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INFORMATION CONCERNING THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN TRUST TERRITORIES

Addendum

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INTRODUCTION

1. The present addendum to the report on the Status of Women in Trust Territories is based on the information contained in the annual report made by the Administering Authority to the General Assembly on the Administration of the Trust Territory of Cameroons under British administration. It was not available to the Secretary-General at the time of the issuance of his report.^{1/}

I. STATUS OF WOMEN IN GENERAL

2. Women in many systems of customary law in the Territory would appear at first sight to be legal and political minors, for whom, at different times in their lives, their fathers, husbands, or brothers are socially responsible. However, in practice, exclusion from land-ownership is the only fairly common legal disability and even this is not universal. Moreover, although office is traditionally reserved for males, women can exert direct political influence as a corporate group through their societies and associations and in certain tribes as individuals, for example, the Queen Mother of Wum; in parts of the grasslands, for example Esu in Fongom, the installation of the chief is inaugurated by a ritual "washing" by the women. The status of indigenous women has been underrated in the past, principally because the men, in accordance with a tradition deriving from warfare, take a leading role in the external relations of the village or tribe.^{2/}

II. POLITICAL STATUS

(a) Federation

3. The qualifications of electors for the House of Representatives, as laid down in Regulation 4 of the Elections (House of Representatives) Regulations, 1958, are as follows:

^{1/} E/CN.6/352, para. 4, footnote 5.

^{2/} Report for 1958, p. 164.

"Subject to the provisions of regulations 5 and 19, every person shall be entitled to be registered as an elector and if so registered to vote at an election who on the qualifying date is ordinarily resident in Nigeria and is a British subject or British protected person of the age of 21 years or upwards and if ordinarily resident in the Northern Region is a male." ^{3/}

(b) Northern Cameroons

4. A person is entitled "to be an elector" and to vote in elections for the Northern House of Assembly, who,

(1) on the qualifying date, is - (a) a male British subject; or (b) a male British protected person; or (c) a male native foreigner, of the age of twenty-one years or upwards; and

(2) has during the period of twelve months immediately preceding the qualifying date paid tax anywhere in Nigeria or was not liable to pay tax in that period by reason of being exempted; and

(3) (a) has been resident - (i) in the case of a male British subject or a male British protected person for a continuous period of at least twelve months; and (ii) in the case of a male native foreigner for a continuous period of at least five years immediately preceding the qualifying date in the urban electoral district or in the rural electoral district in which the registration area or the primary electoral area (as the case may be) is situated and is resident in such district or area on such date; or

(b) is a native of the urban electoral district or the registration area or the primary electoral area as the case may be. ^{4/}

5. At the thirteenth resumed session of the General Assembly the representatives of Argentina, Canada, Costa Rica, Italy, Japan, New Zealand and Pakistan in the Fourth Committee submitted a revised draft resolution (A/C.4/L.582/Rev.1) on the future of the Trust Territory of the Cameroons under United Kingdom administration which, inter alia, recommended that "the Plebiscite which should take place in the Northern part of the Territory should be conducted on the basis of the electoral

^{3/} Report for 1958, p. 62.

^{4/} Ibid., pp. 63-64.

register at present being compiled for the elections to the Federal House of Representatives". According to this register only male persons were qualified to vote. The representative of Liberia proposed to insert in operative paragraph 2 of the revised draft resolution (A/C.4/L.587/Rev.1) the words "on the basis of universal adult suffrage"; this proposal was rejected by roll-call vote of 34 to 25, with 22 abstentions. Consequently, paragraph 2 of resolution 1350 (XIII) recommended that "in the Northern part of the Territory the Plebiscite should be conducted on the basis of the electoral register at present being compiled for the election to the Federal House of Representatives".

6. The Plebiscite took place in 1959 and the United Nations Plebiscite Commissioner submitted a report on this question (A/4314 and Add.1). The report was discussed during the fourteenth session of the General Assembly. During the debate in the Fourth Committee the United Nations Plebiscite Commissioner replying to the representative of Liberia, who asked whether women in the Northern Cameroons were reluctant to participate in the voting, stated that he did not encounter any such feeling. He said that it should be noted that four women acted as polling officers in the Dikwa area although they were not allowed to vote. He thought that this was a very welcome demonstration of interest on their part, and noted in this connexion that women played an important part in the economic life of the Northern Cameroons. The representatives of Canada, Denmark, New Zealand, and Sweden submitted a draft resolution (A/C.4/L.636), paragraph 4 of which reads: "Recommends that the Plebiscite be conducted on the basis of universal adult suffrage"; the representative of Iran proposed to add at the end of paragraph 4 of the draft resolution the following phrase: "all those over the age of 21 and ordinarily resident in the Northern Cameroons being qualified to vote". This paragraph as amended and the resolution as a whole were adopted unanimously by the Fourth Committee and subsequently by the General Assembly in plenary (resolution 1473 (XIV)). According to this resolution, women will have the right to vote in the new plebiscite which will take place between 30 September 1960 and March 1961.

