CUBA


COUNTRY: CUBA

PART ONE

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

From the outset, through its social programme the Cuban Government has sought to introduce changes that improve the lot of the entire population and more especially that of women and children. Cuba had already satisfactorily met the goals proposed at summits and conferences on women even before the proclamation of the first Decade for Women. Nevertheless, these goals have always provided an incentive to continue improving the situation of women in every area of life.

Cuban women arrived at the Beijing Conference with solid achievements in the economic, social, political and family spheres, consistent with the world conferences and summits on women, social development, and population and development, among others.

At the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, the Cuban Government undertook to proceed with the implementation of the Platform for Action. In April 1997, the National Action Plan for Follow-up of the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women was adopted. This Decree-Law of the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba includes measures to remove obstacles and create material, spiritual, educational and ethical conditions that favour the continuous development and improvement of the situation of women in Cuba.

The Action Plan arose out of a proposal by the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), as a result of a seminar on “The Cuban Women of Beijing in 2000” attended by ministers, heads or representatives of institutions, experts and NGOs. The Plan entered into effect on 7 April 1997. It comprises 90 measures relating to the adaptation of the areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action to the specific circumstances, needs and interests of Cuban women. It contains special measures relating to employment, education, legislation, health, participation in politics, women in the media, and sexual and reproductive rights.

The Plan establishes responsibility for its implementation, together with reporting requirements. It applies to the corresponding state entities and institutions at national, provincial and municipal levels, in accordance with the country’s political and administrative structure.

According to the preamble, “this Action Plan, which summarizes the feelings and the political will of the State of the Republic of Cuba, is to constitute the cornerstone of the
development of policies for women and to provide continuity in the advancement and
development of gender equality in our country”.

The Action Plan has been disseminated through the agencies of the State, as well as through the grass-roots organizations of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), its women and family counselling centres and the women’s affairs departments of Cuban universities. It has also been publicized in the media. Responsibility for evaluating the Plan and monitoring its implementation lies at the highest level, with the Executive Secretary of the Council of Ministers, working in collaboration with the Federation of Cuban Women.

National seminars on the follow-up, review and evaluation of the tasks set out in the Action Plan, in which each government agency at every level had to report on the implementation of the measures within its competence, were held in 1999 and in 2001. The work accomplished in the various areas of concern and the challenges, direct and indirect, were critically examined. These seminars were attended by Ministers, heads of agencies, institutions, NGOs and organizations, experts, the Secretariat and officials of the FMC, and representatives of other invited social institutions. They produced reports which included a review of progress with the implementation of the measure, a corresponding analysis and recommendations for the future, based on the accounting given by the ministries and institutions involved in carrying out the tasks assigned under the Plan.

The Federation of Cuban Women, an NGO created 43 years ago at the initiative of the women themselves, has accumulated extensive experience in defending women’s interests, as well as in the theoretical development of the notion of equality and the gender perspective in the life of the nation. With its membership of over four million, representing 86.3 % of all women aged 14 or over, it is well known for its broad experience of working on behalf of women as the national mechanism for their advancement. The Action Plan reinforces this mandate by establishing close coordination with the above-mentioned Secretary so that any measure designed to ensure its full implementation can be taken in good time.

Cuba, the first country to sign and the second to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, is preparing its Fifth Periodic Report for the CEDAW Committee, a task in which both central government and the organizations and institutions of civil society associated with the implementation of the Convention are participating. A Cuban expert is acting as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

The Cuban Government is working on the preparation of the Fifth Report in compliance with CEDAW and with a strong sense of political commitment. During this period significant progress has been made in advancing the status of women and strengthening the policies directed towards that end. The analyses of the National Action Plan for Follow-up of the Beijing Conference and the recommendations resulting from Cuba’s Fourth CEDAW Report and the various summits and conferences have generated challenges which have met with a direct practical response.

Thus, various studies made by the National Statistics Office, in particular its survey of the use of time, to evaluate scientifically the participation in family life of the individuals who make up the family unit and consider what measures might be appropriate in this respect, have found
practical application. In response to the Action Plan, within the context of the Local Human Development Programme, a comparative study of the wages earned by men and women in Granma province was carried out and is now in the analysis stage prior to generalization. Moreover, with a view to improving the tools for assessing female participation in various areas, a system of gender indicators is being developed. Work is also being done to improve the statistics on rural activities, disaggregated by gender, and for this purpose a study, now in the generalization phase, has been carried out with the Labour Research Institute.

In order to ensure that women are better represented at managerial level, an integral promotion strategy defining the responsibilities of the various institutions in this respect has been outlined.

