

# **EGYPT**

## ***PREFACE***

*The present report was prepared through expert group meetings, organized by the National Council for Women, and based on information gathered from all governmental institutions, as well as from a number of active non-governmental organizations.*

## **PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT**

The Egyptian Government is committed to the improvement of the socio-economic welfare of its population both women and men. Remarkable improvements have been observed in the empowerment of women in all areas of development.

In the last two decades, Egyptian women appear to have been acquiring new attributes as a result of their increased access to education, employment in the formal sector as well as exposure to globalization. There is a significant increase in the number of women occupying high managerial posts, and other positions previously closed to women. Examples of these positions include the posts of university presidents, judges and chairs of city councils. The post of Governor is still closed to women. Today's young generation of women have boundless aspirations and compete with their male peers in education as well as employment.

Egypt's achievements with regard to gender equality and women's empowerment during the last decade are actually a response to the following:

- The political will, as manifested in the repeated presidential directives to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and urging a wider participation of women in public life, as well as the instructions of the Prime Minister to all governmental institutions to ensure the elimination of discriminatory practices.
- The establishment of the National Council for Women (NCW) in 2000, as a government institution, affiliated with the office of the President of the Republic, responsible for proposing public policy matters to constitutional institutions on development and empowerment of women to enable them to play their role in society, and to integrate their efforts in comprehensive development programmes.

The National Council for Women, being the governmental institution responsible for the advancement of women, has developed a situation assessment of women that was used as a basis for a national strategy for the advancement of Egyptian women including an ambitious action plan, guided by the identified areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action for the empowerment of women, socially, economically and politically. All 12 areas of concern were addressed in a participatory manner with the government, the NGOs, the private sector and the donor community.

The Council became totally engaged, also in a participatory manner with line ministries, in developing the fifth national plan and established a standing mechanism to ensure gender mainstreaming in the National Plan (2002-2007). It has also developed gender-sensitive indicators to monitor the benefits that women draw from the implementation of the plan. The NCW is building its own and its partners' capacity by continuous training, networking with NGOs and ensuring shared decisions. In addition, NCW is developing methodologies with the different line ministries to develop a gender audit of national budgets.

The NCW has established an Ombudsman Office in 2002 to receive complaints from women with regard to gender discrimination. In two years, it has received 7000 complaints. The office has appointed lawyers and installed a toll-free hotline. The complaints deal with gender discrimination at the work place, personal status law, domestic violence and inheritance. The

Ombudsman has managed to solve around 40% of all complaints. It also assigns free of charge lawyers to poor women who cannot afford to file court cases. The Ombudsman in addressing violence against women cooperates with the Ministry of Social Affairs which has established shelters for women victims of violence.

Despite the fact that a woman has been elected as Deputy Speaker of the First House of the Parliament, yet the number of female parliamentarians is very low (2.2% in the First House and 5.7% in the Second House). The National Council for Women has established a Centre for the Political Empowerment of Women, as a pilot initiative. NCW, with several NGOs are exerting great efforts to increase the number of women candidates in the upcoming elections of the two Houses of Parliament and also in the local elected councils through a 3-pronged program aiming at:

- (1) Increasing the awareness of women of their civic and political rights
- (2) Building their capacity for participation in public and political life through both theoretical and practical training
- (3) Creating awareness in the society at large of the importance of the participation and contribution of women to development through a country-wide activity in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture.

The national efforts and the commitment of the Government to improve the status of women, as equal partners in the development of Egypt, are highlighted, not only by the establishment of NCW, but also by the establishment of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood and the National Council for Human Rights. Through these three instruments, the state is focusing on addressing gender disparities, by narrowing existing socio-economic gender gaps and addressing women's strategic needs including social, economic and political empowerment with the purpose of enhancing the status of all Egyptian women and to maximizing their contribution to the growth and development of Egypt.

The NCW has developed a gender-sensitive strategy, to be integrated into the National Strategic Plan for the Achievements of the Millennium Development Goals, through extensive expert group meetings which was discussed at large by more than 2700 participants during the 4<sup>th</sup> National Conference of NCW in March 2004.

The Egyptian government is currently amending the Nationality Law to guarantee total gender equality. This law is the top priority item on the agenda of the parliament and is expected to be passed within a week.

Egypt has established recently new Family Courts which will safeguard the human rights of women and their children. The Family courts will start operating in October 2004.

The Khul' law was also passed to grant women for the first time the right to divorce herself in court.

The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) started in 2003 a large program to combat female circumcision. It aims to free forty villages in Egypt from the practice.

Yet despite these advances and significant progress, gender inequalities persist and continue to provide policy makers with challenges, particularly in the areas of education where female

illiteracy rate is still high and gender inequalities persist as far as access, attainment and training are concerned. Also despite progress achieved in the area of health, lack of access to low cost health services and the absence of medical insurance schemes remain a challenge. The economic reforms including the structural adjustment programme, the privatization and the global economy challenges, have put women at a disadvantage in the area of economic empowerment. Therefore, community sensitization to help Egyptian women overcome the existing socially and culturally inherited constraints that hinder their active participation in development is urgently needed.

