CAMEROON

MINISTRY OF WOMEN’S AFFAIRS

REPLIES TO QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DAKAR AND BEIJING PLATFORMS
PART ONE

Appraisal of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment.

A POLICY OF GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

The Ministry responsible for women’s affairs was initially established by presidential decree in 1984. In 1987, with the worsening of the economic crisis, Cameroon adopted a structural adjustment plan, which entailed reducing public expenditures and restructuring the Government. In particular, the Ministries of Women’s Affairs and Social Affairs were merged into a single Ministry by Decree No. 88/1281 of 21 September 1988. In December 1997, the President of the Republic, aware of the special problems of women and anxious to improve their status, set up the new Ministry of Women’s Affairs by Decree No. 97/205 of 7 December 1997 on the organization of the Government. Article 5, subparagraph 8 of this Decree provides as follows: “The Ministry of Women’s Affairs shall be responsible for drafting and implementing measures relating to respect of women’s rights and strengthening guarantees of gender equality in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres.”

So far as the advancement of the status of women in the economic and socio-cultural areas is concerned, the policy declaration on the Integration of Women in Development, the Multisectoral Plan of Action on Women and Development, and the National Plan of Action on the Integration of Women in Development were drafted and approved in 1997 and adopted by the Government in 1999. The advancement and protection of the girl child constitute one of the priority elements of those documents. The following action has been taken in this connection:

- Establishment of a special fund to provide support to female students of scientific and technical subjects, and other forms of assistance to deserving students of both sexes;
- Abolition of certain restrictive regulations, such as age limits, unfavourable to women in higher education;
- Use of informal educational structures (Women’s Advancement Centres, Youth and Activity Centres, Social Centres, Vocational Training Centres) to ensure socio-juridico-economic advancement for girls past the age for compulsory education;
- Introduction of a national functional literacy programme and an informal education programme for girls;
- Adoption of a declaration on the new educational policy to combat classroom exclusion, reduce regional inequalities and remove existing obstacles to education for girls;
- Adoption of a new school-oriented Education Act emphasizing the compulsory and non-fee-paying nature of primary education in Cameroon and non-discriminatory access to education for children of both sexes.

All the above documents were prepared with the participation of the main actors in the cause of women’s advancement - the Administration, the private sector, and civil society. The above-mentioned policies are being implemented on a multisectoral across-the-board basis and coordinated by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs.
Since the holding of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, women’s concerns are increasingly taken into account in the major reforms being undertaken at national level. The participatory approach adopted in connection with the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) has made it possible for 30 to 40% of Cameroon’s women to become involved in that process. The Millennium Declaration served to a large extent as the inspiration for the PRSP. Element 6 of PRSP, that is to say the strengthening of human resources, the social sector and the integration of disadvantaged groups in the economic circuit, gives particular attention to Goal 3 on gender equality and women’s empowerment, The Government is accentuating the democratization of education and non-discrimination between the sexes in terms of access to education by both girls and boys. With this in mind, primary education has been made free. Moreover, the Government has finalized its strategy for the advancement of women, which provides for women’s education and training programmes.

In New York in June 2000, Cameroon submitted its initial report on the implementation of CEDAW to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The Committee’s recommendations to the Government concern the preparation of the next periodic report, the speeding up of the drafting of the Family Code, the enhancing of capacities of officials responsible for drafting periodic reports on the implementation of CEDAW, and the popularization of CEDAW.

The following action has been taken towards compliance with these recommendations:
- Seminars have been held with a view to raising awareness of CEDAW among the social actors;
- Leaflets about CEDAW have been distributed among the population as part of a large-scale popularization effort;
- At the legislative and political levels, the number of women members of the National Assembly (total number of deputies: 180) rose from 10 in 1997 to 19 in 2002.
PART TWO

Progress in the implementation of critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and further initiatives and actions identified at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

1. – Women and poverty

The framework document for the Government’s economic and social policies is the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), an integrated framework for our country’s development based on a set of macroeconomic and sectoral strategies aimed at accelerating growth and reducing poverty.