Further efforts have been made to improve the legislation in order to achieve full equality of opportunity and potential for men and women. Thus, the Labour and Family Codes are now in the analysis and implementation stage and, on 13 August 2003, Decree-Law No. 234 on working women’s maternity,” whose Article 16 establishes the possibility of maternity leave being shared between the father and the mother in the interests of improved child development, was promulgated. Post-natal leave extends to the first year of life.

In order to familiarize Cuban women throughout the country with the contents of this important convention, in cooperation with UNICEF, an annotated version of the CEDAW has been prepared and published. This has been studied in the FMC’s more than 74,000 grass-roots organizations, which have received on average one copy of the publication for approximately every 80 women. Moreover, the document is being used as a source of reference in the 175 women and family counselling centres spread across the country, as well as in the women's affairs departments of the universities. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has been published for similar purposes and use.

All the measures adopted, some of which are described at greater length in Part Two, are directed towards mainstreaming the gender perspective across the country’s plans and programmes.
PART TWO

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

The adoption of the Action Plan for Follow-up of the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women has been a particularly important aspect of the achievement of the objective of mainstreaming the gender perspective in policies and programmes for the advancement of women across the board. Due to space limitations, we shall mention only a selection of those contained in the Plan.

I. Women, the Economy and Employment

The Government’s macroeconomic policies of a popular nature, for the benefit of the people. As well as being direct beneficiaries of these policies, women have played a leading part in them. In the labour sector, compensation mechanisms have been introduced without affecting social security and welfare.

Employment policy includes plans and programmes of direct benefit to women, not only by providing them with ever expanding opportunities for employment but also by facilitating access to education and training designed to enable them to obtain better jobs and promotion to managerial positions. This policy, which guarantees equal access to jobs and resources for women on the same footing as men, was further strengthened by the adoption of the National Action Plan for Follow-up of the United Nations World Conference on Women.

The integration of women into economic life is a priority for the Government and an area of special concern. The national female labour force has tended to increase steadily and now amounts to 44.9% of the total labour force in the public sector, which provides most of the jobs in Cuba.

The women’s employment committees, established in the 1980s and revitalized at every level, are an example of affirmative action aimed at ensuring women’s participation in the economy, preventing discriminatory labour practices and providing opportunities for technical training. These committees are chaired by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and also include representatives of the Cuban Trade Union Federation and the Federation of Cuban Women.

The difficulties experienced by the domestic economy have dealt women a double blow since they have simultaneously affected industries such as textiles, which employ large numbers of women, and led to a reduction in certain community domestic support services, the effects of which have also been felt mainly by women. These services are being gradually restored, as far as possible, for the benefit of the working family.

The National Employment Programme takes into account the country’s economic requirements and the interests of men and women; it is based on an assessment of labour and
human resources and gives priority to the recruitment of women and young people to do the new jobs created. As a result of the action taken, the unemployment rate for women has been reduced to 4%.

Since 2001, Cuba has been developing a new comprehensive education strategy for young people participating in employment programmes whose goals are education, health and culture.

Women make up the majority of graduates of the Teacher Training Programme: 71.7% are primary schoolmistresses. They also account for 62.2% of general basic secondary teachers and 74.9% of all teachers of computing.

Girls are also in the majority in the Social Workers Training Programme and constitute 77.2% of all those already in work.

The opportunities for training, reskilling and vocational education are steadily expanding for both men and women. In Cuba there is a trend towards the feminization of the technical workforce: women make up 66.4% of the total in this category, occupying high-level positions in science, technology and the professions.

Women have played a prominent role in science and technology during the five-year period. This highly qualified workforce today makes up 51.3% of the total number of science system workers and 56.8% of technical and professional personnel. The number of women research workers is rising and they now account for 48% of the total.

In recent years, it has also become necessary for women to participate in other sectors of the economy. A considerable number of women industrial and production sector workers are doing non-traditional jobs, having been trained in the new advanced technologies needed for national development.

Every year, central government and the Federation of Cuban Women analyse and refine their employment strategies for women in order to identify new sources and options for meeting the existing needs.

Cuban women belong to various mass and social organizations, evidence of the leading role they play in the national economy. Thus, they account for 45.3% of all members of the Cuban Trade Union Federation (CTC) and 49% of its officials and are well represented on its National Council (47.6%). Five national trade unions have women leaders, and 52.8% of trade union branches are led by women. This broad presence enables them to initiate and influence the making of decisions, including those that affect the interests of working women.

