

Is this a dream?

Sweeping is not just women's work.

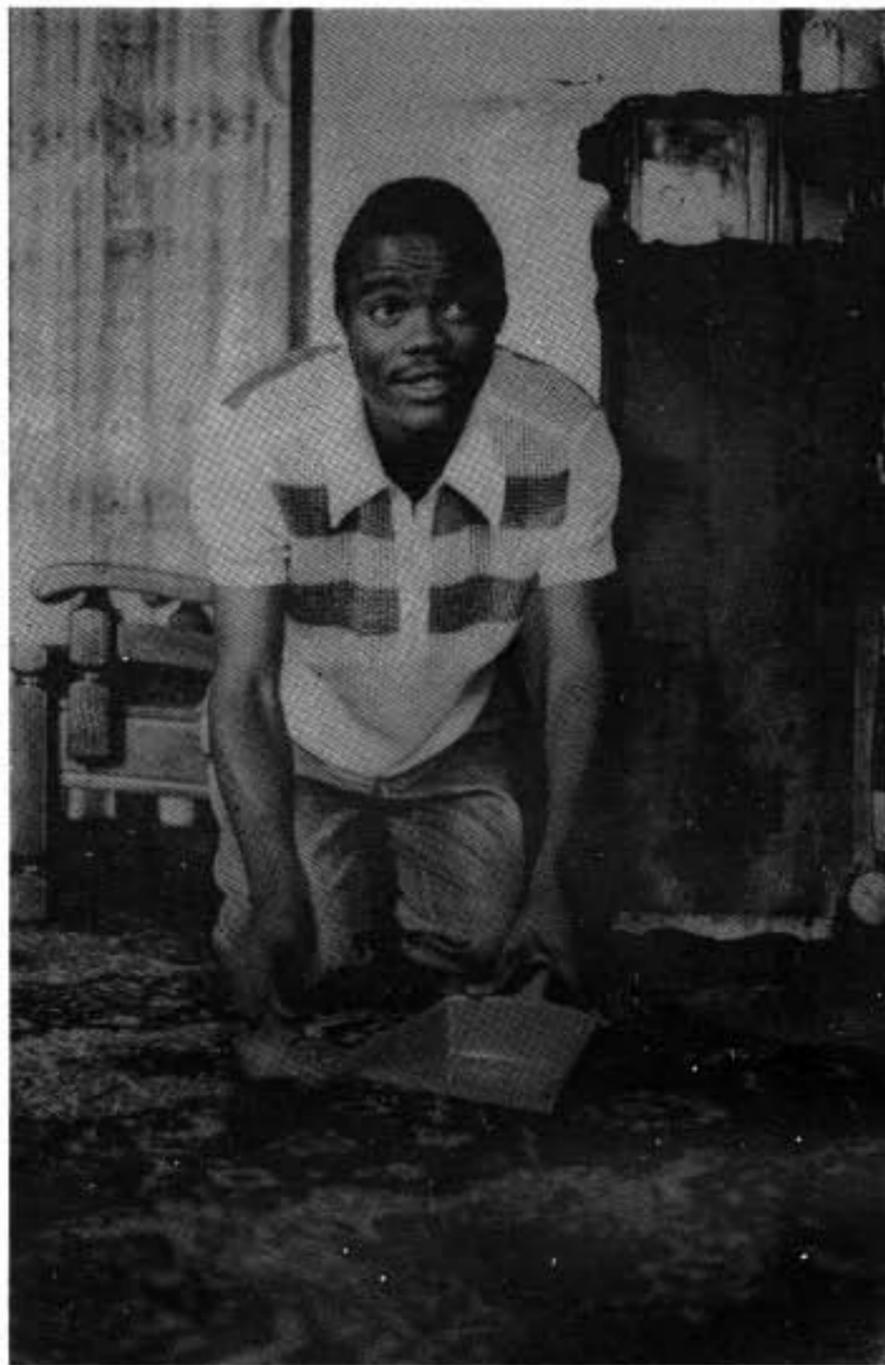
Think of a time when you come home and start cooking. While you are in the kitchen somebody else is seeing to children, making sure that they get ready to sleep. Also making sure the older ones are doing homework.

Think of a time when you finish cooking and sit down while somebody else is cleaning up and you also get a chance to see your children after a day's work.

