

ERITREA

**Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action
and
The Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General
Assembly**

March 2004

Part One: Overview of Achievements and Challenges in Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

1.1 Gender Equality: The Policy Environment

The Eritrean Constitution, ratified in 1997, guarantees equal rights for women and men. In addition to the supreme principle enshrined in the Constitution prohibiting discrimination on account of race, ethnic origin, language, colour, gender, religion, disability, age, political view, social or economic status, various articles in the Constitution grant equal rights to women, as men, with regard to such key issues as land ownership, family and marriage, equality before the law, inheritance and passing on citizenship to their children.

With regard to family and marriage, for example, the Constitution asserts that: "Men and women of full legal age shall have the right, upon their consent, to marry and to found a family freely, without any discrimination and they shall have equal rights and duties as to all family affairs."

The sanctity of these rights is well captured in Sub-article 7.2 which proclaims: "Any act that violates the human rights of women or limits or otherwise thwarts their role and participation is prohibited."

The Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) made a deliberate effort to ensure women's participation in every stage of the constitution-making process. Hence, fifty percent of the members of the Constitution Commission were female, effectively taking part throughout the process.

Once more, Eritrean women had the opportunity to make their voice heard and advocate for their rights and concerns through their participation in various consultation forums organized by the Ministry of Justice's **Law Reform Committee**. The result was a thorough reform of the Civil & Criminal Codes that, inter alia, repealed all prejudiced clauses. The reform process is now complete and the revised codes are expected to be officially enacted shortly. The Committee, established in 1997, was tasked with revising the colonial Civil and Penal Codes.

Meanwhile, as a transitional measure, the courts have, since Eritrea's de facto independence in 1991, been using an amended version of the colonial codes. These were adopted under the law reform proclamation No.1/1991, stipulating that all discriminatory clauses and connotations should be excluded, and protective legal measures included instead. To mention some of the amendments pertaining to the status of women:

- Marriage is now based on the free consent of both partners, and needs no parental consent. The legal age for marriage was raised to 18 years from 15;
- Women can enter into marriage freely and are afforded equal rights as men;
- Bride price and abduction became prohibited by law;
- Articles 708-721 of the colonial Civil Code, on irregular unions, have been abolished because they do not provide any legal protection of women's rights upon marriage, divorce and succession;
- The death penalty commuted to life imprisonment for convicted women who may be pregnant or have children under three years was abolished;

- Abortion, although still punishable under the Penal Code, is permitted in situations where a physician can certify that the woman would suffer grave and permanent damage due to severe physical and mental stress, or when the pregnancy has resulted from rape or incest;
- Rape is punishable under the law with a maximum sentence of imprisonment of up to 15 years. Pornography and other indecent and obscene exposures are also punishable under the penal code;
- Article 635, which bluntly glorifies the marital power of the husband, was automatically repealed and was replaced by Article 45 of EPLF's family law which recognizes the equal rights and status of both sexes and keeps the interest of the children and the mother.

Other legal reform developments affecting the status of women include the Labour Law of 2001 (see next chapter), which provides legal protection for women workers, and the new regional election regulations, issued in March 2004, reinforcing previous provisions (under the Local Government Act of 1996) on expanding women's opportunities for accessing elected office.

The State of Eritrea ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1995. The Convention was subsequently translated into the local language and widely disseminated, particularly among women. There is strong commitment and political will on the part of the government, which provides a supportive environment for the implementation of the Convention.

In a report prepared by the Government of Eritrea in December 2002, an attempt was made to take stock of the implementation status in Eritrea of the various articles of Convention. It tried to illustrate the key legal and administrative provisions that have been adopted to deal with issues of discrimination and equality of opportunities as well as the challenges and barriers thereof. The report noted positive development in all areas at the legislative and policy level. It, however, concluded that 'even if legislation provides for equal rights and opportunities, attitudes and cultural practices still constitute major obstacles, which affect possibilities of change, rendering it slow and gradual'.

The Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), finalised in March 2004, is another key national planning document addressing the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment. Through direct affirmative action and other measures the PRSP resolves to enhance women's participation in the political, economic and social spheres and pledges to make women both active participants in and target beneficiaries of the poverty reduction activities outlined in the strategy. It further specifies measures to improve women's access to employment openings in both the public and private sectors, as well as to enhance their opportunities to access land, financial credit and skills-training services.

