

Institutes, A. C. W. W. and U. N.

Editor's Note: This is taken from the United Nations Supplement to The Countrywoman, written by Beryl Hearnden.

A Practical Service

There is probably more honest-to-God unselfish work being done in the world today than ever before, and a lot of it is being done by the Specialised Agencies of the United Nations. Men and women of all nationalities, doctors, nurses, farmers, engineers, teachers, are working in difficult, uncomfortable and often very unhealthy parts of the world, trying to help build a better life for the people. Many of them could get better salaries and infinitely more comfort if they stayed at home. The United Nations sounds impressive and impersonal, but when you get down to the practical facts you find the operative factor is the individual who is doing the job in the field, and his or her success depends on knowledge, and the ability to pass that knowledge on to other people.

For instance, there was a rice-growing district in India that was riddled with malaria. You plant rice in the wet season, slopping about in muddy water up to your ankles, and the rice fields, as you can imagine, breed mosquitoes like—well, like flies. In this district the mosquito was the anopheles, that carries malaria, and so everybody developed it, and at harvest time three out of every five men were lying on their cots shaking with fever. The women and children got it too. One of the horrible things about malaria is that it causes anaemia, and a lot of women died in childbirth because they could not survive the slightest haemorrhage.

Well, a Technical Assistance team of the United Nations went out, summed up the situation and decided that the first step was to get rid of the mosquitoes. After that they could cure the malaria, get the people working again, and then improve the productivity of the land. The idea was sound, but the team that went up with their spray guns couldn't even get started. The people wouldn't let them. They didn't believe that a ridiculous little thing like a mosquito made them ill. There had always been fever, it was a part of life. They didn't like the look of the spray guns and the tubs of disinfectant; they didn't want any part of it and when they started throwing stones the team retreated to Delhi and reported failure.

In Delhi there was a nurse, working for the World Health Organisation, which is one of the Specialised Agencies. Her name was Elizabeth Pepper and she hailed from Essex, in England. She asked if she could go up to this district and see what she could do, and off she went in a jeep and settled down in one of the villages. She gave the women a hand, just as if she had been a trained nurse in any country

district anywhere in the world. She brought babies into the world and bathed sore eyes and dressed cut fingers and toes and prescribed for tummy aches and talked to the women. Gradually she won their confidence, and when they found she knew what she was talking about they believed her when she said that mosquitoes caused malaria. Then the women talked to their husbands, and the men began to think there might be something in it. And eventually Elizabeth Pepper sent a message to Delhi, saying: "It's alright, you can come now," and the team went into action again and slaughtered mosquitoes in their millions.

Within a year that district had begun to recover. Once the mosquitoes were gone, the doctors could cure the malaria. Once the men were well the farming experts could help them improve their land. Rice production went up 15 per cent and other crops went up 50 per cent. They were well enough to work their gardens and grow vegetables.

How ACWW Helps

Does this sound rather remote, just another story of far away places with strange-sounding names? Well, let's get back to ourselves, to ACWW. We are an association of 140 country-women's societies, all over the world. We believe that these societies can be a tremendous force for good. Over and over again we have seen how a few women who really know the score can, by persuasion and example, transform a community. People who would pay no attention to a stranger are influenced by the practical example of one of their own folk.

When we knew that the 1956 Triennial Conference was going to be held in Ceylon and that a great many observers from Asia were coming we thought it would be a good plan to hold a Seminar on how a country-women's organisation can help in the development of her country. The women of the East liked the idea and said they would be glad to send representatives to the Seminar. But—the usual trouble—these things cost money, so we asked UNESCO, the United National Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, for help. They knew all about us; ACWW sends representatives to the UNESCO working parties in Paris. They knew about our work and our societies all over the world. They approved the plan of the Seminar and gave us a generous grant towards expenses. We had thirty students, from Pakistan, India, Ceylon, Malaya, Burma and Thailand. It was an absorbingly interesting school.

This is the real practical two-way traffic. They will help us, because we are helping them to build this international highway to a better world. It is a very long road and a very big job, and it needs both of us—the United Nations Specialised Agencies and ourselves—we, the people of the world, to carry it through.