

# *“Now go back and tell”*

## PREFACE

This book has one objective: to arouse more public and professional sensitivity to the realities of women's lives in the developing nations. It is an attempt to express my concern about the impact of the development process on the family unit and on its individual members.

Development is a process that brings with it enormous changes in the very substance of people's lives. It touches their values, their cultural norms, and their perceptions of one another. It can bring an opportunity for personal growth and social harmony, or, tragically, it can tear the social fabric asunder.

Years ago, as a medical-social worker in North Africa, I had an opportunity to observe the influence of development programs on rural family life. I was particularly impressed by the effects of those programs on the lives of women and children. It seemed to me that the more negative implications of the programs were not perceived at the planning level. Since that time, I have wanted to provide a vehicle by which women might speak for themselves about the pressures they face in rapidly changing environments. Their views would surely help to identify the problems at hand and thereby assist in the improvement of policy design.

### *A Six-Country Mission*

The opportunity to record the conversations on which I draw in this book was made possible by a grant from the U.N. Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). The countries I visited — Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Kenya, Sri Lanka, and Mexico — were selected by UNFPA for their cultural, social, political, and environmental as well as economic diversity. It should be noted, however, that five of these countries rank among the world's very poor nations, with their per capita GNP ranging from Sri Lanka's \$200 per year to Tunisia's \$840 per year; only Mexico, with its annual per capita GNP of \$1,090, ranks among the relatively better-off developing countries.\*

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\*Annex B of this volume (pp. 149-152) presents some social and economic indicators of variations in the quality of life among the selected six countries.

### THIRD WORLD WOMEN SPEAK OUT

My mission was to travel to these nations and discuss with women their views on family size and the desirability of family planning services. The results of my inquiry have been published in a book issued by the UNFPA.\* But to gather views on such a sensitive subject, I first had to understand the factors that contribute to those views: the elements of a woman's life that contribute to her perception of the needs of her family and to her personal aspirations. That wider-ranging inquiry into women's perceptions and aspirations is the subject of this volume.

Upon arrival in each nation, I met first with government and U.N. officials, who briefed me on the development policies and projects of the country. A second series of meetings, arranged through women friends of different nations, led me to women leaders known for their work both *with* and *for* women and for their independent thinking. Although these women in many instances belong to the upper classes in their societies (as do most university-educated women and men in developing countries), and might therefore be suspected of having little knowledge of the situation of the poorer classes, I found that their perceptions almost always were grounded in the stark realities facing poor families. Many were initiators of progressive efforts for the advancement of women, and their words contribute significantly to this book.

Based on the recommendations of both groups — officials and women leaders — I organized trips to rural areas and small urban centers. Traveling by bus, train, car, and mostly by landrover, I made a consistent attempt to visit areas judged to be "not worth the time" by officials; I systematically avoided the "showcase" locales. On several occasions, I encountered frowns and mockery on the part of officials; they seemed perplexed by my request — my insistence — to talk with those they judged "only poor and ignorant women." The experience taught me that the tendency to discount the opinions of the poor (and women) is found at local as well as national and international levels.



The first country I visited was Tunisia. Once a key contributor to ancient Rome's granary, Tunisia still is predominantly an agricultural nation. Today its principal products are wheat, olives, and citrus fruits. Most of the country is favored with a mild Mediterranean climate. Only its southern portion, bordering on the Sahara Desert, is infertile. There, the population lives in oases or continues centuries-old nomadic wanderings with the changing seasons.

When I had lived and worked in Tunisia sixteen years prior to this assignment, the country's population had numbered four million people. By mid-1976, the count was nearing six million. Tunisia's "population pyramid" confirms that it is a youthful nation: 43.2 per cent of Tunisians are under age fifteen.

When I arrived in Tunisia, the National Population Council graciously provided me with a car and driver to enable me to travel to the more remote parts of the country to talk with women. During the first

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\**Perdita Huston, Message from the Village (New York: The Epoch B Foundation, 1978).*

five days, I traveled south along the coast to the ancient fortified city of Sfax, and from there to villages hidden among the vast olive groves that cover the Sahel region. The following week was spent in the northwestern region, visiting villages nestled among rolling wheat fields near the hillside city of Le Kef. The route to Le Kef was lined not only with towering columns of ancient Roman towns, whose ruins are scattered throughout the small nation, but also with the tents of nomads who had fled the dry season in the south.