The PRSP also specifies policies aimed at the social protection of women, beside other disadvantaged groups of society, through measures that include direct support and social security.

As will be detailed in the next chapter, women's economic issues have also been adequately addressed in a newly developed national food security strategy that was prepared in tandem with the PRSP.

In the national poverty assessment conducted in early 2003, and used as a basis for formulating the PRSP, gender inequality is given prominence in the analysis of poverty.

Gender dimensions were explored in the participatory poverty assessment (qualitative study), while the quantitative study included abundant gender-disaggregated data.

The National Union of Eritrean Women was represented in the technical committee that was responsible for overseeing the drafting of both the Interim PRSP and the Food Security Strategy.

Various government policy documents have embraced the Millennium Development **Goals** (MDGs) as a guiding framework, while efforts have been made in different sectors to align national indicators to the MDG indicator framework and to other relevant sets of indicators adopted in the various international conventions and conferences. However, Eritrea has yet to establish a complete set of national benchmarks and clearly defined and quantified targets. This is an issue expected to be addressed in the first MDG report for Eritrea, which is currently under preparation. The report will provide a more thorough assessment of the country's progress vis-à-vis the MDG targets and projections for future trends.

1.2 The National Action Plan

A new National Gender Action Plan, covering the period 2003 – 2008, has been developed and endorsed by the Government. It has subsequently been distributed to all key stakeholders. Its main objective is 'To achieve equal opportunities and capabilities for women, men, girls and boys of different categories to participate in and access resources, and benefit from a supportive, sustainable and appropriate economic, legal, social and political development system'.

This objective would be pursued through the following strategies:

- i. Mainstream gender in policies, programs and projects in all sectors of the economy taking into consideration ways that empower women and men who have been disadvantaged
- ii. Promote equal opportunities and increase capability of women and men to have access to and control over resources that would enable poverty reduction in a sustainable way.
- iii. Increase the visibility of women in forms that recognize their contribution to productive, reproductive and community activities in relation to those done by men
- iv. Produce, maintain and disseminate gender sensitive information, gender disaggregated data and gender sensitive indicators in forms that will be used in planning, implementation and monitoring of progress made at all levels and in all sectors
- v. Develop capacity of main actors in various sectors to undertake gender planning, analysis and monitoring to enable effective implementation of this Action Plan and other gender related policies and programs in Eritrea
- vi. Develop, plan and advocate for gender sensitive budgets that enables allocation or re-allocation of resources to gender responsive programs and projects
- vii. Strengthen and/or establish gender networking at institutional level between and among government, Non-government, and private sector on issues of mainstreaming gender in their policies, programs and projects.

The Action Plan identifies priority areas of concern in the Eritrean context, which are:

- Women, power and decision making
- Education and training of women and girls

- Women and health
- Women, the economy and poverty
- Human rights of women, violence against women and armed conflict;

In addition to cross-cutting priority areas, namely:

- Women and the environment
- HIV/AIDS
- Gender disaggregated data

The Action Plan continues from there to lay out specific strategic objectives, planned actions, indicators to monitor progress and the institutional actors to be involved in implementation and/or monitoring.

Different stakeholders, including government ministries and non-governmental organizations were involved in the preparation of the Gender Action Plan, which was led by the NUEW.

1.3 Partnerships

As explained elsewhere in this document, the NUEW works closely with a wide range of national and international partners, creating and strengthening alliances to advance women's rights and gender mainstreaming. At the national level, NUEW's close partners include government ministries, the Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC), Local NGOs such including the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS). Gender issues have also been on the agenda of NUEW's relations with regional and international organisations. Among the Un agencies, NUEW has forged strong relations and worked closely with UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIFEM and WFP.

