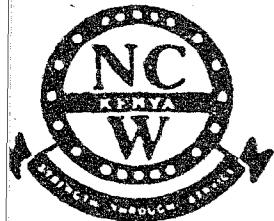
PROPOSED PLAN OF ACTION

Sex is the major force behind the spread of Aids. People should be encouraged to use condoms, however, the speaker noted that there is misuse of condoms by men because of immoral activities. He urged the women leaders to teach other members of the society the importance of minding about the welfare and future of the young generation.

- The participants suggested that during Aids Day lectures and films be shown to the people especially the young generation.
- Church ministers to conduct wedding ceremonies of those people who have been screened.
- Workshops/seminar to be conducted in all areas educating people on Aids.
- The Speaker also told the participants to stick to one partner.

Stop sharing toothbrushes and combs and exchange of clothes. The use of sterilized instruments can be achieved only if those who use them can boil them before use. He complained that a seminar for circumcisers had been organized in Meru but circumcisers failed to turn up for fear that their practice may be banned.

- Banking (wife swapping) should be discouraged.



RECOMMENDATIONS AS DISCUSSED BY THE PARTICIPANTS
FEMALE CIRCUMCISION.

- It should be abolished in Kenya.
- Those involved in this practice should be educated on the dangers involved by the leaders in the community.
- This practice deprives the victim of the pleasure of enjoying sex and can result to marital problems and hence should be done away with.
- The participants argued that the behavior of uncircumcised women was more commendable than that of the circumcised women.
- The circumcised women engage in sexual activities after circumcision and this usually results in pregnancy out of marriage. The participants were advised not to circumcise their women but instead to educate them and uplift their standards of living.



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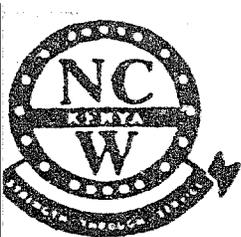
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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Marital problems are the major forces behind this practice i.e. such practices were identified as drunkaredness, misuse of family finances, unfaithfulness, the men's belief that they own women and children.

The participants said that this practice can be minimized by men limiting their drinking habits.

- The spouses should also be educated on the importance of sticking to their spouses so as to sustain their marriages.
- Wife beating in the present society was dismissed as unnecessary unlike the traditional period.
- Violence against women in form of raping should be punished stiffly in courts, and rape cases be heard in camera to avoid exposing women to alot of psychological problems.
- Men should be discouraged against coming home late at night for it is a mental torture to their wives and children.



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EARLY CHILDHOOD MARRIAGE AND PREGNANCIES

- Since this practice is common among the young generation they should be taught family life education in schools both in primary and secondary school.
- Counselling of the youth should be intensified in all forms eg. churches, schools etc.
- The legal age of marriage should be 18 years and above.
- The participants also resolved that the affiliation act be re-introduced.
- The P.T.A.'s (Parents Teachers Association) and Board of Governors should take up the family planning issue seriously and see to a programmed teaching of family life education in schools.



LEGAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN

- Women should be enlightened on their rights as citizens i.e. right to vote in candidates of their choice.
- Her rights during marriage after divorce or separation or the death of her husband.
- Men should treat women like any other human being and stop misusing the term "woman". Women also should be trusted like any other human being in her activities.
- Women should be maintained after separation or divorce by their husbands.
- Women be given right to make decisions in matters of family affairs i.e. property ownership, inheritance of children etc.



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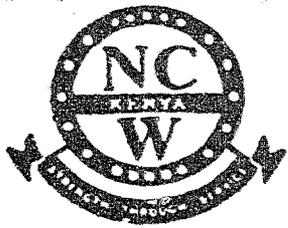
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MATERNAL CHILDCARE AND FAMILY PLANNING

- Even if the child birth occurs at home both the mother and the child should attend clinics for immunizations.
- The mother should also be made aware of family planning.
- Every woman should attend the anti-natal clinics for advice.
- Mobile clinics to be introduced where there are no clinics.
- These children born at home be taken for registration.



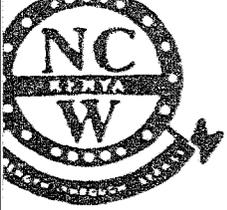
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CULTURAL VALUES AND PRACTICES IN CONFLICT WITH A CHANGING SOCIETY

- The custom of Meru people that does not allow the divorce lady/wife after 45 years should be encouraged.
- Traditional birth attendants skills should be taught to the girls in early life.
- People of the same age group should not marry one another daughters.
- Traditional birth attendants should be trained to serve areas where there is no medical institutions.



