

COMMUNAL FOOD PRODUCTION: THE MUKURU-KAIYABA WOMEN'S GROUP IN NAIROBI

Rebecca Njeri Chege

Rebecca Njeri Chege, responsable des services de bien-être familial pour la Commission urbaine de Nairobi, décrit la formation et les accomplissements du groupe de femmes Mukuru-Kaiyaba, qui est engagé à la production communautaire de la nourriture. Elle présenta ce rapport à l'atelier "Les femmes et la production de la nourriture" au Forum 1985.

I am a social worker by profession, employed by the City Council of Nairobi (now Nairobi City Commission) as the Supervisor of Family Welfare Services. Family Welfare Services include women, children and social work programmes.

Before I describe communal food production by one group of women in the city of Nairobi, known as the Mukuru-Kaiyaba Women's Group, I would like to mention how I manage a few of the women's programmes which contributed to forming a communal food production group:

- *Homecraft Training Courses.* These courses are organized for women to provide them with the informal functional education to improve their standard of living in their homes. Courses such as child care, home nursing, hygiene, nutrition and cooking, and home management are taught. The duration of the courses is one year, from

January to December. An average of 90 to 120 students graduates every year.

- *Income-Generating Women's Groups.* This is another programme to assist needy women. The groups consist of women who have no source of income and who have big families to support. In these groups handicraft activities are introduced. The articles made by the group are sold and the income is divided among the group members, but they have to leave some money to expand the project.

The Mukuru-Kaiyaba group was formed to create another source of income



Rebecca Njeri Chege (center) in Mitero, Kenya

Credit: Sylvia Spring

for the women, as well as to supplement their families' food supply. Through mobilization by social workers and community workers, the group came together and decided to contribute their own labour to cultivate and grow food. The group was formed in 1983 by 49 women, living in a poor, unplanned housing settlement in the industrial area. Food is very expensive in Nairobi city, and if the women could grow food using their free labour, they could realize a profit to assist themselves and their families. Although much land in Nairobi belongs to the Government, if the Government has not planned any construction on it, people are not refused permission to cultivate and grow food. This particular group of women lived in a slum adjacent to such a piece of land.

The land measures approximately 10 acres, where the women grow food crops such as maize, beans, and vegetables. The group has made arrangements as to how to work in their communal farm. They have to work in their farm three days a week, during which they plant the seeds, cultivate or weed for their crops, and harvest when it is ready. If a member is not able to come and work in the farm on the days agreed upon, she is fined 10 shillings. If she is sick, then she is excused and not fined.

The women sell the food they grow to get income for the group and to plan for other projects. As well, each member gets a portion of the food for her family. A major project they have proposed is the levelling of their land next to the Ngong river, so that it can be irrigated. Another is to fence in a small dam on the river, and stock it with fish. The Health Inspectors from the City Council of Nairobi have



Patricia Stamp (left) and Rebecca Njeri Chege promote CWS/cf in Mitero, Kenya Credit: Sylvia Spring

approved the proposed fish project. Once they have raised the funds and fenced the dam, the women plan to rent the dam to fishermen, charging entrance fees.

The Government Administration (that is, the District Officer for Kibera Division, within which Mukuru is located, and the Location Chief) has approved these women's projects. The Agriculture Extension workers also visit the women's farm to advise them on modern methods of planting the crops.

City women are very needy; through farming these small gardens they substantially improve their conditions, as the food sells very easily. We have plans to introduce the same project in other areas of the city, so that more women can benefit. Our aim is to help the women

become self-reliant, and to find their own means to meet their needs.

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CANADIAN-AFRICAN WOMEN'S NETWORK

A fund to support women's training and educational co-operatives in Africa is being established by Canadian women who met with African women's groups in Nairobi in 1985.

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