In line with UN system Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the government and a UN country team under United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) addressed the national priorities in the development and recovery program which has given emphasis to gender in development (GID) strategies as cross cutting issues. This is explicitly stated as follows:

- i. support the implementation of the National Action Plan for the advancement of Women;
- ii. assist in strengthening institutional mechanism at the national, regional and local level to address gender issues in public policy, resource allocation, and monitor gender initiatives in policy, programs and legislation;
- iii. assist in strengthening the capacity of organizations that represent women's interest and promote advocacy , networking and partnership for the advancement of women
- iv. assist in strengthening women's entrepreneurial skills, knowledge and capacities; and
- v. support institutions to collect analyze and disseminate gender-disaggregated data in their respective sectors and areas.

Part Two: Progress in the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

This section discusses progress made in the implementation of the critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action and the further initiatives and actions identified in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

2.1 Women and Decision-Making

NATIONAL GENDER ACTION PLAN – STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Work towards achieving comprehensive reform of laws and legal system in Eritrea specifically paying attention to implementation of amendments made in the marriage and family laws, labour law, and access to land
 - Eliminate problems that hinder women from effective participation in decision-making and leadership and strengthen their capacity to perform better in these fields
 - Establish mechanisms for ensuring a critical number of women in key positions of leadership and decision-making including community level
 - Formulate and advocate for policy measures that enable integration of gender concerns in Leadership and decision making related fields
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Policy/Legislation:

Proclamation No.86/1996 on the establishment of Local Government stipulates that 30% of the seats in the Regional Assemblies would be reserved for women and that they would also contest the remaining 70%.

To further ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power and decision-making, several women are appointed to higher positions. Currently there are three women Ministers (18% of the Cabinet of Ministers) holding the position of Justice Minister, Labour & Human Welfare and Tourism. In addition, there are some High Court judges, attorneys, as well as director-generals, directors and unit heads in ministries and other government departments.

Promoting women's participation in public life – encouraging and supporting them to run for elected office, get organized and seek meaningful representation in all branches of power – is official policy of the government.

Implementation:

Women currently make up 22% of the National Assembly members, and between 27% and 37% in the six Regional assemblies. Out of the 17 central government ministers, 3 are women. At 8.5%, their proportion in the Eritrean diplomatic missions is still very low. Nonetheless, it represents a slight growth over that of 1998, which was a mere 5.5%.

Women participation in the local administration elections held in 2002 and the subsequent elections, in 2003, of magistrates for the newly instituted community courts, was pursued vigorously as official public policy. The NUEW, local government personnel, and other activists waged extensive campaigns to promote female representation in the elections. The NUEW organised a concerted campaign to promote electoral awareness among women in particular. Campaign managers were trained and equipped with promotional materials. Women were encouraged to run in the elections. As a result, a substantial number of women were elected as area/village administrators or deputies. Out of 395 administrators and deputies elected in the Southern (Dehub) Region, 47 (close to 11%) were women. Of these, 4 are administrators and the remaining 43 are deputies. Though still on the lower side, this ratio marks significant progress compared to the situation that existed before, where only three women (one administrator and two deputies) were serving as local administrators in the region. The pattern was similar in the other regions.

In a similar fashion, significant numbers of female candidates were elected as community court magistrates in the first-ever elections of this kind in Eritrea. Nationwide, 399 women, comprising 22.5% of the total, were elected as community court judges. A large proportion of them, more than 90, were elected as central (middle) magistrates in the three-judge courts. Of the six regions, the ratio of elected female magistrates was 30.3% in the Northern Red Sea, and 28.9% in the Southern region.

Table 1 Number and proportion of female magistrates in community courts, elected in 2003

Region	Total	Male	Female	% Female
Central	174	127	47	27.0%
Debub (Southern)	619	440	179	28.9%
Anseba	327	273	54	16.5%
Northern Red Sea	99	69	30	30.3%
Southern Red Sea	90	67	23	25.6%
Gash-Barka	465	399	66	14.2%
National	1774	1375	399	22.5%

It is encouraging to note that in both elections women were elected by directly competing with the male candidates, i.e. without resorting to the quota system.

A project worth mentioning here is the female paralegal training initiated by the Ministry of Justice in 2000. Under this project 90 young women drawn from all ethnic groups were given a three-year legal training, and were subsequently, in 2003, assigned to their communities to work as staff of regional courts, interpreters, advisers and gender-issues advocates.