## **PART II**

### **A. Women and Poverty**

#### A.1. Successful Policies, Legislative Change and Programmes and Projects

Poverty reduction was declared as one of the main objectives of the long-term plan of Egypt, aiming at reducing poverty to 6% by Year 2022. Such objectives target both men and women.

The Ministry of Local Development was mandated to facilitate access of women to loans and to help them at founding micro and small enterprises. A recent bill passed by the ‘Shura’ Assembly (the second House of Parliament) supporting Women’s Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), as a measure to combat the high rates of unemployment, especially among women.

The NCW has, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Local Development and NGOs, launched the national campaign that helped women who were not in possession of any identification document obtain an ID card. This activity is helping a large percentage of women to access a number of services and credits. The Governorate of Qena has succeeded in ensuring that all women in the Governorate hold ID cards.

Other schemes to assist poor families are planned, as part of the overall national programme to overcome poverty, such as the proposed family insurance scheme administered by Bank Nasser. These are currently under review. Also, due to special efforts exerted by the NCW, children of female heads of households are now exempted from all school fees.

The Social Fund for Development is also increasing the number of women who have access to micro and small loans. Several NGOs are also engaged in providing micro and small loans to a large number of rural and urban women.

Promotional activities to create market opportunities through the organization of exhibitions thus enhancing the sale of goods and artifacts produced by women entrepreneurs and small-scale enterprises run by women are organized. Programmes also included major training components to help entrepreneurs acquire skills and enhance their productivity and also to create their awareness with regards to market pitfalls and share with them experts’ views in problem solving (The Women Business Development Centre – WBDC- of NCW). In this respect, the Council was particularly successful in enhancing the earning capacities of female heads of households, targeted as primary beneficiaries of a Small-Grants Program (SGP). The Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) has engaged, with the NCW on a project in support of Female Heads of Households (FHH) on a larger and more integrated scale. In this respect and to ensure appropriate targeting, NCW concluded an agreement with the Ministry of Local Development to use the spatially disaggregated data base developed by ‘*Shorouk*’, the ongoing national programme aiming at the advancement of Egyptian villages. A comprehensive census of all female heads of households was also undertaken to be used within the context of a national project to be developed for enhancing their status.

#### A.2. Obstacles Encountered and Remaining Gaps and Challenges

- The limited marketing opportunities of micro and small enterprises
- The low level of education and skills of the largest number of female heads of households

- The majority of women who work in the informal sector are not covered by health or social insurance schemes
- Female headed households tend to have working children who reinforce the vicious circle of poverty
- The Egyptian taxation system needs policy reform that considers lowering taxes levied on female heads of households.

### A.3. Lessons Learned

- It is important to have a macro government policy addressing all needs of female headed households: income, housing, social insurance, etc.
- Increased projects in support of female heads of household, rural women, and women in slum areas, who form the bulk of the informal sector are needed.
- More effort should be exerted in enforcing the law with regards to compulsory education of the girl child, in ensuring that literacy programmes provide them with better earnings opportunities (it is not often the case), as well as training and re-training of women to compete for remunerable jobs.
- The law should also be enforced with regards to establishing day care centers and other services (that are constitutional rights) thus allowing women to cope with their dual responsibilities at home and work, hence adding to their chances of bringing home an income.

## **B. Education and Training of Women**

### B.1. Successful Policies, Legislative Change and Programme and Projects

The General Authority for Illiteracy Eradication and Adults Education (affiliated to the Ministry of Education) succeeded in reducing female illiteracy rates from 50% in 1996 to 41.2% in 2004. NCW ensures the inclusion of literacy classes in all its pilot activities, in micro-credit projects, where women have to attend literacy classes as a pre- requisite to benefiting from their microfinance scheme.

The Government established a series of one-classroom schools for girls to promote female enrollment in schools. The number of one-classroom schools in 1994 amounted to 213 schools hosting 2926 female students, compared to 2649 schools in 2002 hosting 55315 female students. The Government also constructed community schools especially in poor/rural areas to provide affordable education for females. The number of community schools in 1994 was four schools only compared to 201 community schools in 2001. All these initiatives served in increasing female enrollment in school by 35% from the year 1991-2003.

Other successful initiatives include the Girl-friendly School Programme, the Girls' Education Initiative launched in 2001 by the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM), and the "Mubarak-Kohl Initiative," carried out in cooperation between Germany and Egypt. This latter initiative was adopted in 38 schools with 1100 factories located in 18 Governorates.

The past years witnessed a number of vocational training activities addressed to women. The Ministry of Planning restructured vocational training programmes to meet the requirements of

the new market conditions, and offered through the Shorouk Programme (in villages) 423 vocational training courses that benefited 11056 females.