Members of the National Union of Tunisian Women — an active women's organization of over 40,000 members — welcomed me in each region, and their briefings were most useful. Wherever I traveled in Tunisia, officials were helpful and concerned about the success of my mission. Once again I experienced the legendary hospitality of Tunisia's people. In Sfax, for example, Georgette Cheour (a midwife) and her husband, Mohamed (a paramedic), insisted that I take all meals in their home. I learned much from them about the issues facing the poorer families of the region.

Among Moslem nations, Tunisia sets a bright example in providing the legal basis for the integration of women into national life. Under the leadership of President Habib Bourguiba, the Tunisian National Assembly passed the Personal Status Code shortly after Tunisia gained independence from France in 1956. This code prohibits polygamy, defines court procedures for divorce, grants universal suffrage, and requires the consent of both parties to a marriage. With this one law, women became equal to men before the courts.

Everywhere I traveled in Tunisia, women spoke gratefully of Bourguiba's leadership in "giving us our rights." The president of the National Union of Tunisian Women, Fathia M'Zali, stated that "President Bourguiba is the only *unconditional* feminist I have known." She explained that the President has made a practice of speaking out against traditions that hinder the full participation of women in Tunisian society. His personal commitment to resolving this problem, she maintained, has resulted in a significant change in people's attitudes. On the streets of Tunisia's cities, women no longer veil their faces. Youthful men and women walk together in the streets, a sight unknown twenty years ago. Female police officers direct traffic in downtown Tunis — a visible symbol of Tunisia's efforts to involve women in many aspects of public life.

Despite the considerable changes that have taken place in Tunisia — as in the other countries visited — I was to hear tales of disregard for laws defining the rights of women. Several teenage girls told me that they knew they would not be allowed to choose their husbands, even though the law stipulates that both bride and bridegroom must consent to the marriage. Traditional practices still prevail in many other fields as well. In primary school, for example, girls represent only 39 per cent of students, and at the university level, even less — only 25 per cent. These statistics show a great increase from those of twenty years ago, but, as many women pointed out, "We still have a long way to go." What remains unique about modern Tunisia is that for the past twenty years, the nation's leaders have actively supported women's participation in Tunisian society.



A flight across Libya took me to Egypt, the most populous of Arab nations, and to the Nile-side city of Cairo. Of forty million Egyptians, 99 per cent inhabit only 3.5 per cent of the country's total surface; they live along the Nile River and its delta, where crops of cotton, wheat, and rice can be grown. The remainder of the country is largely desert, dotted with widely scattered oases.

Although influential communities of Christians and Jews have existed in Egypt for centuries, the great majority of Egyptians are Moslems. Islam has greatly affected customs and laws, and Moslem religious leaders are very influential. I was told by many women that the barriers to women's advancement tended to be sustained not so much by law as by religious leaders. Since 1919, when they first joined in street demonstrations to protest oppressive British Protectorate policy, Egyptian women have been involved in a struggle for their rights. The highly educated urban population, concentrated mainly in Cairo and Alexandria, has a large contingent of politically conscious and active women. Equal pay, voting rights, and civil liberties are ensured by law, although I was told by many women that customs and traditions still inhibit women's participation in activities outside the home. One woman official, noting that 50 per cent of Egyptian women remain illiterate, commented: "Our women do not even know they have certain rights. We, the educated women, must teach them. This is our job." Jehan Sadat, wife of Egypt's president and herself a social activist, spoke of the uphill battle of promoting women's rights, commenting that "the men don't pay as much attention as they should to the issue."

The Cairo Women's Organization arranged my visit to a village sixty miles northwest of Cairo, where life at first appeared quite traditional, but where the impact of change upon the lives of the younger generation also was visible. Many teenage girls were attending school, although they were still wearing full-length black veils. Some young women even traveled miles from the village each day to attend training courses.