Think of a time when as a woman the man in your life knows that you are a human being. That you need rest. That you need to go out and be away from cooking and cleaning. And that you need to attend a meeting at work and in the community without feeling guilty about childcare and other responsibilities at home. Is this kind of life all just a dream? We wanted to find out. SPEAK went out to find men and women who live and share together for the benefit of both of them. It was very hard because there are not many men around who know that it takes a lot of sharing to make a relationship enjoyable.

Share the Home, Share the Housework
Ndumiso is not married. He lives with his mother, brothers and sisters. He said "I don't

Photograph by Phakade Magwaza, Afrapix



mind what work in the house there is to do. As long as it needs to be done, I do it. Housework is for us all. After all we share the house. Why can't we share the work as well?"

Often the reason why men do not want to work in the home is the fear of what people are going to say about them. Magrapes and Thabo are two men we spoke to who have had comments made about them.

Magrapes shares housework with his wife. He told us, "One day I was doing washing for the family outside the house. Another man just came angrily and asked why I was washing. He said that I am setting a bad example. He said that all women around will expect men to wash for them."

A lot of this way of thinking comes from the way most of us are brought up. We are told that a good wife is the one who does everything for a man. So, if a man does what is seen as woman's work, he is a funny man. We forget that sharing housework means both a man and a woman will have more time together at the end of the day. It also means that love will grow.

Sharing A Life Together

Thabo is married and has children. "I wash nappies for my little ones whenever I can. But I know that people think that it is the worst thing for a man to look after children. My neighbour started singing a song saying that my wife was bossy because he saw me hanging nappies. I ignored him. I told my wife and we both laughed about it."

Ndumiso, Magrapes and Thabo are some of the very few men who are prepared to share housework no matter what people say. Most people think like Vusi Twala. Vusi Twala is a man who wrote to Tribute magazine saying how bad it is for a man to look after children. "Can you imagine Jomo Sono changing and washing nappies," said Vusi. Jomo Sono is a very well known soccer star. We are not sure whether Vusi asked Jomo if he minds caring for his children. But Vusi says this because in his mind successful men like Jomo cannot take part in child care. This is how many people think.

Brian looks after his two children. He said, "Men only live half lives until they care for their children. Looking after children is a joy. It

makes you a full human being. Your children don't know you and you don't know them until you look after them."

Men And Women In The Struggle

Ndumiso is a member of a community organisation that is fighting for change so that people can live better lives. He said, "For me democracy applies from the time I wake up in the morning, at the work place and in my organisation." Ndumiso felt strongly that what he preaches in his organisation must also happen at home. He also felt strongly that it is important for men to support their wives by taking over responsibilities at home to make sure women also attend meetings. Men comrades forget that it is part of the struggle to make sure that the woman in his life gets time to get involved in community and union struggles. Ndumiso continued to say, "It is a mistake for men in the struggle to leave their wives out in what they are doing. You need that support from each other in order to grow."

Why Is It So Hard To Achieve A Shared Life?

We have been made to believe that there is always somebody who is better. We believe that lawyers are better than street sweepers. White is better than Black. Men are better than



"It isn't all easy going, but men only live half lives until they care for their children."

women. Men are believed to be bosses. This attitude makes us think that men cannot do certain things especially at home. We are brought up to think that a good woman is one who does everything for her man. When a man does things for her, people say it means she is lazy and she is failing to be a good woman.

"In fact in the Black community, a man who shows a lot of love for a woman is believed to have been given muthi to make him soft. And that is bad. Being seen spending a lot of time with your family as a man is not appreciated by other men," said one woman we spoke to.