In the years 2002-2004 the Ministry of Labor Force and Immigration implemented a female vocational training programme in technical and administrative fields for women. The Ministry of Culture is holding seminars on vocational training methodologies and the advantages of diversifying production. The Ministry of Housing allocated LE 3.6 million for female vocational training programmes carried out since 1996, and provided training for 23773 female over the past years. The Ministry of Health and Population trained 52% of the women employed by the ministry in special medical programmes, and on administrative skills. The Ministry of Local Development initiated 187 vocational training centers and held a large number of seminars and training programmes serving thousands of female trainees/beneficiaries.

The “General Federation of NGOs” has become entrusted with liaising between the Ministry of Education and the different NGOs working in the field of female literacy and education for mutual reinforcement and better results. In addition, the Federation concluded several protocols with different institutions, ministries, and NGOs, aiming at enhancing women’s chances to receive vocational and technical training.

#### B.2. Obstacles Encountered and Remaining Gaps and Challenges

- Female illiteracy rates remain high in absolute terms and in relation to male illiteracy. A major campaign is being launched to fight it
- The economic conditions of poor households in rural areas, especially in Upper Egypt where such conditions are coupled with attitudinal barriers, still constitute major constraints to girls’ education.
- School drop out is more pronounced in female headed households due to socio-economic constraints.
- Lack of enforcement of compulsory education
- The existing mismatch between the type of education offered and market demand. A major educational reform is underway but continues to constitute a major challenge to policy makers.

#### B.3. Lessons Learned

- Early marriage in rural areas has to be combated in order to decrease female dropout from schools
- Educational reform is needed to respond to the changing market demand
- Girl friendly schools proved to be in favour of girls’ education
- The relationship between education and employment has to be set in national policies

### **C. Women and Health**

#### C. 1. Successful Policies, Legislative Change and Programme and Projects

Fertility rate has noticeably decreased in Egypt in the past years. Upper Egypt experienced the largest decrease in fertility from 4.7 births per woman in 1995 to 4.2 in 2000. The rate is lower in

urban and Lower Egypt governorates, being 3 births per woman. The increase in the average age of marriage is one of the factors influencing the current fertility decline in Egypt. Another factor affecting fertility is the use of contraceptives. Between 1980 and 2000, contraceptive use levels have more than doubled in Egypt from 24% to 56%.

The adolescents' reproductive health was addressed for the first time in 2003 when the Ministry of Health put a national strategy for adolescents' health. The ministry, with the help of research institutions and international NGOs, is developing protocols on service-provider/client relationship that ensure the human rights of women in maternity hospitals. Risk factors in issues such as normal birthing are for the first time addressed by the Ministry and university hospitals.

The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood has launched a large program in Egypt to work in 80 villages to make it free from this practice.

Although HIV/AIDS are still not a phenomenon in Egypt, the Ministry of Health has, as a preventive and awareness raising measure established a hotline to receive and respond to related enquiries. There are few activities of the Ministry with regard to raising awareness about HIV/AIDS. However, several NGOs are active in this field.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Population and NGOs, the NCW has initiated research on women's health throughout her life cycle, i.e. on breast cancer, osteoporosis and nutritional awareness.

### C. 2. Obstacles Encountered and Remaining Gaps and Challenges

- Health insurance schemes are not available to a large number of poor women
- HIV/AIDS needs to be addressed among women and the gender issues in HIV/AIDS should be made clear
- The low quality of health services provided by the government at low cost has to be improved and monitored
- Despite an overall improvement in maternal care, DHS of 2000 indicates that postpartum care services are not widely utilized.
- Preventive policies are urgently needed to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS

### C.3 Lessons Learned

- Maternal mortality rates outside of metropolitan areas are almost double those in metropolitan areas suggesting that health delivery services need to be accessible to all. This is expected to change due to new and firm policies towards more even provision of services and development in all Egyptian territories.
- A life cycle gender sensitive approach needs to be considered to ensure that the health of girls, that of women in reproductive years, and the elderly are viewed each with the corresponding set of problems that affect them, respectively.



## **D. Violence against Women**

### D.1. Successful Policies, Legislative Change and Programmes and Projects

Lack of credible and accessible data makes it extremely difficult to estimate the nature and extent of the phenomenon though it is known to exist, as in most parts of the world. A first approach to address this issue requires building a data base and analyzing the cause-effect linkages, as a prerequisite to problem solving. Steps have already been taken in this direction including the creation of mechanisms that remove factors inhibiting women from speaking out.

In spite of protective provisions in the Penal Code, violence against women, whether occurring in the home, in the workplace, or more generally in the public sphere, is a cause for serious concern, according to numerous NGOs in Egypt. Unfortunately large gaps remain in our knowledge of the prevalence of violence against women. Due to cultural barriers, the data available does not reflect the reality. Most women refrain from reporting cases of abuse.

Although there is no discrimination in the Penal Code, some research suggests that there may be a gender bias in its application.

