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WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
DECADE FOR WOMEN

NATIONAL PAPER OF JAMAICA

I. Introduction

1. In pursuit of the goals and objectives of the Decade for Women and in accordance with its mandate to ensure the full integration of women in national development, the Government of Jamaica's Women's Bureau has developed a variety of projects and programmes beneficial to women. Although several of these projects were initiated by the Bureau, others were generated by ideas and efforts of the women themselves. Yet other projects have been developed and implemented by quasi and non-governmental bodies some of which have assisted the Bureau in implementing its own projects.

2. The following three projects chosen for this paper were developed by the Women's Bureau and indicate the wide range of activities underway in Jamaica:

- a) The Women's Centre was established in Kingston by the Bureau in January 1978 as the first attempt in the Caribbean to deal with the problem of interrupted education among young women due to early pregnancy.
- b) The St Elizabeth Bammy¹ Project is the first phase of a wider proposal intended to provide income-generating activities for unemployed rural women with families in the parish of St. Elizabeth. Specifically, the Bammy Project aims at harnessing unemployed skilled resources for cassava processing and at utilizing locally grown cassava for the processing of the Bammy. One important aspect is the development of a Cooperative to enable the women to control their own economic activities.
- c) The Sistren Theatre Collective uses the skills of drama to depict the role of Jamaican women in the development of their country and was born out of the creative interests of a group of 11 women who now form the Collective. "Sistren" was named by the group itself and is evidence of the unity within a group of "sisters" together in a struggle for social and economic survival. These women, from poor urban communities in Kingston and St. Andrew, are all mothers in the age range 20 - 40 years. The majority were originally illiterate.

3. In Jamaica, the female population comprises 51% of the total population. More than one-third of the heads of households are women. Another one-third live in non-legal unions in which their income is vital for the economic survival of the family. Unemployment stands at 37.7% for women as against 15.7% for men. Over one-fifth of the unemployed women are heads of households.

¹ The Bammy is an unsweetened bread-like, circular cake made from cassava and eaten as an accompaniment to a variety of dishes.

II. Case Study: The Women's Centre

A. Background and Objectives

4. Exact data on the number of teenagers who get pregnant is not available. However in 1976 and 1977 over 30% of the total yearly births were to teenage mothers, the bulk of whom were attending school when they became pregnant. Since pupils were not allowed to re-enter the educational system after pregnancy, these girls were doomed to swell the large force of unskilled and unemployable women. Often they fell into a pattern of having child after child, continuing the process of underdevelopment into the next generation. The Women's Centre therefore provides an important service.

5. The programme is designed to continue the education of pregnant schoolgirls, thus assisting them to re-enter the school system after the birth of their babies. As devised, it aims to:

- a) give family planning and other counselling;
- b) provide young women with the inner strength, self-respect and dignity to withstand the pressures of ghetto life;
- c) provide them with a knowledge of life in general, encouraging them to develop their full potential.

B. Work Plan

6. Funding was obtained from International Planned Parenthood Federation, the Pathfinder Fund and the Government of Jamaica. The Government provided a large, centrally located building, converted the doublegarage into a Day Nursery, provided Day Nursery staff and paid all utility costs.

7. The Centre is staffed by a Programme Manager, an Administrative Assistant, a three member Counselling section, 8 part-time teachers, a day-care supervisor with 6 assistants and 3 watchmen.

8. The Centre takes four approaches to reach and motivate programme participants:-

- a) Participants enter the programme in the afternoon sessions. Academic subjects are taught, but the emphasis is on individual or group counselling and the encouragement of a positive self-image;
- b) By the second term, most of the girls have had their babies and now move into the morning session where they concentrate on academic subjects, family life and planning education;
- c) "Rap Sessions" are held with students, "baby-fathers" and parents and all are encouraged to participate in social and work-related events;
- d) The Centre serves a nutritious breakfast, lunch and afternoon snack;

9. At the end of the session all eligible morning shift students are placed in appropriate secondary or technical schools or training institutes. In most

cases they are not returned to their original school.

C. Evaluation

10. During 1978, 104 students were accepted at the Centre and in 1979, 130 aged 13 - 17 years. In the two years of the pilot operation therefore, the Centre has surpassed its original objective of 160 girls. These figures do not include a number of young women who, although not eligible to enter the programmes, were nonetheless assisted by the Centre.