The document clearly reflects the authorities’ desire to work towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Its seven main elements are consistent with the major development goals to which Cameroon has subscribed. Element No.6 - “strengthening of human resources, the social sector and the integration of disadvantaged groups in the economic circuit” - specifically incorporates the concerns of equality and equity.

The PRSP goals relating to women are designed to improve women’s conditions of life on the basis of the following:
- Enhancement of women’s economic power, with particular emphasis on rural women;
- Elimination of gender disparities in girls’ schooling;
- Facilitation of access to reproductive health and information services for women of childbearing age and adolescent girls;
- Promotion of appropriate technologies for easing women’s work;
- Improvement of women’s access to credit and to production factors;
- Encouragement of women’s entrepreneurship.

In addition, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs is conducting, within the framework of the socio-economic advancement of women, a number of activities in support of women’s micro-enterprises, encouragement of women’s employment and strengthening of women’s capacities.

The following programmes and projects have been developed:
- The National Governance Programme, where women’s poverty is taken into consideration in connection with aspects of economic governance;
- The National Agricultural Extension and Research Programme Project (NAERP), which provides locally-based agricultural extension services to rural women;
- The Global Programme for the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality, financed by UNDP, which grants micro-credits to women in the Adamawa, Coastal, North-Western and Western pilot provinces. Two hundred forty women’s micro-projects have been financed under this programme;
- The Family Incomes Improvement Programme in the Northern Provinces, which receives financial assistance from the African Development Bank. A large section of this programme is devoted to support of women’s economic activities;
- The “Productive micro-projects for Cameroon’s women” project, which enjoys financial assistance from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Three savings and credit cooperatives have been set up under this project with a view to enabling women to engage in income-generating activities. Since 1998, nearly 8 000 women have received loans totalling five billion CFAF;

- The “Support to women’s integration in micro-enterprises” project provides equipment and materials to needy women organized in associations and Joint Initiative Groups (JIG) with a view to enabling them to carry out their projects in such areas as agriculture, stockbreeding, food processing, handicrafts, etc.

- The project for gender equality and equity trains leaders of women’s associations in poor rural areas to run group activities, provide training in responsible parenthood, and manage community development activities.

- The Poverty Reduction and Action in Support of Women in the Far North Province project (PREPAFEN) receives financial assistance from the African Development Bank and UNDP. It has granted micro-credits to a total value of 600 million CFAF, the recipients of 70% of that total being women. PREPAFEN has made community micro-infrastructures available to needy populations, including women, with the aim of improving their living and working conditions. Women in rural areas have received training in food and agriculture skills, poultry keeping and breeding of small ruminants.

- At meetings organized with informal-sector “Bayam sellam” market women from the Yaoundé, Mbalmayo and Kumbe markets, the women were provided with training in the management of income-generating micro-projects and in taxation and regulation matters.

2. **Women’s education and training**

Documents on the organization and operation of Women’s Advancement Centres (CPF) and Appropriate Technologies Centres (CTA) for women were signed by the Prime Minister in January 2000. The main task of these Centres, which are specialized technical units of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, is to provide civic, moral and intellectual education to women and girls. There are at present 31 operational CPF and one CTA.

With a view to achieving equal access to education and in conformity with Goal 2 (universal primary education) of the Millennium Development Goals, a Presidential Decree establishing free primary education been issued.

Activities designed to eliminate illiteracy among women are being conducted by rural and community group leaders who are themselves women. A theoretical and practical guide has been prepared for this purpose and the rural group leaders have received retraining in its utilisation.

More than 600 community group leaders have been trained as part of the mobilization of society in favour of sending girls to school. Pictorial teaching aids have been developed for their use. A ceremony under the name of “Excellency – Feminine Gender” was held to distribute prizes to the 152 best girl students of the country’s French-language and English-language general and technical secondary schools in the school year 2002-2003.
Education is regarded as a priority sector in the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Accordingly, the resources mobilized by the State budget and other development partners, as well as those arising from Cameroon’s admission to the HIPC initiative, are oriented to the education sector as a matter of priority.