The Ombudsman office at the NCW cooperates with the Ministry of Interior to train officers at police stations on how to register complaints of women victims of domestic violence. NGOs are advocating the need to assign police women to investigate cases of domestic violence.

There has been a positive change in legislation which changed the penalty of the rapist. In the previous law the rapist escaped the penalties when he married the victim. Now even with marriage he can not escape the severe penalty.

At present, efforts are underway to change the articles related to adultery in the Penal Law in order to equate the penalty between men and women.

NGOs have been advocating the need to have one law that covers all forms of violence (instead of several scattered articles in different laws).

### D.2. Obstacles Encountered and Remaining Gaps and Challenges

- Data on violence against women is inadequate mostly as women do not speak out.
- Women sometimes accept to be beaten by their fathers, husbands or brothers as they were led to believe that this is the right of men over women to punish them, especially in the case of disobedience.
- Cultural trends somewhat affect the fairness of some of the judiciary and the law enforcement which often results in women refraining from putting any complaint when they are battered.

### D. 3. Lessons Learned

- Further in-depth studies and analysis of violence against women are needed.

- Extensive awareness campaigns are needed

## **E. Women in Armed Conflict**

### E.1. Successful Policies, Legislative Change and Programme and Projects

As the case of women in armed conflicts does not apply to Egypt, in a direct way, this issue is viewed within the broader context of wars that prevail in the region, on the one hand, and which constitute a global bombshell, on the other hand. This has prompted Egypt's First Lady to initiate and launch *The Suzanne Mubarak International Women for Peace Movement*, strongly supported at the local, regional and international levels by the civil society, to fight and condemn all forms of violence and to advocate tolerance. The Government also participated in a regional conference on Women in Armed Conflicts, with a high level representation. The Government also offers a safe haven for a number of refugees including women escaping from armed conflicts.

### E.2. Obstacles encountered and Remaining Gaps and Challenges

- Dialogue and negotiations have failed to improve the explosive situation in the region because of wars and unending conflicts
- Women are not included in peace negotiations though they could promote a culture of peace and tolerance.

### E. 3. Lessons Learned

- The Suzanne Mubarak International Movement for Peace is young, yet it has been able to attract supporters and advocates at national and international fronts because it addresses an alarming situation risking to affect everyone's life if left unbridled.
- Capacity building is needed to institutionalize and sustain the international movement for peace initiative.
- Efforts to nurture a culture of peace and tolerance need to be developed.
- The momentum gained from building partnerships to strengthen the movement, particularly in the region has to be maintained.

## **F. Women and the Economy**

### F.1. Successful Policies, Legislative Change and Programme and Projects

Although their participation has been growing in recent years, women in Egypt still have limited access to labor markets. Rapidly increasing literacy rates and declining fertility rates are likely though to lead to larger increases in labor force participation rates among women, in the upcoming period. Unfortunately, absorbing the increasing number of women seeking paid employment is likely to be particularly difficult in the context of Egypt, and more generally throughout the MENA region, given high rates of youth unemployment.

The numbers of unemployed educated females across the three population censuses are at levels substantially exceeding those of males. Also female employment in the non-agricultural private sector increased at a significantly lower rate, relative to the increase in male employment. Furthermore, large numbers of female workers in public sector companies, particularly in the middle-age bracket, were laid-off due to privatization. As for rural-urban distribution, the number of unemployed females remained relatively constant in the urban areas between the mid-eighties and the mid-nineties, whereas the corresponding numbers in the rural areas grew at an average rate of 4.4 per annum. The rate of growth of rural employment is by far less than the growth rate of rural population and labor force. The trends of "feminization" and "ruralization" of unemployment are obvious from the data.

The Social Fund for Development (SFD) established since 1993, provides women entrepreneurs with credit to help them establish micro/small/medium enterprises. In addition, the government through protocols signed with the Agriculture Development Bank, introduced a credit scheme targeting rural women. The Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Settlements initiated a mechanism to provide female employees with interest-free loans, to encourage women to consider a career in small and micro enterprises development.

In partnership with a network of active NGOs and women's associations NCW implements projects to promote women's self reliance through training and credit schemes. In addition, NCW initiated the Women Business Development Center (WBDC) to provide women entrepreneurs with counseling and training skills needed to enhance their capabilities and increase their contribution to the national economy. A joint initiative between the Ministry of Telecommunications and the NCW is the implementation of the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) with NCW to increase employment opportunities for women is about to start.

The Ombudsman Office created within NCW focuses on the problems encountered by women in the work place. Equal Opportunity Units that work closely with the NCW have been established in 30 ministries to ensure that women's rights in the work place are safeguarded.

The Ministry of Labor force and Immigration completed a labor and market survey including a listing of professions in demand, as well as those that are saturated. The ministry also completed a study of the informal sector listing all lines of work under that category, as a first step towards providing women with social protection. In addition, the ministry issues a monthly magazine to advertise vacancies in an attempt to open wider employment opportunities for which qualified women could apply.