NUTRITION TABOOS

- The women leaders should encourage women to make sure that the family diet is balanced.
- Women leaders, community workers should encourage women to plant crops such as sorghum, millet, vegetables and fruits for the use in the kitchen.
- Women leaders, community workers should explain the disadvantages of highly refined flour and if this is preferred encourage consumption of a variety of cereals in their diets.
- Schools should be encouraged to provide balanced diet to students, in this connection P.T.A.'s must be involved in school's feeding programme.



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SEXUAL TRANSMITTED DISEASES

- Women leaders and community workers should create public awareness.



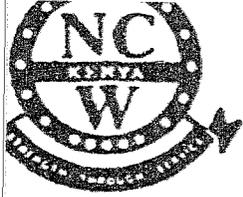
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OFFICIAL CLOSING REMARKS - BY DR. MUNYIRI

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

Dr. Munyiri started his speech by thanking the organizers of the workshop for inviting him to such a well-attended workshop. Further he said that the topics defines it's subjects since women have a big role to play in development. In the third world women fetch 80% of the firewood grow 60% of the food eaten and fetch most of the water used in homes. Women are an important asset to third world. Children Dr. Munyiri continued on the other hand are traditionally seen as the source of labour. They assist their parents in old age. Presently however parents assist their children in old age; since there is a change in the flow of wealth where the young now depend on the old for wealth i.e. land. "In the present times there are traditional values which are of value to us". The speaker asserted, i.e. the Ministry of Health, the traditional healers and traditional birth attendants have more knowledge on some diseases than the modern doctors. The modern doctors also lack the knowledge of the importance of harmony between ancestors, God and individual. The speaker claimed that the Ministry of Health is trying to incorporate these people since they help quite a big population.

Further the speaker identified traditional practices which are negative i.e. female circumcision, nutrition taboos. He also identified modern practices which are negative i.e. practice of parents leaving their children to housegirls in which case children do not learn important values from their parents. He said that this practice is responsible for early pregnancies among children i.e. 10% of births in Kenyatta Hospital are young mothers and 60% - 70% of them had sex knowledge while the age of below 14 years.



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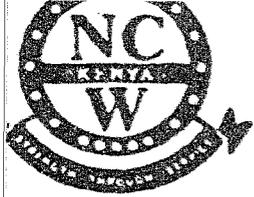
MOI AVENUE
P. O. BOX 43741
TELEPHONE: 24634
NAIROBI, KENYA

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Finally the speaker told the participants to encourage the retention of important values and discourage the negative ones.

He thanked the NCWK on behalf of the Ministry of Health Meru and hoped that they would continue teaching the community what is preventable to prevent wastage of time by doctors.

He advised the participants to disseminate information to the others before declaring the workshop officially closed.



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VOTE OF THANKS

BY: MRS. JANE NGUGI - NCWK

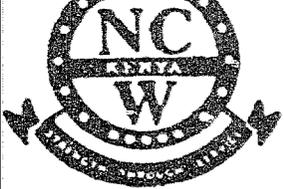
Our Guest of Honour this afternoon, Dr. Munyiri
Mrs. Ida Mbira
Mr. Mutwiri
The Chairman of NCWK - Ms. Lilian Mwaura
Colleagues from NCWK
Our Co-ordinator - Mrs. Gitonga
Mr. Mbazabu Family Planning of Association of Kenya District Co-ordinator(Meru)
Participants
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to take this opportunity to thank our Guest of Honour for agreeing to come and close our workshop.

I would like also to thank Mrs. Gitonga and Mr. Mbaabu for the tremendous work they have both done to make this workshop a success.

And finally, last but not least, we would also like to thank the principal of Kagaa Rural Training Centre for allowing us to use their facilities in the centre and of course our appreciations for our husbands for allowing us to participate in this seminar and taking care of our homes.

At this juncture I would like to call upon the chairman of NCWK to light a candle and pass to Mrs. Gitonga who in turn will pass it to the participants as a symbol of continuity of creating public awareness on those traditional practices which affect the health of women and children.