3. **Women and Health**

The Government intends to improve the population’s health situation by implementing the health strategy document adopted in October 2001, which emphasizes the special place of women in the programme to combat sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Women not only form the section of the population most affected by the epidemic, they also represent the most vulnerable social group. Accordingly, prevention of the transmission of HIV/AIDS from mother to child and encouragement of the use of condoms and sheaths appear prominently among the strategies recommended in the document. Measures aimed specifically at women that have been developed in this connection include the following:

- Enhancing awareness of the HIV/AIDS problem among women and girls;
- Developing a strategy of encouragement of girls’ schooling;
- Developing a strategy for the improvement of the economic status of women.

With regard to the transmission of HIV/AIDS from mother to child, successful activities are being conducted under the auspices of the Chantal Biya Foundation, which provides pre-confinement care and post-confinement follow-up for pregnant women.

Furthermore, a plan for combating HIV/AIDS incorporating a special section devoted to women has been drafted and was adopted in May 2003. Its implementation by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs will take the form of the following activities:

- Training of leaders of women’s organizations and associations as well as of Ministry of Women’s Affairs staff;
- Raising women’s level of awareness through associations and organized groups and events devoted to people living with HIV/AIDS.

The authorities have also adopted a programme to combat malaria (the “Roll Back Malaria” programme) whose goal is to halve the morbidity and mortality due to malaria by 2010, especially among the most vulnerable sectors of the population (children below 5 years of age and pregnant women). Mosquito nets impregnated with an insect-repellent substance were distributed to pregnant women under this programme in 2003.

The obstacles encountered included the following:

- Persistence of illiteracy among the female population;
- Insufficiency or absence of women’s incomes;
- Persistence of certain customs such as female genital mutilation, levirate, sister swapping, etc.
4. Women and the Economy

The following areas have been identified at national level in connection with the implementation of this part of the Beijing Plan of Action: agriculture, stockbreeding and fishing, forestry, environment, trade, industry, arts and crafts, tourism and employment. These areas also form part of the Government’s poverty reduction policy.

The Government has drawn up an integrated strategy of rural development whose principal elements are the following: modernisation of production mechanisms, restructuring of the institutional framework, improvement of available incentives, and sustainable management of natural resources. The strategy places special emphasis on gender-based and participatory approaches.

The following programmes have been set up with a view to promoting local development and strengthening the capacity of communities to enable grass-roots actors to participate more actively in the development of their locality: National Participatory Development Programme (PNDP), National Programme of Support to Community Development (PADC).

The National Micro-Financing Programme sets out to improve the access of rural dwellers to micro-financing institutions and to strengthen the capacities of micro-financing institutions.

The Agricultural and Community Micro-Projects Investment Fund (FIMAC) forms part of the effort to achieve greater food security. Its goal is to increase the purchasing power of beneficiary groups and to encourage self-advancement among the rural population.

The National Agricultural Extension and Research Programme (PNVRA) aims at raising farmers’ productivity by improving their technical competence. The Decentralised Rural Credit Fund supports rural dwellers’ economic initiatives.

Women are involved in a number of promising agricultural developments such as pepper and watermelon growing, horticulture and biological agriculture.

In the area of animal husbandry, poultry keeping and pig-breeding are activities habitually performed by women. These occupations are now receiving better support through measures designed to reduce stock mortality.

A project for the installation of community tele-centres has been developed with the aim of promoting integrated development in rural areas and of facilitating rural dwellers’ access to information on new technologies. The object is to provide information and communication services with a view to improving rural dwellers’ quality of life, creating employment- and income-generating activities and preventing the drift from the countryside.

In the area of trade, activities have been undertaken in cooperation with businesswomen’s organizations with a view to deriving greater benefit of new export opportunities provided by the American Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).
The decentralised financial sector has been growing rapidly. Some measures for the protection of savings have been introduced.

The National Employment Fund has developed integration, information and support to self-employment programmes.

The establishment of several savings cooperatives run by women in both urban and rural settings is to be noted.

5. **Women and the environment**

The Government has embarked upon a process of rational and sustainable management of its forests and natural resources. The Sectoral Forests/Environment Programme (PSFE) sets out to provide a coherent framework for all activities conducive to the attainment of the country’s forestry and fauna preservation policies.

Women are strongly involved in the management of community forests.