11. Drop-outs from the programme totalled eight during 1978 and 13 in 1979. Drop-outs (for reasons other than second pregnancy) after replacement in the school system totalled 29 in 1978-79. Most of them found it impossible to continue due to their economic situation and are now working. The total of second pregnancies recorded for the two year period is ten or approximately 4%. With the addition of a Family Planning Counsellor to the Centre's staff, it is hoped that the incidence of second pregnancies will be reduced.

12. Problem areas are:

- a) differences in the educational levels of the participants;
- b) provision of boarding grants and uniforms to the students when they re-enter the school system;

Solutions are being found, in part by assistance from local high school students who give extra lessons and from aid in the form of uniforms or grants as necessary, from the Ministry of Education.

D. Projection

13. As of January 1980, the Government assumed full responsibility for the Centre. It is envisaged that at least one other Centre will be set up in Kingston and one in a rural area during 1980.

III. Case Study: The St. Elizabeth Bannmy Project

A. Background

14. The Parish of St. Elizabeth has always traditionally cultivated Cassava Tubers and produced Bammies. In recent years production declined and some productive skills have been lost. In order to utilize the potential of the area to cultivate cassava, a Government land-lease programme encouraged farmers to grow cassava for bulk-purchase by a proposed Cassava Factory. Plans for this factory did not materialize and the Women's Bureau responded to the crisis by mobilizing a group of unemployed women with families, for Bannmy production.

15. One important feature of the Bannmy Project is that it is a cottage-industry involving only one centre for collection, quality control, packaging and distribution to market outlets.

16. The project comprises 32 women within the age groups 26 - 50, approximately 50% of whom are married, living on their own land some of which is being utilized to grow the cassava. Educational level of the participant is low - a small

percentage being illiterate and the majority with low primary education. All had the required skills for bammy-making and once the project started men and children of the households assisted.

17. The involvement of other Agencies with the expertise in production and marketing was seen as crucial to the development and implementation of the project, which was also designed to include Social Support Services and Training identified by the women themselves, such as Business Skills, Co-operative Management, Leadership Training and Family Life Education. Essential to the life of the project was the establishment of a Management Committee which includes participants as well as relevant Government and Non-Government Agencies within the target area. Discussion with all Agencies and with the women themselves led to the preparation and implementation of the Project.

B. Project Implementation

18. The project started in September 1978 with the production of 250 Bammies each week but only after funds were identified to make immediate production possible. (Since then production has increased to approximately 4,000 Bammies per week). The initial capital of J\$5,000 was provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, which also remodelled one of their buildings to serve as a packaging and distribution Centre.

19. From the very beginning, participants were paid in relation to their output. Since there is no difficulty in selling the Bammies, income derived can only increase. Each participant now earns a minimum of J\$35 per week, a significant benefit for a previous non-earner and an improvement in the economic status of the families concerned.

20. Training in food technology, quality control and packaging is provided at the Centre by the Ministry of Agriculture. Other women are being taught by those who possess the bammy-making skills. In addition, a programme for training and social support services is being developed. All participants are also required to obtain Food Handlers' Certificates.

21. There is a great local demand for the Bammy, as well as a growing overseas market particularly among Jamaicans living in North America. Based on market studies, it would be feasible to step up production from 4,000 to 15,000 bammies weekly.

22. The Ministry of Agriculture provides transportation facilities from the homes of participants to the Centre for processing and then to the identified markets.

23. The Management Committee controls financial accounts, dictates policy and seeks markets. It comprises 12 persons drawn from Government and Non-Government Agencies (including the Women's Bureau) community and youth leaders and 3 participants in the project. It is hoped that in time, with expansion and training, more leadership qualities will be identified among participants.

C. Evaluation

24. By harnessing the skills of the women and utilizing the natural resources within the Parish, a viable economic project was developed in which participants

have learned to budget their time to accommodate an income-earning occupation within the home. They have learned to fill production targets and have a positive attitude which has resulted in rapidly increasing production. Their improved status is a benefit to the women themselves, their families and communities. This project benefits also those men who assist the women in Bammy production, as well as the children in the household who have begun to understand work concepts.

25. Gradually, leadership qualities are emerging and a generosity among older women to pass on their skills to younger women who wish to participate.