Women workers, mainly technical personnel and professionals in various fields and sectors, have also joined other social organizations such as the National Association of Cuban Economists (ANEC), where they make up 51.2% of members, and the Union of Cuban Architects and Engineers (UNAIC), 47.8% of whose members are women. Women workers,
technical personnel, professionals, and scientists, together with housewives, also account for 35.8% of the membership of the National Association for Innovation and Rationalization.

These associations are prominent in the struggle for economic development under embargo conditions and have shown how the level of organization achieved has made it possible to seek solutions to the most intractable problems of production, services, the environment and sustainable development.

Working women have numerous rights that improve their quality of life. Thus, under the Labour Code (Law No. 48), entitlement to social security benefits on retiring, falling sick or becoming disabled or otherwise incapable of working, as well as entitlement to paid leave, is something enjoyed by all Cuban workers, both men and women. The amount of each of these benefits is proportionate to the worker’s wages.

The right to health and safety protection in the workplace, including protection of the reproductive function, is another feature of Cuba’s labour legislation. The State has undertaken to establish all the arrangements and conditions necessary to guarantee this protection for women workers. The existing corps of experts is swelled every year by hundreds of newly trained graduates who are responsible for monitoring and ensuring compliance with this legislation.

Protection for the woman worker, as well as for the working mother, is a priority. The recently approved Working Women’s Maternity Act (Decree-Law No. 234 of 13 August 2003) includes a revolutionary proposal that recognizes the role of the family in the education of the children and the inculcation of values, namely, approval of the sharing of leave between mothers and fathers by mutual agreement and in accordance with the needs and characteristics of each couple, once the breastfeeding period is over.

The employment programme gives priority to single mothers who are the household’s sole support. Economic assistance is provided for those in need who are unable to find work and have the right and access to training or job skills development, as the case may be. The Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MTSS) are addressing these issues by systematically evaluating benefits, training, placement and the relevant conditions. Between 2000 and the present, jobs have been found for more than 6,000 single mothers.

The existing social programmes include one which provides assistance for all working mothers with severely disabled children requiring constant care. The State pays such mothers the wage they were earning at the time they were obliged to stop working, while guaranteeing that their years of service and their right to a full wage will be respected.

The Labour Code and the wages system ensure compliance with the Equal Remuneration Convention ratified on 13 January 1954. However, the statistics system suffers from a lack of wage data disaggregated by sex. The results of a study of this question, carried out by the National Statistics Office in the six provinces in which the human development programme is being implemented, are now being analysed with a view to their generalization, in response to the National Action Plan for Follow-up of the Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing.
II. Women and Health

Health care is free and universal. Last year, the State allocated 1,923,032,100 CU (Cuban pesos), or 170.92 CU per capita, for this purpose. Comprehensive medical care under the family doctor system has national coverage, taking in 99.2% of the population.

The low rates of infant and maternal mortality are unquestionable achievements of the Cuban health system, the former having been reduced to 6.3 per 1,000 live births, placing Cuba among the world leaders in this category. Maternal mortality is 41.7 per 100,000 live births. Some 99.9% of births take place in hospital centres, in a safe environment with medical specialists in attendance. There are 267 maternity homes to ensure a safe delivery for expectant mothers for whom there is no hospital within easy reach.

There are several specialized programmes for women and children whose achievements are reflected in figures and statistics that place Cuba near the top of the table, developed countries included, in this respect. Sexual and reproductive health is a priority of the health care system and is regarded as a woman’s right. Abortion is legal and is carried out in medical establishments under safe conditions.

There are specific programmes on sexual and reproductive health with a strong gender awareness component. The National Sex Education Programme has national coverage and there is a National Centre that offers services to the public.

The achievements in the health sector include legislation and programmes that benefit women and children such as: in-hospital delivery, which has a 99.9% take-up, safe and free abortion available to all women over the age of 14, programmes for the prevention of breast and cervico-uterine cancer, mental health, care for the older adult, the prevention of non-infectious chronic diseases, health and quality of life, infectious diseases, prevention of alcoholism and dependency on other drugs, mother and child, comprehensive health care for the adolescent, “responsible parenthood”, HIV/AIDS/STD prevention and control, prevention of anaemia, breastfeeding, family planning, sex education, etc.

HIV/AIDS is a priority for the Cuban health care system and all the services provided are free and accessible. Cuba is one of the countries with the lowest infection rates, only 0.02% of seropositives. There is a special programme for dealing with this problem which involves both health care bodies and community organizations.

Despite the adverse impact of the economic, financial and commercial embargo on women’s health, due to the consequent shortage of medical supplies, laboratory equipment, etc., thanks to the broad coverage of the specialized programmes the number of abortions is tending to decline, along with the incidence of deaths from cervico-uterine and breast cancer.