Next I journeyed further north by train for a three-day visit to the Mediterranean port of Alexandria. There, the privately managed Family Planning Association organized visits to health clinics, day-care centers, and youth training courses, at each of which I met women who talked willingly about their family situations and their views.

The following week, I traveled past the Giza pyramids to Fayoum, a region consisting of over 160 village oases spread along a vast irrigation system in the desert southwest of Cairo. As we passed the irrigated fields, we saw a group of children, seven or eight years old, working among the rows of plants under the supervision of an older man. It was there, in Fayoum, that I heard family planning workers make a plea for mechanized farming, saying, "If the farmers had less need of labor in the field, they would have fewer children."



It was not until I flew south from Cairo to Khartoum and viewed the inhospitable vastness of Sudan, that I began to comprehend the magnitude of the problems facing its people. Sudan is the largest nation in

Africa; deserts of sand and rock, bare mountains, vast swamps, and savanna cover 967,500 square miles—an area almost one third the size of the continental United States. Eighty per cent of Sudan's eighteen million people live in isolated rural areas, where the lack of roads and communications is a major barrier to adequate health and educational services.

The country's capital, Khartoum, which calls to mind romantic images of the joining of the Blue and White Niles, is in reality a stark and dusty town to which the poor migrate when they flee even drier regions. Doctors with whom I spoke estimated that 87 per cent of Sudanese children are undernourished and that 80 per cent of the women are anemic. The "population pyramid" is even younger than that of Tunisia, with 45 per cent of Sudan's people under age fourteen. Primary school enrollment stands at only 38 per cent of school-age children, and twice as many boys as girls are enrolled. Illiteracy among Sudanese women is estimated at 95 per cent.

It is often said that there are, in fact, many Sudans. The isolation of towns and the division of the country by the great Sudd swamp contribute to the diversity among tribes and their customs. The north is largely Arab-African and of the Moslem faith. The south, which has its own territorial parliament, is inhabited mostly by Nilotic Africans who either are animists or belong to a variety of Christian sects.

From Khartoum, I traveled by plane northeast to Port Sudan, which lies on the Red Sea and is Sudan's link to the world. Our plane followed the tracks of the railway that is the country's lifeline, spanning the desert that separates Port Sudan from Khartoum. In most areas of northern Sudan, the key to daily survival is water. One woman whom I visited in her hut south of Port Sudan told me she walked three miles each day to fetch water, which then had to be carefully distilled to lessen its salt content. From the rusty tin can that served as the family's cup, I drank of the water that represented hours of patient work.

Later, again from Khartoum, I flew south to Juba. Although it is the largest town in southern Sudan, Juba is but an overgrown village, accessible from the capital only by air or by a month-long boat trip up the White Nile. In the southern region, where the climate is tropical, water is plentiful but carries diseases common to other tropical regions. Bilharzia, malaria, and tuberculosis abound among the region's tribes. A doctor in Juba confirmed that most women in the south are seriously anemic.

From Khartoum itself, I made several trips—to villages in the city's outer reaches and later also to Gezira Province further to the south. I visited villages hidden away along the route to El Medani, a small city that is the heart of the Gezira Scheme, a vast irrigation project. In one village I witnessed the opening of a primary school. While the officials spoke, women sat listening on one side, men on the other. One speaker was a young woman whose veil—which in Sudan covers the head and body but rarely the face—was made of white cotton imprinted with the International Women's Year symbol. Later she told me that the women's group in El Medani had designed the material and produced hundreds of such veils during 1975. I found, however, that in northern Sudan women were far more reticent in expressing their perceptions of their

status and roles than women in the other countries I visited. In the southern region of the country, the contrary was true; there I found that women were aware of and outspoken about women's potential contribution to their community and nation.

In Khartoum, several educated women refused to let me tape our conversation; others requested that a witness be present during the discussions. I sensed, however, that the major reason for this was a feeling of insecurity about discussing the situation of women with a foreign visitor rather than personal timidity.