Table 2 shows slow progress in women's representation in the legislative bodies and higher government positions. Particularly notable are increases in women's share of regional assemblies (from 20% before 1997 to 30.6% in the current term). The election of women magistrates in community courts is a new phenomenon altogether.

Table 2: Women in decision making government posts: 1992, 1998 and 2003

	1992			1998			2003		
	Total	Female	% Female	Total	Female	% Female	Total	Female	% Female
National Assembly	105	22	21.0%	150	33	22.0%	150	33	22.0%
Regional assemblies (1992-97)			20%	399	122	30.6%	(term continues) ¹		
Ministers	13	2	15.4%	17	2	11.8%	17	3	17.6%
Director Generals	4	1	25.0%	51	2	3.9%	51	3	5.9%
Regional Governors	10	0	0.0%	6	0	0.0%	6	0	0.0%
Directors/Division Heads							153	10	6.5%
Unit Heads							306	20	6.5%
Ambassadors				18	2	11.1%	28	1	3.6%
Counsellors				13	1	7.7%	19	0	0.0%
Consul Generals				6	0	0.0%	8	1	12.5%

¹ New regional elections planned for May 2004

First Secretaries	19	0	0.0%	33	2	6.1%
Second Secretaries	31	1	3.2%	30	0	0.0%
Third Secretaries	23	2	8.7%	13	7	53.8%
Judges	89	14	15.7%			#DIV/0!
Community magistrates				1774	399	22.5%

Source: NUEW, Central Personnel Admin. (CPA), MoJ, MoFA

Women are also fairly represented in the NGO community such as National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW) & the NUEYS - the national organizations that represent respectively the workers and youth/students in the country. Out of 39 members of the Central Committee in the NUEYS, for instance, women comprise 30.7%, with one serving in an executive position. Women comprise 27% of the NCEW Central Committee and are also represented in the executive committee. Both organizations have established a gender unit in their structure. (NUEW, CEDAW Report, 2003).

Women make up 27.2% of all government employees. However their presence is more pronounced in the junior and clerical jobs rather than senior or professional categories. While constituting over 41% of all administrative and clerical, and more than 29% of junior professional positions, their ratio in the professional category is only 11.6%.

2.2 Education and Training of Women

NATIONAL GENDER ACTION PLAN – STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Increase access to and accessibility of education and training
 - Formulate programs to promote women’s literacy
 - Improve quality of education
 - Improve community attitudes to girls’ education
 - Monitor quantitative and qualitative changes in attitude and behaviour achieved through education for boys and girls
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Policy/Legislation:

A new national education policy, issued in February 2003, articulates the central value placed on gender equality in education. It states that, in basic education (primary and middle levels), “the government will work towards equitable education opportunities to all citizens irrespective of rural-urban, regional, gender and ethnic differences”.

In the same policy document, the government commits itself to implement the six ‘Education for All’ objectives and the two relevant Millennium Development Goals.

Specifically addressing gender disparity in education, the government’s education policy states: “the government shall work towards the elimination of gender disparity at all levels of the education system”. It further commits the government to “ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic and secondary education of good quality”. It also pledges to pursue literacy for women as a twin prong of the policy. The National Literacy Program of the MoE illustrates explicitly that one of its main objectives is ‘to narrow the gender disparity in literacy by increasing women’s participation in literacy programs’.

To achieve the above-stated objectives, the government pledges to “ensure equal participation of girls and women in all education programmes.” As one of the strategies to promote girls’ education, by way of addressing some of the impeding factors, the government commits to expand boarding schools for girls.

Implementation:

The country's net primary enrolment almost doubled in the period between 1991 and 2001, increasing from 24.8% in 1991/92 to 46% in 2001/02. Yet, the ratio of girls to boys in the primary level did not improve over this period. This is not as alarming as it may seem, however. Hence, while the overall number of girls attending primary school has increased substantially from 69,200 to 146,218 over the decade, (female net enrolment rate increasing from 25.3% to 43%, and gross enrolment rate from 39.2% to 69.3%), male enrolment rates have increased slightly faster (NER from 24.4% to 48.8%, and GER from 41.2% to 71.4%).