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(c) Southern Cameroons

7. The Southern Cameroons has an Executive Council presided over by the Commissioner of the Cameroons, who is appointed by the High Commissioner for the Southern Cameroons, and a House of Assembly almost wholly elected by popular vote. During the year registration was carried out on the basis of universal adult franchise and new elections were fixed for the 24th January.^{5/}

8. Under the new Southern Cameroons Electoral Regulations which were approved in December 1957 women are granted the right to vote and to stand as candidates for election without the taxation qualifications which were formerly required. A woman sits in the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly as a Special Member to represent the interests of women. The recently appointed Southern Cameroons Scholarship Board has one woman member who possesses equal authority and responsibilities with the male members of the Board. In the reformed councils of Victoria Division each council will have nominated women councillors to represent women's interests on the council and one woman has been appointed a court member on the Tiko Council.^{6/}

III. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STATUS

9. The status of women in the Territory differs in many respects from that in the West and many other parts of the world. Though there are no legal restrictions on the occupations women may take up, in fact the great majority of them spend their lives in looking after their homes and children and in work on the land. Husband and wife work for a common end and make decisions in their respective fields of activity. The wife has the chief responsibility for looking after the home, for the care and discipline of children and for the growing of crops and food. The husband's job is to render assistance in heavier farm work and provide necessities such as clothes, tools, oil, salt and medicine.^{7/}

10. An increasing number of women are taking up light employment of an agricultural nature, and for this the main centre at the moment is Tole Tea State. This Estate is the property of the Cameroons Development Corporation and employs some

^{5/} Report for 1958, p. 137.

^{6/} Ibid., p. 26.

^{7/} Ibid., p. 164.

70-80 women on light weeding, pruning and plucking, at the rate of 2s. 9d. per day.^{8/}

11. There is no discrimination in employment and remuneration on the ground of sex.^{9/}

12. Chapter IX of the Labour Code Ordinance covers the employment of women. This law contains restrictions regarding the place of employment of women on night work or underground. Part II of Chapter IX covers maternity protection to women, and provides, inter alia, for absence from work, payment of wages during absence to the extent of 25 per cent, after six months' continuous employment, and prohibition of serving a notice of dismissal during absence. The Commissioner of Labour may by order specify such contracts as may be concluded by women either generally or in respect of any particular undertaking or group of undertakings, or in respect of any particular type or types of employment.^{10/}

IV. STATUS OF WOMEN IN PRIVATE LAW

13. Patrilineal institutions are the rule although matrilineal systems are found. Some of the tribes appear to be in a transitional state, in which patrilineal customs are taking the place of an earlier matrilineal system.^{11/}

14. Among foreigners living in Victoria Division there has been a tendency to contract marriages under the Marriage Ordinance rather than by native law and custom; this gives the status of women greater protection. The total number of persons married under the Marriage Ordinance is, however, still very small.^{11/}

15. A misleading factor in the assessment of the status of women is the accepted custom of polygamy. This is not an indication of a low valuation of women, but is rooted partly in the customs controlling sexual intercourse during the long suckling period of an infant, and partly in economic factors. Traditionally polygamy in a household confers a higher status on both husband and wives. Like many other traditional values, those concerning polygamy are now being transformed

^{8/} Report for 1958, p. 170.

^{9/} Ibid., p. 174.

^{10/} Ibid., p. 177.