As I flew south from Juba to Nairobi, Kenya's plateau-perched capital—which I had visited several years before—I was once again brought back to the realities of the country's geography. There is very little of the lush vegetation that the wildlife films shown in the West mislead us to associate with Kenya. In fact, 80 per cent of the country's surface is marginal land, and the past few years had not brought much rainfall even to the more fertile areas. During this visit, I saw evidence everywhere of prolonged drought. The scope of this disaster becomes clearer when one realizes that most of Kenya's thirteen million people subsist on what they grow for consumption. Even the animals were suffering. One day during the drive to Mombasa, I spotted groups of elephants plodding along in search of food. Their rib cages were poking through the heavy skin that hung loosely from their emaciated bodies.

Compared to Sudan, however, Kenya appears quite well off. It has been the scene of rapid foreign investment, and the country's capital exhibits all the external markings of a modern city. If one looks more closely, however, one finds that Nairobi is burdened with the afflictions of other large urban centers. As many as 300,000 people—nearly one third of Nairobi's total population—live in slums of cardboard and tin shanties. Poverty, prostitution, and fear are now a part of the capital's offerings to those who continue to migrate to its outskirts.

The changes brought about by the rapidly growing economy have profoundly affected the nation's social structures. One third of all rural households are headed by women, largely because men have migrated to the cities and towns in the hope of finding salaried work. Their wives continue to work the family plots of land and are always busy with some scheme to earn a bit of cash. Everywhere one sees women walking to market with basketloads of vegetables on their heads, infants strapped to their backs, and older children following behind. Even while they walk to market, these women often are weaving baskets or fashioning other handiwork that they hope to exchange for cash needed for the family's support or the children's education. In Kenya, schooling is free only until the fifth grade, and throughout my travels, I heard women express anxiety about their need to find ways to earn cash to equip and send their children to school.

The women of Kenya—whether Christian, animist, or Moslem—enjoy far more mobility than their Moslem sisters to the north. As several women leaders pointed out, however, "We still have little legal freedom.

We are dominated by males through a lack of legislation that would protect us from unjust divorce, polygamy, or unfair inheritance practices and abandonment.”

Throughout Kenya, I found agency officials very helpful; family planning associations, offices of U.N. agencies, women's organizations, and government ministries provided me with a car and driver and aided my travels to the provinces. Over a three-week period, I visited the regions between Mombasa on the Indian Ocean and Busia on the Ugandan border. In each village, town, farm, school, and plantation on my itinerary, I was guided by community development workers, social workers, paramedics, or members of *Maendeleo ya Wanawake*, the major national women's organization.



From Nairobi I flew to Colombo, Sri Lanka (long known to the rest of the world as Ceylon). Centuries of Arab, Portuguese, and British domination have left their marks on Sri Lankan life and culture. Buddhism is the predominant religion, but Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity also have greatly influenced the national culture. With a population of fourteen million — some 514 persons per square mile — Sri Lanka is one of the world's most densely populated nations.

The most noticeable differences between Sri Lanka and the other nations I visited seem mainly to result from the country's remarkable educational, medical, and transportation systems. Education for boys and girls — from primary school through university levels — has been free for the past thirty years. The literacy rates are 89 per cent for men and 72 per cent for women. Compared to those of other developing countries, the medical infrastructure of Sri Lanka is exceptional; there is one doctor for every five thousand inhabitants, and 55 per cent of all births take place in medical facilities. Public transportation is remarkably efficient; the island is crisscrossed with hundreds of roadways on which some eleven thousand buses carry over a million people each day. The railway system stretches across the entire island and climbs into the tea-covered highlands (through some of the most beautiful terrain on earth). Despite this remarkable infrastructure, Sri Lankans nonetheless face — although perhaps to a lesser degree — many of the problems common to other developing nations. Unemployment, for example, stands at a chronic 14 per cent of the total work force; and in 1974, 14 per cent of all preschool children suffered from third-degree protein-calorie malnutrition.