In the middle level, the female net enrolment rate grew from 7.2% in 1991/92 to 12.1% in 2001/02 as compared to an increase from 7% to 13.3% for male students. The GER, on the other hand, increased from 21.2% to 39.5% for girls and from 19.8% to 52.5% for boys. Here again the growth rates for both sexes are not widely disparate.

The most worrying disparity in enrolment is in the secondary level. Compared to an increase from 9.1% to 16.6% for male students over the same period, female NER increased only slightly – from 9.1% to 11.8%. GER grew from 13% to 30.1% for males, but only from 13.3% to 17.6% for females.

These figures indicate that there is no marked gender distinction in school enrolment at pre-primary, primary and middle school levels. It also shows that for the last five years girls' participation has been significantly increasing especially at the primary level. In general terms, there have been marked changes in the educational situation of girls in the last few years. However more interventions would be required to improve the existing status.

Reduction in girls' drop out rates as well as improvement in their retention in school was attributed to the government's effort to address girls' education as a key concern in the education sector as well as the introduction of a link between parents, communities and schools through out the country.

To counter lower educational attainment of female students in secondary schools, the NUEW and NUEYS conduct certain programs to enhance girls' achievement in schooling especially in the field of math and other natural science subjects by organizing make-up classes for girls. Focusing on female teachers is another means whereby the MoE is trying to address gender issues in education. An innovative programme in teacher provision is the special measure introduced on female teachers coaching at the Teacher Training Institutes (TTIs). Through UNICEF funding, more than 170 have benefited from this intervention. Apart from benefiting female teacher trainees, it has demonstrated (socially and culturally) that the role of women teachers is central to the teaching and upbringing process in general and that of girls in particular. The education policy in Eritrea is co-educational and hence the female coaching is not seen in relation to separate classes for girls. It is rather a way of consolidating the role model factor (MoE, EFA Report, 2002).

A Gender training session as an addendum subject is regularly conducted at Asmara TTI for students who would graduate to teach at Primary levels. Considering the prime importance of gender sensitization among teachers, the ATTI has recently developed a Gender Training manual, the Gender Fair Teacher, and will be incorporated in the curriculum of Pedagogy.

In the country's only university women are poorly represented, making up only about 14% of the student body. Over the last decade, no significant progress has been recorded as female

enrolment – in all programmes including degree, diploma and certificate - fluctuated in the range of 10% to 15%.

The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the NUEW and local administrations, has been conducting an extensive **adult literacy** programme chiefly targeting women. Between 1997 and 2003, 249,000 adults participated, of which over 143,000 completed the programme. Significantly, 92% of all participants were women. In the period mentioned, therefore, 132,000 adult women became literate (MoE, 2003). The completion rate for females was markedly higher (71.3%) than for males (about 48.4%). Another positive aspect of the programme was its steadily incremental enrolment - from 11,500 in 1997/98 to 56,780 in 2002/03.

Consequently the female illiteracy rate among adults has dropped from 65% in 1990 to 55% in 2000 (Unicef). The ratio of young literate females to males (15-24 yrs) increased from 0.68 in 1990 to 0.76 in 2001 (UNDP, 2003). In 2002, Eritrea's literacy programme was recipient of UNESCO's International Reading Association Prize. Particular mention was made of the Eritrean Adult Education Division's efforts, over more than a decade, and its achievement in teaching Eritrean women to read and write.

Table 3. Trends of key education indicators – the gender dimension

Indicator	1991/92	1995/96	2001/02	
Net enrolment rate (primary) %	24.8	31.2	46.0	
Female net enrolment rate (primary) %	25.3	31.5	43.0	
Male net enrolment rate (primary) %	24.4	31.0	48.8	
Female gross enrolment rate (primary) %	39.2	53.7	69.3	
Male gross enrolment rate (primary) %	41.2	59.2	71.4	
Female net enrolment rate (middle level) %	7.2	6.4	12.1	
Female net enrolment rate (secondary level) %	9.1	9.6	11.8	
Proportion of female students at Asmara University (%)	17.1	11.7	13.4	
Ratio of literate females to males (15-24 years)	0.68		0.76	
Ratio of girls to boys in primary education	Using	0.92	0.91	0.84
Ratio of girls to boys in secondary education	NER	0.91	0.86	0.68
Percent of women with no education (EDHS 1995, 2002)		65.9	50.1	
Proportion of women participants in literacy programmes (1997-2003) %			92.0	
Literacy programmes (female completion rate; 1997-2003) %			71.3	
Literacy programmes (male completion rate; 1997-2003) %			48.4	