^{11/} Ibid., p. 156.

by changing conditions of life and the institution is generally in decline. It would be impossible to abolish it without disrupting the whole social system and such a step would be both unnecessary and an outrage to public opinion. The Administering Authority subscribes to the views on the subject expressed by the 1949 Visiting Mission in its report, and policy is framed accordingly.^{12/}

V. MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

16. A new maternity ward was added to the Kumba Hospital during the year. A grant has been made to the Roman Catholic Mission for a twelve-bed maternity block at the Sugu Native Authority Health Centre.^{13/}

17. The Government Health Sisters stationed at Maiduguri, Yola and Mubi held regular ante-natal and child welfare clinics at Bama, Madagali, Michika, Mayo Nguli and Jada in the Northern Cameroons. During the year a full-time Health Sister was posted to Mubi to open clinics in Northern Adamawa thereby giving the Health Sister at Yola more time to visit the Southern area. A difficulty has been to ensure continuity during the absence on leave of the Health Sister, there being no cadre of trained auxiliaries to carry on the work. A training school for Community Nurses has therefore been established in Kaduna, which will open its doors early in 1959. It will give Grade II Midwives a year's course in domiciliary midwifery and health visiting. Rapid progress cannot, however, be expected until the drive on women's education begins to bear fruit, and more educated girls become available for training.^{14/}

18. Within the Northern Cameroons, medical attention in childbirth is available at the S.U.M. Hospital at Gwoza, the Government Hospital at Mubi, the R.C.M. Rural Health Centre at Sugu and the four maternity homes run by the S.U.M. In 1958 these institutions between them delivered about 400 women. Large numbers of village midwives are needed and as a first step towards providing them Grade II Midwives Training Schools have been approved at Maiduguri and Yola Hospitals, but it will be some years before educated girls are available for training in anything like the numbers required.^{15/}

^{12/} Report for 1958, p. 165.

^{13/} *Ibid.*, Foreword, p. xv.

^{14/} *Ibid.*, pp. 189-190.

19. The maternity and child welfare unit maintains its mobile service in Victoria Division. It is in the charge of a Nursing Sister, fully trained not only as a nurse but as a midwife and Health Visitor. With the assistance of two midwives she carries out school inspections and holds clinics in areas where there are none permanently established. At many rural centres there are now resident midwives. All government and mission hospitals in the Southern Cameroons provide maternity and child welfare facilities and there are also child welfare clinics attached to the lying-in wards under the control of the Native Authorities.^{15/}

20. Midwifery is a "designated profession", i.e., a profession in regard to which enactments of the Federal legislature take precedence over those of the Regions and the Southern Cameroons, with the result that the training and qualifications of midwives and the practice of midwifery are still regulated throughout the Federation by the Midwives Board and by Rules made under the Midwives Ordinance (Laws of Nigeria, 1948, Cap. 132). Midwives have to be registered, and for that purpose they must hold certificates granted by the Board which the Ordinance set up, or certificates issued by the Director of Medical Services before the Ordinance came into force (in 1931); or they must have qualified in other countries. A woman who pretends to be a registered midwife is liable to be fined £5, and a registered midwife must give the Board notice of her intention to practise. She must also inform the Board if she changes her professional address. She is not by law authorized to practise medicine or surgery, outside a midwife's ordinary duties, and she may not grant any medical certificate, or any certificate of death or stillbirth; nor may she take charge of cases of abnormality or disease in parturition. These general restrictions apart, she is subject to the Midwives Rules and to the Midwifery Board.^{15/}

ANNEX

Documents and records of discussions of the General Assembly
and the Trusteeship Council relating to the status of women
in the Cameroons under United Kingdom administration

Report of the Trusteeship Council to the General Assembly covering the period from 2 August 1958 to 6 August 1959 (A/4100).

Status of Women in General, Part II, Chapter IV, para. 71.
Political Status, Part II, Chapter IV, paras. 7, 16, 22 and 27.

The official records of the thirteenth session of the General Assembly give an account of the discussions in the Fourth Committee of interest to the Commission on the Status of Women with respect to the Cameroons under United Kingdom administration:

Political Status

A/C.4/SR.869
A/C.4/SR.873
A/C.4/SR.874
A/C.4/SR.875
A/C.4/SR.876
A/C.4/SR.877
A/C.4/SR.878
A/C.4/SR.879
A/C.4/SR.880

Report of the Fourth Committee to the thirteenth session of the General Assembly, A/4095, paras. 28, 31 and 33.

The official records of the fourteenth session of the General Assembly give an account of the discussions in the Fourth Committee of interest to the Commission on the Status of Women with respect to the Cameroons under United Kingdom administration:

A/C.4/SR.989, pp. 9, 10 and 13
A/C.4/SR.994, p. 9
A/C.4/SR.995, pp. 2, 8, 12, 14-16, 18, 21, 23 and 27.