I traveled by train to several small towns north of Colombo to visit a series of cooperative farms; one was managed by young people, another by older workers who had been employed on the estate before it had been nationalized and turned into a cooperative settlement. Accompanied by members of the *Mahila Samithi* (a women's organization), I also visited villages in the Colombo area in which women's employment projects were being supported and directed by the organization's membership. Several days later, officials of the Office of Family Planning took me by car to the plantation country high in the central region of the

island. We traveled out from the ancient capital of Kandy and from the town of Maskeliya to the region's plantations and villages. On one plantation, when visiting a class in an open-structure school building equipped only with hand-hewn benches, I asked the schoolmaster who among the students sitting before me was the brightest pupil and the best worker. "She is," he answered without hesitation, pointing to an eleven-year-old girl. The child blushed and partly hid her face in her arms while smiling—an expression of the modesty found among Sri Lankans of all ages.

My Sri Lankan travels extended as far as Kankesanturai on the northernmost tip of the island, where I traveled by train, crossing "the dry zone" — a vast area that had not benefited from a monsoon for several years. From the train I could see hundreds of abandoned huts—left by those who had fled the drought for more fertile regions.

Although the women of Sri Lanka have far better access to education than women in the other countries I visited — female literacy is 72 per cent—taboos and superstitions continue to restrict the lives of many, especially in rural areas. Everywhere, the dowry plays an important role in women's lives as well. In Sri Lanka, it is generally the bride's family that provides the dowry to attract a husband; the less educated the girl, the more dowry she must offer to compensate, it is said, "for her ignorance."

While it is true that many of the women I talked with in my travels, in the rural areas especially, evidenced poor self-esteem, I found Sri Lankan women to be more politically aware than women in, for example, Tunisia, Sudan, or Mexico. Many are involved in trade-union and other political activity, as well as in women's organizations, which play an important role by serving the rural poor.



The last country I visited was Mexico. Although Mexico's per capita GNP statistics suggest that it is a relatively richer country, the disparities between the quality of life of the upper and lower classes are far more evident there than in the other countries I visited. I did not find social consciousness as widespread among upper-class women as, for example, in Sri Lanka. It did not prove easy to locate women who worked with less fortunate women — perhaps partly because I visited Mexico at a time when the new government was in its first months and information on who would be working in what field was not readily available.

The National Population Council and a handful of concerned women in Mexico City helped me plan trips to rural areas near the cities of Oaxaca and Guanajuato, to the suburbs of Mexico City, and to the vast lake-bed squatter settlement of Netzahualcoyotl. There, two million people — recent migrants from rural areas — huddle together without the barest amenities.

Rapid population growth—the population of Mexico is now sixty-two million and is expected to double before the end of the century — has resulted in the migration of millions of peasants to urban areas. In the capital alone, one thousand migrants arrive each day. In 1900, 81 per

cent of all Mexicans lived in rural areas; today the figure has decreased to 41 per cent. Women account for some 55 per cent of the migrants from rural to urban areas. They leave the villages seeking employment, often as domestic servants. When they do not find such work in the cities, they face few alternatives. If they are young, they frequently turn to prostitution; if not, they often resort to begging in the streets. Homeless peasant women, often carrying small children, roam every quarter of Mexico City. Official statistics say that unmarried women account for 28 per cent of all births in Mexico; it is also estimated that over one million clandestine abortions are performed each year.

As I traveled throughout Mexico, women often named the church and the all-powerful "macho" mentality as the reasons for their lack of autonomy and for their reluctance to act independently on any matter, including family planning.

Proximity to the United States is an ever-present factor of Mexican life. In Dolores Hidalgo, I met a peasant woman who admired her husband greatly because he had illegally crossed the U.S. border, located hundreds of miles to the north, seventeen times in search of work. The longest he ever had been able to work before being apprehended was two months. "But," she said, "it meant a lot of money for us." On the other side of Guanajuato, in Villagran, the men migrate because only seasonal work is to be found locally. Miles of strawberry fields surround the village; the delicate fruit is shipped by refrigerated truck to supermarkets in the United States. Yet in Villagran, both children and adults suffer from severe nutritional deficiencies as export crops take the place of local staple crops.