At the same time, greater provision has been made for Cuba’s family planning services whose coverage has been extended, despite the fact that, for the same reasons as mentioned above, there is a shortage of specialized contraceptives and condoms; sex education is also being expanded and incorporated into the curricula at all levels, while the coverage of infant-and-
juvenile gynaecological consultations is being broadened to provide specialized care for this segment of the population.

Adult women can consult specialists on the change of life and the menopause. Although coverage is increasing, calcium supplements for women and hormonal preparations for HRT are in short supply owing to the circumstances mentioned above, which are making it difficult to obtain these products.

There is an extensive voluntary movement consisting of more than 70,000 community health workers organized by the Federation of Cuban Women who encourage women to make use of the services offered by the Cuban health care system, thereby giving a powerful boost to their delivery.

Although the achievements are unquestionable and the indicators outstanding, the health care sector faces difficulties associated with the main obstacle, namely, the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the Government of the United States, which is preventing the full development of our plans. These difficulties include restrictions on the purchase of drugs and products manufactured or patented in that country that would improve the standard of health of women and the population in general, shortages of diagnostic means of detecting cervico-uterine cancer, shortages of nutritional supplements for expectant mothers and children with low birth weight, shortages of drugs for diabetic (insulin-dependent) women, shortages of sanitary tampons the demand for which cannot be met by the national system for lack of raw materials, etc.

III. **Education and Training of Women**

The education plans provide for non-sexist education. From a very early age, boys and girls are familiarized with the existence of the male and female genders. There is close cooperation between teaching institutions and organizations to ensure that the school/family/community system works to instill a comprehensive general culture and positive values in the new generations.

Only 0.2% of the population of Cuba is still illiterate and of these 39.6% are women. Despite limited resources, the measures adopted in this sector have made it possible to consolidate the progress previously made. In 2003, more than 3 billion pesos, representing 23.8% of the total budget, went towards financing the education system.

On average, the adult population has completed the ninth grade of education, with the possibility of progressing further. Through the adult education subsystem, the Ministry of Education gives priority to the provision of educational facilities for women with different levels of schooling, using regular and periodic tutorial courses to meet the specific needs of this segment of the population.

The programme to bring women into the classroom is an example of the support provided by the State and the systematic efforts of the Federation of Cuban Women, together with the Ministry of Education. In 2002-2003, of those enrolled in the various levels of
education 55.7% were women. In language teaching, women made up 60.2% of the total enrolment.

The **Alternative Community Programmes**, which have been designed as an alternative education, have benefited thousands of women throughout the island and are organized on the basis of the needs and interests of the participants. They deal with such subjects as care for the elderly, family education, issues relating to the “For Life” programme, environmental protection, health, “green” medicine, handicrafts, sex education, computing, etc.

Various study options are offered on equal terms for those living in both urban and inaccessible rural areas, by facilitating the opening of classrooms for undereducated women, mainly housewives. Another alternative form of study available on equal terms to men and women is the Cultural Self-Improvement Programme for the Sugar Agroindustry (task “Álvaro Reinoso”), 35.5% of whose graduates are women. Steps have been taken to facilitate the inclusion of all the women living in rural areas in this programme.

The school drop-out rate continues to decline thanks to the measures taken to strengthen the educational work and functioning of the institutions and to improve the curricula and, within this framework, the efforts to ensure a non-sexist education aimed at adolescents, young people and families.

Basic secondary education is undergoing a profound transformation that is affecting all the country’s schools and a pupil/teacher ratio of 15 is guaranteed. In this branch of education school projects based on an analysis of the needs and interests of the pupils, the teachers and the family have been implemented so as to contextualize the work of sex education with reference to the situations encountered.

With the support of male and female helpers from various professions and organizations, the FMC’s nationwide network of 175 women and family counselling centres contributes to the important function of providing a discussion and advisory service for women and families. Gender training is an important part of its work. Courses that provide women with various skills of use to them in their social and working lives are also being developed.

The integral self-improvement course for young people, set up two years ago, has had an enormous impact on families, the community, students and teachers. More than 102,000 young people between the ages of 17 and 29 who were neither working nor studying have been enrolled in the 514 centres that exist throughout the country, where they receive pre-university training. At present, women make up 65.7% of the total number enrolled. Altogether, more than 34,318 have entered higher education in 20 different fields of study. For these men and women studying is their job and they receive a monthly allowance of 100 pesos from the State.

