What is the International Federation for Home Economics?

Founded in 1908, IFHE is the unique world wide, professional organisation concerned with the promotion of home economics. It brings together institutions, organisations, associations and individuals dedicated to further both formal and informal home economics education. IFHE is an International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO) in consultative status with the United Nations and works in close cooperation with FAO, WHO, UNICEF and UNESCO.

The IFHE Congress and Council emphasized their special role and close relationship with the grassroots of human development at their meeting in Accra, Ghana, July, 2000, with the following statement: „The expanding Role of Home Economics in developing human resources, in improving living conditions and fostering human rights, the IFHE is an organisation of professionals who, in their work, deal with matters concerning households and families in various areas: working directly with households and families, educating family members, working with community, government agencies and business, promoting programmes which support and strengthen households and families, doing research on issues relevant to the daily lives in households and families. „IFHE mission is to strengthen the Home Economics profession so that it can act as an advocate for families and households assisting them to meet their needs in ways which are compatible with the needs of people in global settings. As an international organisation IFHE is concerned with improvement of living conditions in households and families all over the world in their societies.“

In accordance with its mission IFHE already does; and will in the future, participate actively in the „United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty“ proclaimed in 1997. Members of the Federation are aware that poverty is a problem caused in part by the lack of resources for survival; for personal development; for community living and welfare development. Based on their areas of competence and political will, and with their dedication to the concerns for women, particularly the responsibility for families and household management, IFHE members will concentrate all efforts on the prevention and eradication of poverty.
The Many Faces of Poverty

The Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report 2001 reveals disturbing figures: More than 2.8 billion people, close to half the world’s population live on less than the equivalent of 2$ a day. More than 1.2 billion people, or about 20% of the world’s population live on less than the equivalent of 1$ per day, of which South Asia has the largest number 522 million, and Sub-Saharan Africa 46.3 per cent or close to half the regions population.

Nearly one billion people are illiterate, more than 1 billion people do not have access to safe water. (UNDP Development Report, 2000)

At the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen 1995 a broad concept of poverty was developed:

“Poverty is not only inadequate income; it is also the lack of access to basic services and amenities, the lack of security and exclusion from community life. The recommendation is to focus efforts to uproot the causes of poverty and to achieve the involvement of the poor themselves taking part in the elaboration of policies which concern them.” (Statement by the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family, 1995)

„Precarious life situations“ as individual instances of poverty are measurable. Depending on the great variety of circumstances which cause them, they require different analytical, preventive, protective and alleviating measures.

• People and families can lose their life-sustaining resources without fault of their own through natural disasters, ineffective governance, disregard of human rights, wars, expulsions, genocide and terrorism (absolute poverty).
• People can subjectively or collectively perceive themselves as disadvantaged or relatively poor in comparison to other regions, nations, other historic times, professions, social classes or other lifestyles (relative poverty).
• Poverty as a „precarious situation of life“ also exists in welfare societies with a social security network and regulations for minimum income. They result from inadequate life skills to appropriately deal with life, family or social crises, with living or managing a household or family together. (5. Familienbericht, FRG)

Home economics competencies must be reviewed in order to be effective in the variety of life situations and everyday socio-economic and cultural demands of people and their families who live in poverty. Clearly, daily chores must meet the requirements of life and family planning, socialisation, education, health and personal nutrition, daily living and hygiene, as well as the economic activities in living together and working together. Without family and household-oriented education for both genders at the grassroots level, there can be no sustainable progress in human development for all, since this would disregard all special life-sustaining contributions which women make to nurturing human capital.
The Challenge for Home Economists

The fight against poverty, marginalisation and precarious life situations is quite different from the general and professional education and counselling of home economists. It is vital to keep in mind the immediacy and proximity to everyday life and its worries, specific daily skills and contributions. The impulses can only come from those groups that are affected by poverty and exclusion. It will require socio-political dedication to make available to them just and inclusive participation in the available resources or opportunities for self-help.

IFHE needs to adopt an additional internal and external position on its activities in poverty prevention in the 21st century.

Goals will need to be set at many levels

• **Strengthen political activities:** At the national and international level home economics position is still receiving insufficient attention from society, both with regard to the macro-perspective of the UN Human Development Report, and wider socio-political publicity. IFHE and its members must continue their socio-political activities to raise the issue through public debate and make the demand that human development requires home economics education for men and women as an important pre-requisite for the prevention of poverty. As a consequence a critical evaluation and adaptation of the professional competences and traditional values is very important.

• **Obtain linkages between the Body of Knowledge and Practice of Home Economics and the Eco-social market system:** According to the publication on the „Eco-social market economy as a key to global sustained development“ (FJ Radermacher, Vienna 2002), global political regulatory and control systems must advance free markets, protect the environment in a sustainable way and create a long term equitable welfare development for all.

• **The key to sustainable development** requires a gender-sensitive perspective. This demands the politically secured recognition of equality and equal validity of household production as a sustainable form of investment by families, and especially by women, in the human capital of society. The relationship and integration between the macro-perspective and the micro-perspective of „sustainable development“ in the various regions of the world has yet to be developed.

• **Expand home economics education and counselling programmes:** the World Summits for Social Development (Copenhagen 1995 and Geneva 2000) expanded the concept of poverty eradication to include such factors as „access to basis services, productive employment, sustainable livelihoods, sense of human security, reduction of inequalities, elimination of discrimination, and participation in the life of the community“.

While the above goals reflect the macro-level perspective the reality of poverty is manifested on the micro-level, in the daily life of individuals and families.
Terms have now been formulated whereby home economics education provides every individual with basic strategies to overcome poverty, to help to secure food and nutrition, health and hygiene, to handle the household budget, to cope with the market, to train to be a better shopper, to care for and bring up children, to care for the elderly, to be able to combine professional and family life. In addition home economic studies provide research in these areas. Home economics education is a valuable tool in the fight to eradicate poverty of individuals and families! Seen in the light of the above reflections it is a key for a better life of humankind.

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