### *The Search for a Genuine Exchange*

Even this very sketchy account of my interviewing itinerary gives some sense of the enormous diversity of the countries I visited. The nearly two hundred women I spoke with in the six countries were hardly a homogeneous group. In addition to the diversity of cultures in which they were rooted, they differed from one another in numerous other ways—they were both rural and urban women, they were both illiterate and educated, and they were both poor and rich.

Nevertheless, if I focused on their differences, I would be going directly counter to the cumulative character and impact of what they said, which is what I wish to share with the readers of this book. What is surprising is that when women in these very different places spoke of the issues that concerned them, the similarities in what they observed seemed to outweigh differences. Rural women, especially, emphasized similar needs: they spoke of the problems they continue to face in the form of social practices that limit their personal roles and influence in the family and community; of their heavy work burden and extreme fatigue; of their inability to earn enough, if any, cash; and of their desire to learn and work and educate their children for "a better life than mine."

In my selections of vignettes from the conversations, I do not attempt to provide a scientific sampling of the opinions of women in the

six countries.\* Rather, I wish to convey what even precise transcripts of interviews cannot communicate: the urgency that the women themselves attributed — by gesture, tone, and repetition itself — to the points they themselves chose to emphasize. In that sense, my method is akin to that of a documentary filmmaker. I am sharing what I personally found persuasive.

Preferring the conversational mode to the structured interview technique, I used no formal questionnaire. We were simply women talking together. In a cattle field in Kenya, beside a tea bush in Sri Lanka, or sheltered from the sun in a palm-roofed hut in Sudan, we discussed our families and our lives. I told about my mother; they told about theirs. They questioned me about my children and spoke with pride about their own.

The majority of the conversations were taped. In a few cases, women refused to be recorded, fearing their husbands' disapproval or the political implications of the words they spoke; they did not, however, object to the use of what they said in this book. In other cases, taping was impossible due to the noise surrounding us — children playing, street sounds, or curious crowds waiting outside to take a look at the "visitor"; but the content of those interviews contributes to this volume as well.

The greatest challenge lay in finding, or creating, an environment in which women would speak with as little reservation as possible. Believing that a group setting would provide a more open and secure atmosphere for conversation, I sought to find women in groups — gathering at a health center, selling in a market, or simply working in the fields. If we talked in a group first — discussing the object of my visit, exchanging stories, and getting to know one another — the women soon became confident and participated readily in the exchange. Following the collective discussions, I asked if anyone wished to pursue the conversation in private. This question always drew more offers than could be pursued because of the time constraints of the women's work responsibilities as well as my own schedule. Thus self-selection played a very important part in determining who would be interviewed. Some readers may consider this a shortcoming of the representativeness of the interviews whose content I share in this volume; this is not my own view. I believe that the self-selection process permitted more open conversations — more "heart-to-heart" talks — than if I had imposed a dialogue on an unwilling person. Moreover, asking for volunteers made it possible for me to ensure some diversity of interviewees; for example, when eight out of twenty women present volunteered to speak with me in private, I was able to choose three of varying ages, or four or five of varying levels of education or training.

The key question I asked was, at least at face value, a simple one: "How does your life differ from that of your mother or grandmother?" The responses triggered discussion on a variety of issues: housing, food,

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*\*At the same time, I wished to provide a check on this method — for myself as well as others — and therefore turned over all my interview transcripts to the International Center for Research on Women in Washington, D.C., for analysis according to generally accepted behavioral science techniques. A summary of this analysis is provided in Annex A (pp. 127-149) of this volume.*

alcoholism, politics, male-female relationships, children, education, love, and disappointment. In the course of comparing past and present conditions, women began to articulate the needs and the difficulties they encounter in a changing environment.