26. This project has attracted much attention from local and international observers and is a successful first phase of a development programme for women in the rural sectors of the Parish of St. Elizabeth. It is still in its pre-cooperative stage although plans are being developed towards the establishment of a co-operative.

27. However, much can be done to develop technology to relieve the burden of manual preparation of the cassava. Production could also be increased by installing a wood or coal burning stove in the Centre.

28. The next phase will include 20 mothers aged 18-35 who will be trained to make cassava wafers. However, financial constraints inhibit development to fullest potential and expansion of the project is therefore slow in relation to market demand.

IV Case Study: The Sistren Theatre Collective

A. Background and Objectives

29. In 1976 the Government's Special Employment Programme had mobilized many people, the majority of whom were unskilled women, for employment as street cleaners. The Women's Bureau identified women within this Programme who displayed interest in working as Teachers' Aides² within Government schools operating on a shift-system. Eleven of the women identified for this purpose now comprise "Sistren."

30. The municipality of Kingston and St. Andrew, where the women live, is the largest urban centre in Jamaica and has all the problems of a growing metropolitan area in a developing country. Most women in this area are not only unemployed in marginal jobs, but are low-skilled or unskilled. The unemployment rate for women in the area is 44.2% compared with 24.3% for men.

31. The project is designed to:

- a) Create theatre which analyses and comments on the role of Jamaican women;
- b) Create a collective structure which educates participants as they educate the public;

² People caring for 12-15 year old students on the shift system, when they are not in school and are without supervision at home.

- c) Provide group members with supplementary income and participation in a self-reliant co-operative organization;
- d) Use techniques of improvisational production to encourage people to examine their attitudes towards work, life-styles, fellow citizens and their contribution to the community.

C Project Development

32. Initial training, incorporating Drama, Dance, First Aid, Arts and Library skills, was provided by the Bureau in collaboration with the Council for Voluntary Social Services, the co-ordinating agency for voluntary organization. Later, in 1977 at the request of the women, the Jamaica School of Drama assisted by the Bureau, started a formal training programme. Other training, including reading skills, English language and literature, Mathematics and Cooperative Management, is given by Government and quasi-government bodies such as the Jamaica Movement for the Advancement of Literacy and the Women's Centre (see paragraph 2 a).

33. Training results were reflected in the group's first commercial production Belly-Woman Bangarang, in 1978. This play was developed from the life stories of the women and earned "Sistren" national and international awards. "Sistren" has also designed a series of short docu-dramas for the purposes of community education, performed at Parish workshops organized by the Women's Bureau. The group has been involved in two documentary films, one of which was televised in October 1978, while shooting for the other began in December 1979 and is nearing completion. The second major production of the group, Bandoolu Version, based on personal experiences in Kingston, was toured in 1979.

34. In 1979 the group streamlined its programme as follows:

- a) An Action Committee was selected from the Bureau, the School of Drama, friends and members of the Group, to assist in management and problem solving and identification of funding sources;
- b) A year's programme was designed which included research workshops in methods of teaching adults to read through drama, training in theatre skills and workshops to aid problem-solving and personal development;
- c) Planning and research for the third annual major production which was conceived as a historical drama on the life of Jamaican National Heroine, Nanny, researched by the women. It was presented in theatres in March 1980 and is currently being presented in schools;
- d) A documentary film, shot in 1979, was planned in collaboration with students from the Institute of Mass Communications. The film is nearing completion ;
- e) Further training in academic and related subjects.

35. Members have been elected to take on specific administrative tasks and are now understudying persons who have been assisting the group. They have expressed interest in acquiring new skills which would aid their productions and improve their quality and effectiveness. Members have also proposed beginning an income-generating project apart from drama and are consulting with the Women's Bureau on this.

36. The women themselves are deeply involved in every aspect of the project, which indeed sprang from their request for training and funds to develop a theatre. They designed the project, set its goals, assess its progress, creating solutions to the problems encountered, with guidance from the School of Drama and the Women's Bureau. They reach other women through workshops, community groups, schools, television and community theatre.

37. Funding was provided locally by public agencies (including the Bureau) private enterprises and fund-raising efforts of the participants. Aid also came from the Canadian University Services Overseas, the Organization of American States (through the Jamaica School of Drama, the Inter-American Foundation and the Ford Foundation.)