In the last five years, the country’s technical workforce has been feminized, with women accounting for more than 60% of the annual number of graduates. The trend should continue for the next few years, since the proportion of women among the students enrolled and in the new intake will remain within this range.
The branches with the highest proportion of women are the humanities, the natural sciences and education. In the medical sciences, for several years more than 70% of those enrolling and graduating have been women.

In higher education, about 50% of the teaching staff are women and in several universities the figure is much higher. In academic year 2002-2003, the number of higher education teachers doubled with the addition of almost 6,000 more women, this increase being mainly due to the universalization of university education, accompanied by the creation of more than 160 municipal university centres and increased enrolment.

Through the curriculum and family education, the Cuban national education system is working to deliver non-sexist education by instilling values at school and implementing the National Sex Education Programme. Methodological guidelines, which include the classroom treatment of issues such as solidarity, mutual respect, gender equality, love as the basis of sexual relationships, etc. are being applied.

Since 1959, the education project has received special attention, with everyone being given the opportunity to study and disparities and inequalities being eliminated. New programmes whose objectives include social work aimed at the entire population, raising the general standard of education and a better prepared younger generation are currently being developed. The computing programme and the audiovisual programme, like the education channel, cover sex education topics.

Family education to encourage child development is a national priority, precisely because it is at that age and in the home that the foundations are laid for the entire subsequent development of the human being.

In view of these and other considerations, after 10 years of scientific research, since school year 1992-1993 the educational welfare programme “Educate your Child” has been implemented throughout Cuba. The aim is to prepare the family to achieve the all-round development of the children from birth to age 6. Thus, it is the family that systematically engages with the educational process, thereby strengthening its educational role.

The programme relies on the support of more than 100,000 voluntary activists, men and women whose main task is to develop, together with the family, activities involving the children and to help mothers, fathers and other family members to ensure the continuity of the educational process in the home so as to control the quality of the activities. It currently covers 70% of the population from birth to age 6, the remainder receiving institutional attention in children’s circles and nursery schools. Half the children that benefit from the programme are girls. These results have made it possible to achieve a total coverage of 95.5% of the population in this age bracket.

Some 1,892 community television and video viewing facilities have been set up in isolated rural settlements without access to the national grid by using solar panels to supply the power. Over 500,000 men and women benefit from the use of these facilities.
There are two education channels with regular programming designed for students and the general public and over 5,450 hours of broadcasting, including 2,052 hours of tele-classes and other educational programmes aimed at students. The signal reaches all the country’s provincial capitals and about 7,007,000 people.

The FMC’s women and family counselling centres and the women’s affairs departments of the higher education centres play an important role in education and value building. They undertake various educational and advisory activities aimed at the family in the community.

Particularly noteworthy during the review period has been the implementation of programmes aimed at developing a well-rounded general education. More specifically, among those targeted at the Cuban family, it is worth mentioning the Family Library Programme, which includes a selection of 60 important books by Cuban and foreign authors.

At the same time, there has been an increase in the radio and television time and programmes devoted to family education and guidance, the aim of which is to inform parents and to motivate and persuade them to educate their children properly.

Prominent among the new programmes are:

- The television programme “Cuando una Mujer”, a joint project of the Federation of Cuban Women and the Cuban Radio and Television Institute. Aimed at men and women, it offers guidance on family relationships with due emphasis on gender and also provides information and advice on sexual and reproductive health and family planning issues.
- The Audiovisual Programme of the Ministry of Education, under which every school has been supplied with television sets and video players, helps to prepare adults to provide children and adolescents, in the home and in the community, with guidance on sex education matters, attitude to life, etc.
- The project “Formal education for responsible sexual behaviour”, which dates from 1995, is helping to reinforce the National Sex Education Programme and is developing and establishing itself nationwide. It is intended to improve the preparation of adult family members and encourage their informed participation in the training of their offspring, in coordination with the schools.

IV.- Women and the media.

This is also an area covered by the National Action Plan, the aim being to ensure that the media project a fitting image of women and give them increased representation, from a fair and appropriate gender perspective, by breaking down barriers and stereotypes.

Closer attention has been paid to the training of men and women information professionals. These actions, taken jointly with the Federation of Cuban Women, the Union of Cuban Journalists and the Cuban Radio and Television Institute, have made it possible to train more than 500 specialists.
The recently created **Gender and Communication Department** at the José Martí International Institute of Journalism, an addition to the national training system for men and women information professionals, has stepped up its activities. An Intersectoral and Interdisciplinary Working Group has been set up in the Cuban Radio and Television Institute for the purpose of monitoring the depiction and presence of women in the media and framing policies that promote a balanced image of women.