Because the average discussion took well over an hour, the presentation here of entire conversations is not possible. In excerpting from them, I have tried to communicate as closely as possible the spirit of the entire discussion. It must, of course, be recognized that the personalities and skills of interpreters inevitably influence many aspects of the information gathered. I believe that I was fortunate to find female interpreters who warmed to the subject of my inquiry and who took special care to set the women interviewed at ease. Yet each interpreter differed from the next. Their educational levels varied greatly; they were social workers, members of women's organizations, doctors, teachers, and university students. In some cases, two interpreters were required: one who understood the tribal tongue and could translate it into the national language and another who could translate from the national language into French or English, which I could understand. These translations were sometimes unavoidably awkward. In some cases, moreover, the more abstract expressions of educated interviewers undoubtedly altered the flavor of language used by articulate but uneducated rural women; such losses are unfortunate, but they can at best be minimized. In the belief that on the whole, authenticity would suffer most if the language were heavily altered, the conversations have been edited for comprehension purposes only.

Because what the women interviewed said often was very personal in substance, the question of anonymity was extremely important. I found that most women were willing to speak more freely if they were confident that their words would not be repeated to their family or friends. For this reason, I chose interpreters who were not from the same locality. In a further attempt to assure interviewees of their anonymity, I did not *ask* the women to provide their names. Those who *wished* to tell me their names when I told them mine of course did so, but not in response to any direct request. The reader will find, then, that some women are named in the text while others are not. The more educated women are named because they spoke as leaders, "for the record." They pointed out the need for an exchange of information among women of different nations and hoped to make a contribution to that exchange through their words.

The format of this book is shaped by the common topical threads that emerged during our discussions. The first three chapters reveal the impact of change on women's lives, the effect these changes are having on traditional family relationships, and the social practices that seem to block women's advancement. The content of these three chapters often is startling, dismal, even hopeless. In a sense, it conveys the "psychological" setting I encountered in many of my conversations. The content of the next three chapters — which focus on what the women said about health, nutrition, and family planning; about education and work; and about participation in the community and society at large — often provides a strikingly positive contrast to the first three chapters. While the

greatest common concern of the women interviewed was for the future of the family as its members are bombarded with a myriad factors of rapid change during the "development" process, the outlook of most of the women was remarkably positive — despite the enormous barriers that many of them recognized as standing in the way of their aspirations.

In reading the interviews, the reader will, I hope, be compelled to ask the question: Had men also been interviewed, would their views conflict with or give credence to those expressed by the women? In my opinion, this question is a very important one. If similar work on the situation of women is undertaken in the future, care should be given to gathering the views of men as well as women. This could best be done, I believe, by teams of female and male interviewers, for in most rural areas of the developing world today, women interviewers cannot expect to discuss personal and intimate questions openly with men.



The warmth, sincerity, and openness of the women I interviewed were often overwhelming. Nearly all of them expressed curiosity and concern about women in other parts of the world. They wanted to know more about the lives of women because, they said, they cared about them. This "caring" was particularly evident in an experience I had in central Kenya.

A cold winter drizzle was falling on Nyeri when I arrived late one morning. A meeting with a group of fifty older women had been arranged in the unheated town hall. The women were poor and illiterate, but anxious to learn new skills by attending a town-sponsored education group to which I had been invited. I told them (as I did each group with which I met) that I had come to collect their words — that the United Nations had sent me there to listen to them so that they could help me write a book. The book, I explained, would be about women's lives and about the changes, needs, and aspirations of those lives. I would take their words back home, where they would be published so that women and men around the world would better understand the lives and needs of women like themselves.

After an hour of group discussion, I asked if anyone would like to talk with me further, to tell her own story in private. I chose four women from among the volunteers, thanked the group for their participation, and spent the next three hours interviewing in a small office-like room adjoining the hall.

When, much later, I emerged from the building with the last interviewee, all the women with whom I had met hours before were still there, standing in the rain, without shoes or coats, shivering in the winter cold. They had waited for me to complete my work in order to wish me farewell and a good journey. I was distressed and embarrassed: I had had no idea they were waiting for me. I thought they had gone home once the group discussions ended. It seemed they had warmed to my mission. As I moved toward the group, they began to sing and dance. The interpreter explained that they wanted to make me an honorary member of their tribe and to give me a tribal name.

In the midst of the ceremony, a seventy-year-old woman — toothless, shoeless, and in rags — rushed out of the crowd and took me by the arm. Grinning and shaking her finger in my face, she said, with authority: "Now you go back and tell the women in your place that the women of Nyeri *care* about them."