The National Environment Management Plan (NEMAP) includes a “Women in environmental programmes” section. Its goal is the integration of women in environmental programmes and the promotion by women of the use of environmental protection methods.
PART THREE : Institutional Development

This part concerns institutional mechanisms and provides sex-disaggregated data.

1. Institutional mechanisms

Questions pertaining to the status of women are entrusted to the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, which, besides its Secretary-General, General Inspectorate and Specialized Technical Boards, commands the following resources:
- External services in the provinces, departments and districts, which ensure extensive coverage of the national territory by the Ministry’s activities;
- Rural group leaders, whose role is to provide leadership and guidance to grass-roots women’s groups in their various activities;
- Women’s Advancement Centres, neighbourhood structures that provide leadership and training in simple trades and dispense informal education to women and girls;
- An Appropriate Technology Centre, which sets out to reduce the hardship of women’s work and to popularize appropriate technologies;
- A National Women’s Observatory, established by Decree No. 97/068 of 4 May 1998 setting up the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, which is responsible for monitoring the development of the situation of women in Cameroon. The document formally establishing the Observatory and defining its remit has been drafted but is not yet operational;
- Focal points for the representation of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs in certain other Ministries in line with the across-the-board approach.

The Ministry also works with women’s associations, which can enter into partnership agreements with it. Certain NGOs and associations participate in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Beijing Platform. Thus, for example, the Association Fighting Violence against Women (ALVF) is conducting awareness-raising activities among other associations and NGOs.

The Ministry’s budget allocation has genuinely improved over the last few years, rising from 390 million CFAF in the financial year 1996/1997 to 3 538 million CFAF in 2004.

This budget increase reflects the interest taken by the State in reducing gender disparities.

2. Sex-disaggregated data

The main national data collection institutions – the Central Bureau for Censuses and Population Studies (BUCREP) and the National Statistical Institute (INS) – are placed under the control of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Programming and Territorial Development (MINEPAT). They are responsible for carrying out operations connected with the collection, analysis and publication of statistical data throughout the national territory. The data relate to many different fields, including the economy, politics and social affairs.
Numerous sex-disaggregated databases exist at national level, making it possible to monitor and evaluate progress achieved in all areas of the nation’s life. Among others, we may mention the following:
- The multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS 2000);
- The “social logbook” (TBS 99) on the situation of women and children in Cameroon in 1999;
- The household surveys (ECAM I and II) conducted in 1996 and 1999, respectively;
- The statistical yearbooks, which are compilations of data drawn from various surveys and data collection exercises conducted within public and semi-public administrations and in the private sector.

In addition, the United Nations Population Fund is supporting the Government of Cameroon in establishing a socio-demographic database that includes over 200 sex-disaggregated variables.
PART FOUR: Main challenges and action to address them

Among areas requiring future action, mention must be made of combating violence against women and improving women’s legal status.

1. **Combating violence against women**

A draft Act on measures to prevent sexist violence is being drafted.

The phenomenon of violence against women and girls is a social reality in Cameroon. It produces a negative impact on the victims, the perpetrators, the development of the family and, indeed, on the country as a whole.

An Act designed to combat violence against women and girls can be effective only if it takes account of the essential elements of our socio-cultural context.

Accordingly, the preparation of the draft Act has been guided by the following four major concerns:
- Translation into a legislative act of the Government’s affirmed political will to improve the well-being of women in particular and of the family in general, with a view to achieving a more just and more harmonious society;
- Bringing our legislation into line with the commitments undertaken, as well as with the regional and international human rights instruments ratified by our country, which essentially proclaim the rule of equality and the protection of the rights and freedoms of all individuals within society;
- Institutionalization of the role of various social actors (religious and traditional authorities, psychologists, social workers, civil society);
- The need to remove certain barriers that may hamper victims or witnesses of violence or social actors from coming to the fore.

The object of the Act is to introduce measures that will change ways of conduct, with punishment being only the ultimate recourse against recalcitrant or recidivist perpetrators of violent acts.

2. **Improving the legal status of women**

Among future action to be taken in this area, mention may be made of the preparation of a draft Code of the Person and the Family. The draft is currently undergoing the process of validation prior to being submitted to the National Assembly. It incorporates provisions favourable to the advancement of women (on marriageable age, matrimonial regimes, inheritance, etc.).