A Big Battle

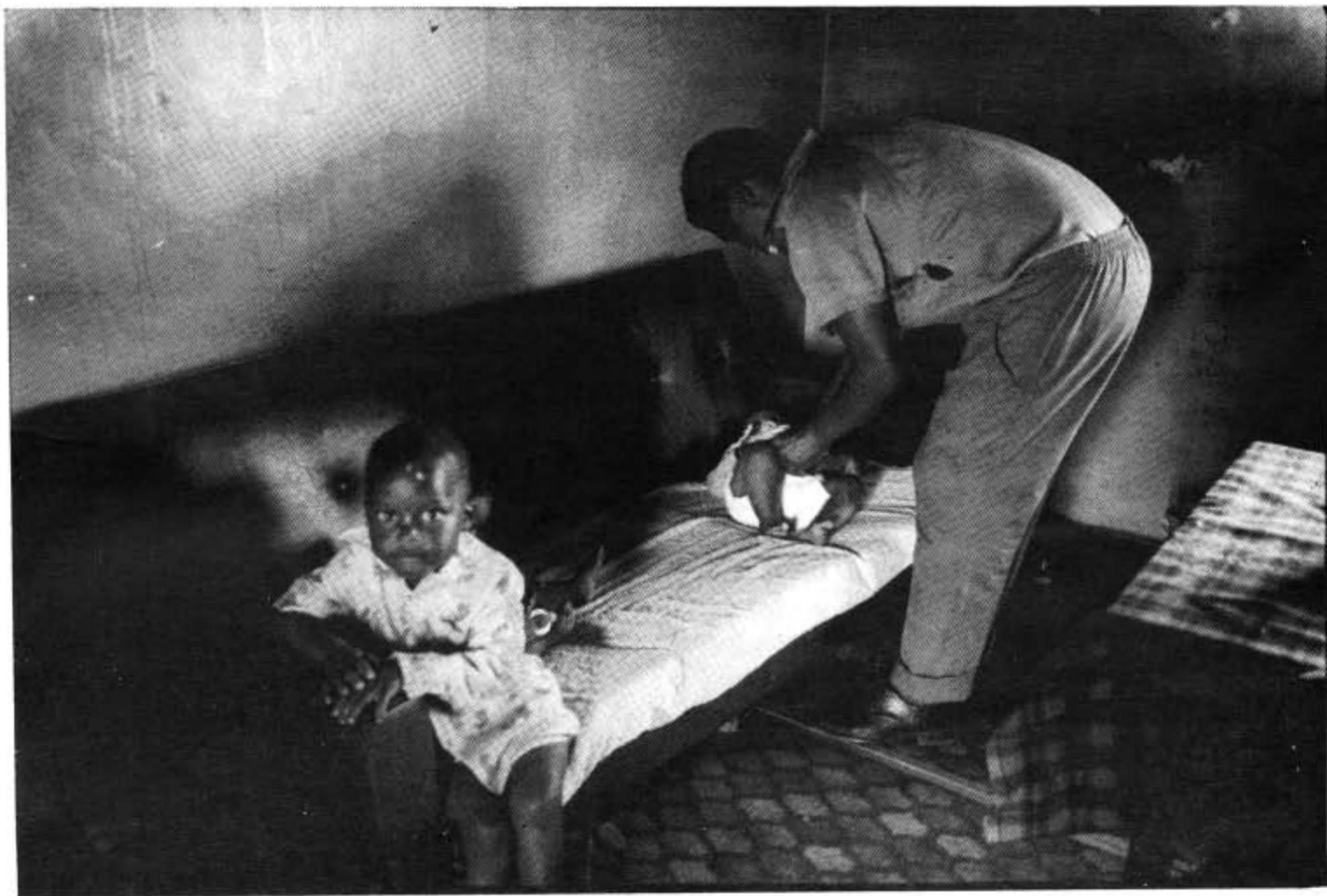
We also spoke to women who live with men who have made changes. There were very few women who found men willing to share everything. Most of them had to fight very hard. One woman said, "It is very nice to be in a relationship where everything is shared. You get to understand and love each other better. But it is a big battle. It does not happen overnight. You have to keep reminding the man you live with that you are also a human being and you need to be helped and to be

loved. It is very difficult because some of them never think about it at all. But you still try. It need not get to the point of quarrelling. If a person is loving he should understand your concern.

We Have To Be Brave In Our Lives

Another woman said, "We are facing many problems. There are laws which make it difficult for people to have normal lives. Workers are fighting for better working conditions. In the townships people die every day. Many people think that talking about problems between men and women these days is crazy. They believe that fighting bosses and government for our rights is the only battle. But, if we win the fight against bosses and government, will women be free?"

So many problems! All these problems cannot be solved overnight. But let us start working on something we can change now. Let us change our lives now and work for democracy in our homes. Let us share our lives and responsibilities at home, This will make us even stronger to fight all other problems outside the home.



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