

# just a housewife

Ques. Are you married?

Ans. Yes.

Ques. Does your wife work?

Ans. Oh, no!

Ques. How does she spend her time?

Ans. Oh! she gets up early to prepare the children's breakfast and send them to school. Then she goes to fetch water from the village well, gathers wood from the near-by grove, then she kneads the dough, prepares the bread, cooks the noon meal; cleans the house, and does some sewing; after which she waters the house garden, milks the cow, etc...

Ques. How can you say that she does not work?

Ans. Oh! she is just a housewife. She does not perform any real work!

The answers given by the husband in this short dialogue reflect the attitude of most people toward housekeeping. "It is not real work", though it may be for the housewife a source of exhaustion. In fact, a woman spends in house-work more time than a man does in factory work or in farming. In rural districts which lack mechanized or modern facilities, the work of a housewife is doubly increased, and more particularly if she participates in farming activities.

In return for all her work, a housewife receives no salary except mere sustenance. If she falls sick, she may not find any one to take care of her because the husband is busy. If none of her children is able to look after her, she may die of neglect.

When a woman is so burdened, what ways may she use to alleviate her work and solve her problems?

In our rural districts, for example in many Lebanese villages, the husband and children generally share the housewife's duties in their free time. Their help assumes a larger proportion in periods of fruit gathering and food preparation and storage for winter. In the past, the Lebanese villagers followed the tradition of helping each other in busy periods. Women of the same quarter met to help each one of them clean the wheat crop before sending it to the mill, or prepare the provisions of "burghul" (pounded wheat), "Kishk" (wheat soaked in sour milk), jams and other foods stored for winter. This beautiful tradition is now slowly disappearing because ready-made canned foods in many households are replacing those prepared at home.

In countries where workers enjoy social security, husbands receive family allocations destined for wives and children. Health security is also included. In this case, the wife should be allowed to receive in cash her share of the sum as a recognition of her services to the family. She therefore has the right to use that money for her own personal needs or to keep it aside for future uses. It is now admitted that women should not sacrifice themselves

for their families unless sacrifice is absolutely necessary, since experience has shown that husbands and children are not always reliable providers in days of need.

In rural districts, especially where social security has not been established, women have to put up with a good deal of injustice. In addition to housework, they usually help in rural work without any compensation, because their work forms a part of the husband's work and the latter either owns the land or hires it from the owner. These rural women form about 52 per cent of the working women in Asiatic countries(1). In Iraq, they constitute more than 40 per cent of the whole body of rural workers. It is the duty of governments and other responsible institutions to require the husband to pay the wife a part of the salary that he receives or to associate her in the income of the land that he owns. As partner in the work, she should also be allowed to be co-owner of the land or to own a share in it. If she works for wages with her husband or without him, she should receive equal pay for equal work with men.

Statistics given by the "Office of Women in development", 1975, affirm the increased importance of women to the Third World, particularly in rural districts. "The lure of the city and cash producing work is drawing the men away from the farms, leaving the women behind. It is estimated that 30 per cent of rural families in the Third World are now headed by women, and that 40 to 70 per cent of Third World agricultural labor is female."

In the next 25 years, the world population will increase from 4 billion to 6 billion people. Most of that increase will be in developing countries. By the year 2000, 87 per cent of the world population will be living in the less developed countries.

## Conclusion:

1. A key to the resolution of the problem of excessive Third World population growth is family planning and the key to that is women.
2. If agricultural production and productivity are to increase, development planning in the Third World must give an equal place to women.
3. If the health and nutrition of 87 per cent of the world's people is to be improved, it is mainly through women that the improvement should be sought.
4. For all these reasons, the women of developing countries must be educated, because through education they may become aware of their responsibilities, and better prepared to perform them. Through education, they should become aware of their rights and better prepared to claim and obtain them.

(1) Rural Women: their integration in development programs, by E. O'Kelly, 1978.