## F.2. Obstacles Encountered and Remaining Gaps and Challenges

- High dependency rates still exist
- The economic reform and structural adjustment programme ongoing in Egypt since the early 1990s has negatively affected women more so than men, in the production sector.
- The economic growth rates in Egypt are not sufficient to generate employment, neither for men nor for women
- The private sector is not in favour of employing women

- The absence of adequate services (which are constitutional rights) enabling women to carry out their multiple roles as housewives and child caretakers influence negatively their chances at work

### F.3. Lessons Learned

- Additional efforts are needed to improve women's economic opportunities by increasing women's access to training and technology and their access to credit.
- Tailoring of macro and micro economic policies to better address women's employment problems especially in the private sector is needed
- Providing accessible daycare centers and other services are important

## G. Women in Power and Decision Making

### G.1. Successful Policies, Legislative Change and Programmes and Projects

The President instructed the government and called on political parties, and national bodies to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to take active measures to increase women's active participation in the decision making and in political life. To this end, a number of steps to enhance women's active participation have been taken: 1) The appointment of the First Woman Judge in January 2003, followed by the appointment of 3 other women judges shortly afterward, 2) The appointment of more women in higher decision making positions reaching 34.6% in 2002, compared to only 15.3% in 1996, and 3) Building a cadre of politically and technically qualified women with knowledge and experiences to be able to run for the parliamentary elections in 2005 and the local councils elections in 2006. The latter is being implemented through the establishment of the Center for the Political Empowerment of Women initiated by the NCW.

The Center for the Political Empowerment of Women aims at preparing a cadre of trained women to run for parliamentary elections in 2005 and local council elections in 2006 by providing them with specialized technical and managerial skills. To this end several training programmes/workshops, field missions and advocacy campaigns were carried out in cooperation with line ministries to stimulate women's political participation and for assuming positions at decision making levels.

A special awareness raising programme on the importance of the role of women in society is jointly carried with the Ministry of Culture, in the form of Political Forums throughout the country.

Despite the fact that a woman holds the position of Deputy Speaker for the People's Assembly, women's representation in the national legislative bodies still range from 2.2 %-5.7%. . It reveals that there are constraints, many of which are hard to overcome. Also despite a marked increase in the rate of females appointed to higher decision making positions, which nearly doubled from 15% in 1996 to 34% in 2002, women representation in the political spheres is still lagging behind. The percentage of registered voters reached 37.4% in 2003. In some governorates it

approached 65%, while in others it was as low as 23%.

Women's participation in syndicates constitutes 17% of the total participation. Female participation in syndicates varies, ranging from a high of 77% in the Nursing Syndicate to a low of 5% in the Applied Arts Syndicate. Women have also not fared well in trade unions. In 1999, only 621 women (3 percent) were elected to trade union committees in all governorates, while one woman finally succeeded in being elected to the General Federation of Trade Unions in the last election. Even in NGOs, where women's membership is close 35 %, women's participation on boards remains in the range of 15-18 percent, with a high of 42 % in family planning associations, and a low of 8% in scientific and religious associations.

### G.2 Obstacles Encountered and Remaining Gaps and Challenges

- Societal perceptions regarding the traditional division of labor, where women are seen as bound to certain functions only, are major barriers hindering women's political participation
- The famous "glass ceiling" hampering women's access to high level positions commensurate with their professional qualifications and competitive advantage is still existing.
- The cost of running campaigns is very high. Women candidates cannot in the majority of cases meet such cost.

### G.3 Lessons Learned

- Political parties should support the campaigns for women candidates, both technically and financially
- Awareness campaigns are effective and are continuously needed
- Activities of pressure groups and non-governmental organizations to affect the decision-making process proved successful
- To work towards implementing Article 4 of the CEDAW, and to which Egypt is committed, in connection with the possibility to resort to temporary measures, pending that Egyptian women acquire their right to a fair representation in the legislative councils and that is commensurate with their efforts in social development.
- To revisit the current election system to increase the chances for women and youth to win seats in elected councils.
- To revise the Party Law to obligate parties to set a specific percentage for women and youth on their electoral lists.
- To support the Programme for the Political Empowerment (*NB. they actually use the word "rehabilitation" rather than empowerment*) of Women of the NCW as well as the Political Forum for Women, which is being implemented by the Council in cooperation with the General Authority for Cultural Centers with a view to promoting a culture for political participation and raising the awareness of women voters on the importance to their political role.

## **H. Human Rights of Women**

### H.1. Successful Policies, Legislative Change and Programmes and Projects

The highlight of successful policies undertaken in this area is the establishment of the National Council for Human Rights in 2004, with a women representation of 23.1% .

The Personal Status Law was amended in 2001 to facilitate divorce procedures for women. This is known as the “*Khul*” law and it granted the woman the right to initiate divorce for the first time.

In the area of gender equity, the nationality law is being amended to give Egyptian women, married to non-Egyptians, equal rights with men in passing the Egyptian nationality to their children. The amendments will be passed very soon.