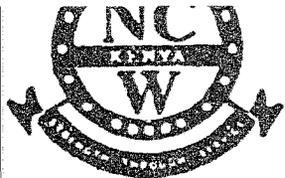


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MERU WORKSHOP
13-14TH DECEMBER, 1991

PARTICIPANTS LIST

<u>NAME</u>	<u>ORGANIZATION AND TOPIC FACILITATED</u>	<u>ADDRESS</u>
1. MS LILIAN MWAURA	NCWK'S LEGAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN	43741 NRBI
2. MRS. RAHAB MWATHA	NCWK INCOME-GENERATING PROJECT	"
3. MRS. JANE NGUGI	NCWK, VOTE OF THANKS	"
4. MRS. MARY KAMAU	NCWK, FEMALE CIRCUMCISION + EARLY CHILDHOOD MARRIAGES & PREGNANCIES	"
5. JEAN WANGECI	ASSISTANT	"
6. MARY WAITHERA	"	"
7. JOAN WANJIKU	"	"
8. JANE WACHIRA	"	"
9. AIDA MBIRU	NUTRITION TABOOS	"
10. CHARITY KAINADA	MATERNAL CHILD CARE AND FAMILY PLANNING	" MERU GENERAL HOSPITAL
11. DR. MUNYIRI	OFFICIAL CLOSING REMARKS	"
12. DR. MUTWIRI	FEMALE CIRCUMCISION + SEXUAL TRANSMITTED DISEASES	"
13. REV. ALICE MWENDA	CULTURAL VALUES IN A CHANGING SOCIETY	617 MERU
14. MR. KIOGA	LEGAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN	430 MERU
15. MR. KARIUKI	VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN	1497 MERU
16. JANE MUKILA	KUBURU WOMEN GROUP	506 MERU



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

<u>NAME</u>	<u>ORGANIZATION AND TOPIC FACILITATED</u>	<u>ADDRESS</u>
18. STEPHEN RUKHUNGU	MERU SCHOOL FOR MENTALLY HARDICAPPED	174 MERU
19. ELIZABETH MUEWIRI	COMMUNITY BASED DISTRIBUTION AGENT OF FAMILY PLANNING	29 MERU
20. AGNES MBAARU	"	700 MERU
21. ERASTUS MUGAWA	"	127 MERU
22. JOYCE KANYUA	"	688 MERU
23. ZIPPHORAH MUTWIRI	"	1485 MERU
24. MARGARET GACHERI	"	214 MERU
25. MARGARET MUNENE	"	1134 MERU
26. ANNE MUTHURI	"	184 NKUBU
27. PAUL GITONGA	"	49 NKUBU
28. PETER RIUNGU	"	265 NKUBU
29. JESICA MUTEBEI	"	1561 MERU
30. CELINA NTURIBI	"	922 MERU
31. MERCY GITONGA	"	MUTUNGUU LOCATION
32. RUTH MUTWIRI	"	768 MERU
33. RUTH KARIANKI	MAENDELED YA WANAWAKE	500 MERU
34. MARGARET KIBURU	LUBUNU SELF HELP GROUP	506 MERU
35. ESTHER MBATHA	"	"
36. ELIZABETH KIMATHI	"	"
37. ALICE KAGWINA	"	"

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

<u>NAME</u>	<u>ORGANIZATION AND TOPIC FACILITATED</u>	<u>ADDRESS</u>
40. LUCY ITHEWA	"	"
41. PRISCILLA MUTHIKA	YOUNG RURAL WOMEN CO- ORDINATOR (TIGANIA WEST)	1141 MERU
42. JANET KAGUTHI	" (NITHI DIVISION)	2 CHUKA
43. PENINA KALAYU	" (TIGANIA WEST)	1141 MERU
44. DIANA MUTHONI	" (NITHI DIVISION)	1 CHUKA
45. JANET MAUA	MWENDWA KAMAROO WOMEN GROUP	506 MERU
46. RUTH K. ANDREW	KIANJAI CIRCUIT WOMEN ORGANIZATION	1193 MERU
47. LYDIA MUTHIKA	ASSISTANT SECRETARY, KANU MAEDELED YA WANAWAKE URUNGA SUBLOCATION	"
48. INYASIA NJOKI	LUBUNU WOMEN GROUP	506 MERU
49. MARGARET MBAARAU	CHAIRLADY CIRCUIT WOMEN GROUP MAUA	64 MAUA
50. SUSAN MUTIRITHIA	TIGANUA EAST WOMEN GROUP	506 MERU
51. KINANU KIMATHI	KATHIMA WOMEN GROUP	86 NKUBU MERU
52. NYDROKA MATHIRI	MIATHENE WOMEN GROUP	933 MERU
53. FAITH MARURUA	TIGANIA EAST WOMEN GROUP	506 MERU
54. NAOMI KIRAITHE	METHODIST CHURCH LEADER	1553 MERU
55. JANET KAMENCU	LEADER IN METHODIST CHURCH	"
56. JUDITH RIUNBU	SECRETARY P.C.E.A. KANYAKINE CHURCH	31 KANYAKINE