The weekly television programme “Cuando una Mujer”, which has raised public awareness of issues relating to the objective and subjective factors involved in discriminatory attitudes towards women, has continued to be broadcast.

The return of the specialized magazine **Mujeres** and the tabloid **Muchacha**, published quarterly in runs of one hundred thousand copies, are making it possible to develop a public debate on a very wide range of women’s rights issues and the problems of the modern Cuban family. The women’s sections of the four Cuban on-line newspapers and the appearance of the Mujeres web site have also made it possible to popularize notions of gender equality in the new media.

The inclusion of gender issues in the social communication course is providing an analytical tool for the new information professionals. The creation of the Mariposa collection by the Oriente publishing house to disseminate academic gender studies and the works of women authors and the publication by other publishing houses of texts on the situation and status of women in Cuba constitute important socializing events in a country in which on average education ends at the ninth grade.

The holding of the Ibero-American Conference on Women and Communication enabled information professionals to acquaint themselves with the latest trends in non-sexist journalism. Highly qualified specialists from various institutions are available to train the country’s information professionals in non-sexist language. Public welfare campaigns using various media have prioritized the issues of aware and responsible parenthood, the sharing of domestic tasks within the family, non-violence, sex education, etc.

The “For Life” campaign, coordinated with the Ministry of Education, the Cuban Radio and Television Institute, the Federation of Cuban Women and other institutions, has been notable for its aesthetic quality and in-depth treatment of the issues.

**V. Women in power and decision-making**

This is one of the areas in which major advances are being made, despite the challenges that still face Cuban women in climbing the employment ladder.

The integrated female promotion strategy calls for the participation of all the State agencies and nongovernmental organizations and institutions in its implementation. Its objectives include the social recognition and dissemination of the qualities of the woman manager through improved publicity campaigns. Evidence of its effectiveness is the significant increase in the female presence in economic and political life. Thus, in Parliament there has been a 9 point...
increase as compared with the previous legislature and 35.9% of deputies are now women, a very high indicator surpassed only in five Nordic countries which operate a quota system.

The personnel committees are mechanisms set up by the Cuban State in all its agencies to make administrative appointments. There is a special working arrangement in force which constitutes an affirmative action measure. Whenever a vacancy is filled, for which a minimum of two applicants is required, at least one of them must now be a woman.

This objective meshes in with the tasks and functions of the women’s employment committees, which systematically evaluate the representation of women, their access to reserve lists at every level, and the obstacles to their progress.

For many years there has been progress, steady since 1996, in the promotion of women to managerial posts in the civil state sector, as can be appreciated from the following series of figures: in 1996 women managers accounted for 30.1% of the national total, in 1998 the figure was 31.1%, in 2000 it was 33.3%, and it is now 34.5 %, the highest level so far achieved. In absolute terms, the total number of women managers amounts to 95,314. All the country’s provinces have raised this indicator.

At present, there are six women ministers, in charge of the Ministries of Science, Technology and Environment, Internal Trade, Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration, Audit and Inspection, Light Industry, and Finances and Prices, respectively.

In 1995, there were 12 women deputy ministers, whereas now there are 33 and in recent years the appointments have been diversified to include what, for women, are non-traditional departments such as the Ministries of the Iron and Steel and Mechanical Engineering Industry, Information Technology and Communications, Transport, Construction, Agriculture, and Civil Aviation.

All this illustrates the achievements of the strategy for the promotion of women.
PART THREE

Institutional development

As explained above, the Cuban national mechanism for the advancement of women, responsible for following up and implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and subsequently orchestrating the corresponding National Action Plan, is the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), an NGO granted special consultative status by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

When the United Nations, within the framework of the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985), urged governments to create national machineries, FMC already had behind it more than 16 years of solid and sustained work, with an experience and practice which had turned it into an organization with expertise in women’s affairs and an essential and mandatory source of reference for the Government in the design of policies, programmes and legislation targeted at women or having an impact on them, with the backing of the vast majority of Cuban women.

The FMC came into being at the initiative of the women themselves and fights for full equality for women, for their integration into every social sphere on equal terms and for the promotion of gender issues and the empowerment of women.

In addition to a National Committee, FMC has 14 provincial and 169 municipal committees. At the grass-roots level, its members, who now number four million (86.3% of women over the age of 14), are grouped into 74,000 chapters, structured on the territorial principle of area of residence.

The organization is self-financed from its members’ dues. In carrying out its task of promoting policies and programmes it coordinates with the sector ministries responsible for the implementation of projects that favour the integration of women into the country’s economic, political and social life, with due allowance for the gender perspective.