The Constitution and complementary laws stipulate that men and women are equal. Human rights of women are violated through implementation rather than through legislation. The following steps were taken to ensure the human rights for women:

1. The establishment of equal opportunity units in all ministries to ensure women's rights at work
2. The establishment of family courts to ensure the human rights of women in the family
3. The advocacy of NCW and NGOs to lift the reservation on some articles of CEDAW
4. The establishment of the Ombudsman Office in the NCW to redress violation of any human right of women

In addition, several NGOs are implementing programs on legal literacy to raise awareness of women and the whole society of women's human rights.

### H. 2. Obstacles Encountered and Remaining Gaps and Challenges

- Lack of awareness of women of their own rights is a major cause for their not claiming such rights.
- Social and cultural inherited traditions, particularly in rural areas, deprive women of their human rights.

### H. 3. Lessons Learned

- The creation of institutions such as NCCM, NCW, the Ombudsman Office, the Family Court and now the National Council for Human Rights is essential to monitor the observance of human rights as they act as human rights watch for the respective segments of population they are entrusted to protect. Better coordination between all such councils is a must.
- The Ombudsman through its database on complaints of violation of women's human rights has proved to play a major role in highlighting major abuses and suggesting several amendments to legislation

## **I. Women and the Media**

### **I. 1. Successful policies, Legislative Change and Programmes and Projects**

The NCW created a Media Watch Unit to monitor the content of media messages relating to women (printed and broadcasted) and to recommend corrective measures to further enhance the status of Egyptian women. An analysis of the messages has started and extensive efforts need to be exerted to operationalize the recommendations resulting from the analysis, and in defining the roles and responsibilities of all the parties involved.

To this effect, and in collaboration with competent authorities, NCW has been sponsoring short films, snapshots and messages to create awareness of the masses, or to target special groups that take into consideration the social or cultural norms of such groups, such as when addressing Bedouin or rural communities or those living in Upper Egypt where malpractices have been based on erroneous conceptions of gender rights and status. To this effect, local TV channels that now have been created in Egypt's eight geographical divisions have been an extremely powerful social communicator. The Radio and Television administration allocated LE 3 million to raise awareness of women's issues, gender equality and the importance of changing the negative portrayal of women.

The Radio and Television Union established a specialized Women's Committee responsible for setting national strategies, plans and programmes to enhance women's status and their empowerment. The NCW Information Standing Committee has been working at providing the necessary arguments, documentation, and other tools in order to help develop meaningful media strategies to improve women's image and status. The Radio and Television Broadcasting Services and NCW also cooperated in launching a media campaign in 2003 under the theme: "*Women Development Enhancement via Awareness Campaigns*" aiming at enlightening women about their rights and helping them to know about services offered by institutions working for their advancement so that they can avail themselves with such services.

The Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with NCW, held several workshops and seminars to raise awareness among the Egyptian population, women in particular, of women rights and obligations.

Furthermore, NCW is continuously conducting training programmes targeting influential media personnel to increase their awareness of the role of women in society and of women's issues.

The number of women occupying high-managerial posts in media, heads of television channels is larger than the number of men. The Head of the National Television is a woman. This post has been occupied by a woman for over 20 years. 7 out of the 10 national television channels have women as their directors or as deputy directors.

### **I.2. Obstacles Encountered and Remaining Gaps and Challenges**

- There is still no consistency in portraying women. Some programs, soap operas, etc. portray good images. Others do not.

- Many of those who work in the media, including women in high managerial posts, are not aware of the gender aspects of development.

### I. 3. Lessons Learned

- Gender sensitization training of media personnel themselves proved to be needed.
- Increasing participation of women in the Boards of the Television and Broadcasting Union proved to be influential and needs to be substantiated.

## **J. Women and the Environment**

### J.1 Successful Policies, Legislative Change and Programmes and Projects

To comply with its commitments to Rio, Egypt was amongst the first countries to issue a special law for the protection of the environment in 1994. Eighteen natural protectorates were established to preserve the bio-diversity.

The establishment of a Ministry of State for the Environment is proof of Egypt's commitments to protect and preserve the environment. The first Minister appointed to take charge of the ministry was a woman. The first task of the Ministry was to ensure the implementation of the national "Agenda 21" and Plan of Action drafted by the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA), with experts' advice through cooperation with international agencies that specialize and are friends of the environment. A Women's Unit was established in the Ministry to enhance women's roles as environment champions and agents of change.

Excessive use of chemical fertilizers, sewage problems, soil pollution, and lack of safety means to get rid of solid wastes have combined to cause the spread of diseases and infections in a number of areas. Such factors are being constantly fought by the government that is pursuing a number of measures to enforce the environment law. Improving environmental awareness among women as the key players in the environmental preservation process has been acknowledged and given special attention. These awareness campaigns are disseminated through the different environmental initiatives the government takes part in. Through such campaigns, the government aims at promoting women as natural resource managers, improve living conditions in urban slums and rural Egypt. It also entered a number of local initiatives and partnerships with all stakeholders including NGOs and the private sector to effectively combat environmental pollutants and hazards. Women have also been introduced to a number of technological devices to save the environment. This has included training them on using biogas in cooking and other renewable energy applications to save on traditional sources of energy.