38. Earnings from Major Productions are used to:

- a) supplement the \$25 per week wage of the members ;
- b) create a revolving loan fund for group members;
- c) finance a health insurance scheme;
- d) assist with the administration of the group.

C. Evaluation of the Benefits to Women

39. Benefits to "Sistren"

- a) All members are now literate and articulate;
- b) Members have become skilled in theatre techniques;
- c) Drama now provides part-time employment for members, with financial gain;
- d) There have been great improvements in discipline and attitudes to work;
- e) Members are now better able to assist their children with school work;
- f) The nutritional levels of their families have improved, due to the knowledge gained about nutrition and the injection of additional income into the family budget;
- g) The women have gained self-confidence and an improved self-image;

- h) Their dramatic achievements have gained national acclaim, through an award for producing experimental drama of a high standard. They have also been recognised internationally, through a cash award and a certificate from the OAS/CIM³ for the best promotional project depicting the role of women in development.

40. Benefits to Women in the Society

- a) The group acts as role models for women;
- b) Productions not only provide entertainment, but encourage women to improve themselves and become self-sufficient;
- c) Women become more aware of their changing roles and the need for grasping opportunities to equip themselves for greater personal development and greater participation in national development;
- d) Productions highlight the struggles and problems of women, thus making women and society at large more conscious of these problems and therefore more supportive of women's struggles;
- e) Productions help to develop communication between different socio-economic groups, fostering better relationships and understanding of women's needs.

41. Possible Generalizations

- a) Drama can function as an efficient tool for skill training;
- b) Women without formal education can function as teachers by sharing their experiences and analysing them;
- c) The group's process of development can be of use to other groups as a model;
- d) The channelling of education towards a particular goal to be immediately achieved, assists learning.
- e) Upgrading the social and economic quality of a woman's life also upgrades that of her family;
- f) Drama alone is not sufficient to provide an adequate income, and has to be supplemented by other income-generating activities.

D. Conclusions

42. The success of the Sistren Theatre Collective is an illustration of what

³ OAS/CIM: The Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organization of American States.

women who are motivated are able to do to gain education and augment their wages through additional employment. The women in "Sistren" were employed through the Government's Special Employment Programme, but through their interest in drama they have sought to educate themselves and to improve their economic status. There are plans afoot to further improve their economic status, through other co-operative income-generating ventures.

42. It is noticeable that from the inception of the programme of training provided to these women, the birth rate among the group has been nil. This is interesting, as these facts seem to suggest that given creative incentives women may voluntarily control the size of their families in order to improve the quality of their lives, that of their families and their communities.

V. Voluntary Fund of the United Nations Decade for Women

43. In an effort to obtain finances to allow further development, the three projects were submitted as an integrated proposal for funding, to the Voluntary Fund of the United Nations Decade for Women. The proposal was approved in September 1979 for a total of US\$228,684, disbursement of which should have started in January 1980, but has been delayed as negotiations concerning the role of the UNDP in the operations of the Voluntary Fund, still continue at the Headquarters of the United Nations.

VI. Conclusions

44. One attractive feature of the three projects discussed in this paper is their adaptability to different locations. The experience gained in these cases can stimulate exportation of improved versions of the projects to other areas. The Women's Bureau believes that these experiences can be shared to advantage with women of other developing countries and is pleased with the opportunity for this type of exchange, which is provided by the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women.

45. What has become readily apparent is the positive impact of these (and other) projects on the lives of the participants and therefore, of their communities. This is evident, not only in their improved economic status, but also in their increased awareness of their self-worth and dignity and in a significantly better attitude to the discipline of work. As in the case of the members of the "Sistren Collective", unemployed women who were previously illiterate or hardly more than functionally literate, have become wage-earners who are articulate and self-confident, being able to aspire to the development of talents and potentials which they were previously unaware that they possessed. Their participation in every phase of the projects' implementation and determination to seek solutions to their problems can only redound in further benefits to themselves and their community.

46. The success of these projects encourage the mushrooming of similar efforts to involve more and more women. However, financial constraints have dictated a slower pace as they have also inhibited further development of existing projects. Since the improvement of the social status of the island's women is a pre-condition for Jamaica's overall development, every effort will be made to ensure their integration into the programmes for national development.