For example, within the local human development context, the design of production-oriented projects with a gender perspective has been encouraged and the FMC, a theoretical and methodological reference for gender, has provided training in the subject for about 300 programme managers and specialists, more than half of them men. More than 1,400 new jobs for women have been created in the areas concerned and 32 women and family counselling centres have been institutionally strengthened.

The women’s organization has encouraged cooperation with the agencies of the Central Administration of the State and other institutions and organizations of Cuban civil society in the development of mass programmes for the general advancement of women, their entry into the labour market, education, health, culture, and the dissemination and promotion of positive values in family relations and in the new generations, through agreements and joint action plans.
Joint action plans have been agreed between the FMC and the Ministry of Agriculture (MINAGRI). In 1998, women’s committees were set up in all its services and economic branches and the results have been very useful for systematically analysing and evaluating the implementation of the National Action Plan and other measures by this department.

Similar plans have been agreed with the Sugar Ministry (MINAZ), the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (CITMA), the Ministry of Fisheries (MINP), in four Cuban provinces, the Ministry of Light Industry (MINIL), and the Ministry of Internal Trade (MINCIN).

The women’s organization has also signed working agreements with social and non-governmental organizations such as the Cuban Trade Union Federation (CTC), the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP) and the National Association for Innovation and Rationalization (ANIR), all aimed at encouraging, promoting and improving the participation of Cuban women in the labour market and their active presence in the country’s economic, political and social development.

The FMC has assisted with the gender training of the experts and officials of governmental and non-governmental entities who are working closely together for the advancement of women in every field. There are special advisory programmes which are already bearing fruit, with an agenda and language aimed at effectively assimilating and understanding gender issues and securing their inclusion in policies, programmes and projects.

There are also mechanisms set up for this purpose, such as:

The **Women’s Affairs Department Programme**, whose chief task is to spread the gender approach across university teaching, research and extramural studies. Established in 1990 at the initiative of the FMC, the programme now already runs departments at 23 centres of higher education throughout the provinces and employs over 700 professionals in different specialties.

The work of these departments is aimed at addressing gender disparities in education. With respect to teaching activities, there has been progress with the incorporation of the gender approach into disciplines and courses as important as sex education at all levels (from primary school onwards), general teacher training, psychology, pedagogy, philosophy and history, Spanish-literature, social communication, economics, etc.

The departments offer postgraduate courses and in the last two years have trained about 7,300 teachers in different provinces in the gender approach, an activity which has been extended to include groups of students, community activists, civil servants and others in a position to exert influence or help to raise awareness and project images of gender equality. Each year, 3,000 people from different institutions (professionals, students, etc.) participate in some departmental activity concerning gender and related issues. Gender training courses for teachers, technical personnel, civil servants and community activists have also been delivered.

The offer of gender diplomas and a master’s course in the subject is another recent development. The departments’ experts also provide various institutions and bodies with
technical and methodological advice on gender equality issues, with special emphasis on the need to break down stereotypes.

The FMC’s Centre for Women’s Studies (CEM) carries out and promotes research into the gender approach, methodologically coordinates the work of the women’s affairs departments and, jointly with the Ministry of Higher Education, helps to institutionalize the gender approach in university teaching. During the review period, two national workshops and one international workshop for women’s affairs departments, programmes and centres have been held. At these workshops a balance-sheet of the achievements of the gender approach, the obstacles it faces and the prospects for its introduction was drawn up.

The work of the CEM has resulted in valuable contributions and advances. It has collaborated with the Ministry of Education to improve materials and in the actual training of professionals, with a view to eliminating gender disparities in education. A tabloid and a gender reading list, intended to serve as a bibliography for teachers, have also been prepared.

The FMC’s Women and Family Counselling Centres, which are linked with the women’s affairs departments, provide services, both individual and collective, for women, families and the community on the basis of an analysis of interests and needs. The courses taught in the centres are of great value since they incorporate topics such as equality, gender, self-esteem, etc. The centres provide spaces for discussion and guidance which, with the aid of volunteers from various professions and bodies, perform the important function of advising women and families and promoting just and fair relations. There are 175 of these centres spread all over the country, with at least one in each municipality.

The National Sex Education Centre (CENESEX) arose out of the need continuously to improve the national education system since it was considered important to include in the curricula, starting with the primary grades, various topics related to sex education, treated from both the biological and socio-ethical standpoints, on the basis of a study of nature and the human organism. It was this centre that was entrusted with organizing the World Congress of Sexology, and the fact that this event was held in Cuba constitutes recognition of the progress made by the country in this field.