National campaigns for environmental awareness targeting men and women have been launched using the powerful communication arms of the main and TV channels as well as through the radio and press that reserves special pages for this purpose.

- A major successful project for the protection of Cairo Air (CAIP) is headed by a woman. It proved to be a model for women's commitment to protect the environment.

### J.2. Obstacles Encountered and Remaining Gaps and Challenges



- The high illiteracy rates among women keeps them unaware of environmental risks and the need to preserve the environment.
- Many governmental efforts to alleviate high density and overburden on existing infrastructure by creating new communities and cities in new lands have not been successful so far as to pull Egyptians away from the overcrowded Nile Valley and Delta.

### J. 3. Lessons Learned

- The law needs to be enforced. A system of incentives and penalties should be introduced and observed.

## **K. The Girl Child**

### K.1. Successful policies, Legislative Change and Programmes and Projects

There is a special focus on the girl child. NCCM has adopted several initiatives to protect the rights of the girl child. These include: 1) girl's education; 2) combating early marriage; 3) eliminating female circumcision.

In addition, Egypt ratified the ILO Minimum Age Convention (#138) in 1999, and is expected to ratify the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor convention (#182) in the near future.

Egypt's First Lady established a large number of libraries throughout Egypt equipped with electronic devices for IT training. The education of children in general and the girl child in particular has tremendously improved as a direct result of the availability of such learning facilities in their neighborhoods.

The Girl's Education Initiative started in 7 governorates in 2001, and is implemented by the NCCM. The community schools initiative has given a much larger number of girls a chance of education, especially in rural Upper Egypt where distance between villages and schools inhibited their enrollment.

An intensive media campaign to encourage girls' education and discourage female circumcision has successfully been launched and has been followed up by on the air talk shows that stimulate discussions.

The Ministry of Culture held several workshops and seminars to enlighten parents of the best ways to deal with female adolescence in terms of social, political and health care.

### K. 2. Obstacles Encountered and remaining Gaps and Challenges

- The phenomenon of working female children resulted in non-enrolment or dropout from schools
- The practice of female circumcision is still spread all over Egypt due to misconceptions

### K. 3. Lessons Learned

- Girl's education is important to combat the phenomenon of child labor.
- Micro credit to female heads of households can decrease the phenomenon of child labor
- Root causes for girls' dropout of school need to be fought
- More is needed in terms of raising parents' awareness on the harm they do by discriminating against the girl child, by forcing her into early marriage or on practicing female circumcision. Establishing restrictions to this effect may be required.
- More attention to be focused on street children

### **Part III: Institutional Development**

#### **1. Successful Policies, Legislative Change and Programmes and Projects**

The highlight of the successful policies and Egypt's jump start towards women's advancement during this decade is to be traced to the establishment of the National Council for Women (NCW) by presidential Decree in the Year 2000. The National Council for Women is a government institution mandated to propose to the constitutional institutions policies aiming at enhancing the status of women and their participation in the sustainable development of the society. NCW is also mandated to monitor and evaluate the implementation of policies and laws pertaining to women, through concerned government institutions.

The clear mandate of the Council allowed it not only to provide political leverage to gender issues previously ranked low in the national agenda, it also gave it all jurisdictions, autonomy, budget and authority to suggest and spearhead the necessary changes in full consultation, cooperation and partnership with the legislative authorities, all ministries of the cabinet, the civil society organizations and other concerned parties such as the private sector and interested members of the Development Assistance Group, research institutions and universities. Formed of 30 distinguished members, the council has a technical and executive secretariat and 11 standing committees, each to address specific issues namely: Education , training and scientific research, Information, Political participation, NGOs, Local Governance, Environment, , Economy, External relations, Legislation, Culture and Health and population.

The creation of 27 branches of NCW in the Governorates of Egypt also allowed an ongoing dialogue with all segments of the population and enabled it to acquire first hand information on the state of affair in all parts of the Egyptian territories as far as gender issues are concerned. It also allowed it to penetrate such territories with its advocacy programme, while tailor-making it to suit and respect local traditions and sub-culture.

The NCW succeeded in initiating Equal Opportunity Units in almost all the ministries to monitor the implementation of the constitutional gender equality.

One major achievement of the NCW has been the mainstreaming of gender in the National Development Plan 2002-2007. The plan was designed to mainstream gender at the national, sectoral, regional and local levels, and to permeate all policies and programmes. Another major achievement of the council is the institution building of a strong data base for the generation, dissemination, and updating of gender-based statistics and indicators to allow the launching of programmes of action at appropriate scale, and as monitoring and evaluation tools.

The institutional building component of Egypt's plan of action to advance women has therefore comprised:

- Building a statistical and information base,
- Building capacity and know-how – within existing institutions – to analyze public expenditure and render national budgets gender-sensitive,
- Building the institutional capacities of national machineries to effectively incorporate the gender dimension in their ongoing functions and activities as well as coordinate efforts,

- monitor progress, and evaluate results.
- Building capacity for networking

NCW chose the Millennium Development Coals (MDGs) and targets to be the theme of its Fourth National Conference (2004) for the purpose of familiarizing line ministries, and other governmental and non-governmental organizations with such goals so that they can use them as yardsticks by which to measure their own progress in achieving gender equity, being one of the Millennium goals on the one hand, and as a cross-cutting component of all other goals, on the other hand.

Parallel to this initiative, NCW, in cooperation with partners, took the first initiative towards ensuring the availability of efficient and accurate gender disaggregated data. I In addition, NCW introduced the Geographical Information System (GIS) utilizing gender desegregated data as a support decision tool.

Gender-responsive budgeting is also one of the main focus area of NCW.

The National council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) is entrusted with the welfare of girl-child until age 18 and motherhood. Its mandate is

1. Proposing a general policy in the field of childhood and motherhood.
2. Designing a national comprehensive plan particularly in the field of social and familial service, health, education, culture, media and social protection.
3. Monitoring and assessing the general policy and the national plan.
4. Collecting information, statistics and available studies.
5. Proposing training programs aiming at improving the level of performance in the implementation of childhood and motherhood activities.
6. Proposing cultural, educational and information programs to raise awareness of the general opinion and encourage volunteer activity.
7. Cooperation with governmental and non-governmental organizations.
8. Giving opinion on agreements relevant to childhood and motherhood.

It has gained the political commitment and mobilized donors' money to establish girls' schools all over Egypt to close the gender gap in education. It has designed with NGOs a national plan to combat female circumcision.

## 2. Obstacles Encountered and Remaining Gaps and Challenges

- Budgetary allocations are not yet adequate to fulfill thee objectives and goals

### 3. Lessons Learned

- Monitoring the effectiveness of all these mechanisms is important
- Budget allocations re-gender issues in the different ministries should be monitored both at the national and the local levels
- Coordination among donors in funding women's machinery proved to be continuously needed

## **Part IV: Main Challenges and Actions to address them**

In spite of the great efforts exerted to improve the status of women in Egypt and to implement the concerns of Beijing Platform of Action and the International Commitments such as CEDAW, there remains, several challenges that need to be addressed forcefully. These include:

1. The government of Egypt remains committed to the goals of eradication of high illiteracy rate among women and of universal education. The eradication of illiteracy needs much more innovative methods and efficient monitoring. Models of other countries especially with regard to national campaigns for illiteracy eradication can serve in this context. The government has focused on increasing the enrollment rates in the primary level in recent years and has been successful in doing so. Girls' access to secondary and post secondary schooling has also improved. The largest remaining questions concerning education are how to accommodate boys and girls who do not have birth certificates, how to change attitudes of parents who have negative attitudes about girls' education as well as addressing several quality issues in education, particularly teaching methods, quality of teachers, girls friendly schools, the physical infrastructure and the contents of the curricula. The need to link education to the changing employment market is also of great importance.
2. Government is committed to continued legal reforms especially with respect to achieving gender equality. The nationality law is at the top of the government agenda and is expected to be approved by parliament within a week. The adultery provisions in the Penal Code have to be changed in order to address gender discrimination. More importantly, is the need to monitor the implementation of the laws to make sure that administrative practices do not discriminate against women. The establishment of the Ombudsman office at the National Council for Women was one mechanism to monitor the right implementation of laws and to ensure that they are not abusive of women's human rights. Other mechanisms have to be in place to ensure the same thing.
3. Further efforts to increase women's low participation in politics are very much needed. Recent declines in their participation in the People's Assembly, following the end of the quota system, are disappointing. Ways and means to increase their participation is urgently needed. While an increase in women's participation is urgently needed. There is also a need to build women's leadership skills at all levels. The post of Governor still remains closed for women, despite their having occupied the posts of Chair of City Council. This issue still needs to be addressed.
4. The large number of women who work in the informal sector face many problems. For example, almost 88 percent of females working in the private sector are employed on an informal basis. Informal sector female workers generally earn lower wages than men with similar educational backgrounds and experience. A large segment of workers in the informal sector can be categorized as poor, particularly if dimensions other than wages are considered, including social, medical, security coverage and work stability. Serious schemes of health and social insurance are to be made available and accessible for women in the informal sector.

5. The practice of female circumcision still needs to be addressed in non conventional ways.
6. NGOs, despite their very large number (at least 17,000) in various fields of activity with an extensive geographical coverage suffer from severe constraints. Although some NGOS are very active and have an impact on society, constraints still inhibit most of them from playing an active role in the development process in general. Despite some governmental efforts to enhance their contribution to development, a major campaign to promote the culture of volunteerism is needed.