The FMC coordinates the National Group for the Prevention and Treatment of Violence in the Family and the National Family Group, and its President heads the Standing Committee for Children, Young People and Equal Rights for Women of the People’s National Assembly (Cuban Parliament), a body whose wide-ranging work has produced proposals such as, during the review period, that mentioned above relating to maternity.

The Cuban Network of Institutions for the Support of Rural Women has been functioning continuously for eleven years, since being established in the region at the request of the FAO. It too is coordinated by the FMC and promotes development cooperation on behalf of peasant women and women farm and fishery workers.

The action taken to achieve a correct gender approach radiates in all directions, and from school onwards a continuous scientific effort is being made to promote a non-sexist and non-
exclusive education through the teaching process, textbooks and extracurricular activities. The spread of the parents for education movement has made it possible to acquaint the community with the development of the non-sexist educational teaching process and has enabled the school, in its turn, to impress these approaches on the family.
PART FOUR

In its comments, the CEDAW Committee of Experts has acknowledged the adverse effects of the Helms Burton Act and the economic, trade and financial embargo imposed on Cuba by the United States Government on the full implementation of the Convention and the Platform for Action, which is placing a particularly heavy material and psychological burden on women.

In the last five years, these measures have been applied more stringently than ever and the economic, political and biological aggression against Cuba has increased. Cuba has been included in the list of “terrorist states” on the basis of false arguments and unscrupulous lies. This new and outrageous injustice constitutes one more threat which, together with the embargo and acts of aggression, is undermining Cuba’s ability to achieve the objectives set out in the National Action Plan for Follow-up of the Fourth Beijing Conference and CEDAW principles, as a result of which it has been obliged to make an extra effort to ensure that they are met.

The adverse circumstances of the embargo have mainly affected women and particularly ordinary family life. They manifest themselves over a wide range of sectors, from the most everyday to those in which the country’s future development is being compromised. The International Tribunal of Cuban Women Against the Embargo, held before a prestigious jury of men and women from different parts of the world, heard the case and, in clear acknowledgment of the adverse effects, found in favour of the accusers.

The consequences are unfortunate for all Cuban women, but especially for those living in rural areas. The shortages of fuel, sanitary and cleaning products, transport, food, etc. are making it difficult to reconcile working life with the demands of the family and children and restricting the opportunities for personal development.

Cuban women professionals, research workers and scientists have seen the process of scientific exchange between experts and institutions adversely affected, while at the same time the opportunities for acquiring the technologies, equipment and inputs that would enable them to participate more effectively in scientific development, from which they benefit and to which they also contribute, have likewise been seriously restricted. They have likewise found themselves prevented from participating in training, courses and scientific occasions which involve visiting United States laboratories. Moreover, Cuban women scientists have not infrequently had difficulty in obtaining access to projects, fellowships and grants offered by international organizations and bodies.

Despite this situation, which has been further aggravated by the still serious repercussions of the collapse of the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe and the current difficult and complex international economic climate, Cuba is continuing to apply its survival, resistance and development strategy, in every area of economic, political and social life. There has been further progress with the restructuring of the economy and new ways and means of mitigating the adverse effects, optimizing the use of material, financial and human resources and safeguarding what has been achieved have been devised. In the face of the most diverse difficulties, further progress has been made with the establishment and strengthening of mechanisms for protecting,
in particular, the rights, status and position of women. As a result of the efforts of the Cuban Government and people, the indicators of female participation in the economy and society continue to improve.

Of course, there are still objectives and targets to be met and in this connection Cuba has drawn up strategies which in general are contained in the 90 measures of the Action Plan for Follow-up of the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women and developed in the plans, programmes and projects involving Cuba’s agencies, organizations and institutions.

The country is still faced with the challenge of working to change people’s attitudes to the roles of men and women in society. This is a process, taking place at both public and private levels, in which education and everyday practice play a decisive part and all the social factors are involved.

Work is also proceeding on the introduction of ever more comprehensive checks, indicators and statistics in order to make it possible to establish the precise situation of women in any particular place and at any particular time.

Continuing efforts are being made to improve women’s access to managerial positions in order further to extend their participation in and influence on decision-making.

Much remains to be done since the Cuban Government and Cuban women are still not completely satisfied with what has been achieved. However, everyone is fully aware of the future challenges that Cuba will face and the official decision to continue meeting them.

The country also wants to go on working with the United Nations and the international community to promote the social advancement of women, as called for at the Beijing Conference and other summits and meetings. We are pleading for improved relations and understanding between nations and the establishment of the climate of peace and cooperation necessary for human survival, development and equality.