Sources: MoE 2002; EDHS 1995 & 2002; UNDP HDR 2003

Women have been a primary target in many technical and vocational training programmes as well, where female participation has been promising. They account for about 58% of the total. Their enrolment rates in regular technical schools, however, is still quite low. In its EFA plan, the Ministry of Education intends to increase the enrolment of female participants in the skill-training programmes by 20%. (MoE, 2002).

In 2001, the NUEW organised a series of workshops on girls' education in different parts of the country, the outcome of which informed national policy on girls' education.

Gaps and Challenges:

- Coverage of the education opportunities is still a challenge as educational opportunities are concentrated mainly in urban areas. However, the Ministry of Education is making progress in expanding the system to the rural and remote areas. Likewise, there is a marked difference between girls in urban and rural schools. Girls in urban schools attend school better than those in rural areas.

- As indicated earlier, there is a significant gap in education opportunities for women in rural and urban areas. The gender disparity has also a regional dimension. Looking into enrolment rates by region and by urban and rural backgrounds of female students, we find a marked difference that requires attention. Girls in urban areas are attending better than girls in rural areas at all levels and the 45 % enrollment rate at the Primary level masks a major disparity, the rate being only ...% in rural areas.
- The issue of reduction of female student dropout rates and the organization of programs for girls and women who have left school prematurely continues to be a major challenge.
- The participation of girls and women in technical vocational schools is still low, yet this is the level where they would be getting most of the major skills required for innovative activities and employment creation. The national strategy on Technical and Vocational Education and Training has been developed by the MOE and has indicated priority areas that include increased enrolment of female participants by 30% by 2006; recruitment of two vocational and gender counselling and guidance officers as well as ensuring that all training courses are open to female participants.
- The enrolment of female students at University level is low, ranging between 13-14% for degree, diploma and certificate courses. Female students are mainly in social science courses.
- Several factors continue to have a negative impact on the full participation of girls and women in education. Studies and workshops have revealed that economic and social factors are the major causes of girls' lower participation, retention, drop out and achievement in education. Customary and traditional attitudes, early marriage, and heavy domestic responsibilities combined with inadequate facilities for girls, and shortage of female teachers continues to affect girls' effective participation in education. The relationship between education and health in defining the status of Eritrean women shows the rationale for education of girls and women in the country. The EDHS report of 1995 as well that of 2002 show that education is the single most important factor in determining the health patterns, economic status and general empowerment of women in Eritrea.
- Women are also poorly represented in the educational management positions.

2.3 Women and Health

NATIONAL GENDER ACTION PLAN – STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Establish mechanisms and programs to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity
 - Undertake activities that enable assessment of needs for and enhance capacity building and support programs for Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs)
 - Undertake activities that create conducive environment for adolescents, disabled any other special groups of female and male in communities
 - Formulate and advocate for policy measures that enable integration of gender concerns in Leadership and decision making related fields
 - Establish programs to enhance community, family & individual awareness of utilization of Health services
 - Establish programs to address the poor nutrition status in households and institutions
 - Participate in strengthening prevention of sexual transmission of HIV including pregnant mothers
 - Work towards reduction of communicable diseases that affect health of pregnant mothers and infants to reduce anaemia and low birth weight of babies
 - Ensure a pool of trained staff in gender analysis and monitoring within the Ministry of Health as well as a gender specialist and a unit established
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- Provide research information and advocate for the need for availability of policies explicitly targeting maternal mortality reduction
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Policy/Legislation:

The national health policy is based on the concept and principles of primary health care (PHC) and is designed to serve the interests of the majority of the population, with mother and childcare as its central focus.

Improving and expanding mother and child care services and reducing maternal and infant mortality is the first of six major objectives of the national health strategy. The Government of the State of Eritrea believes that women have a basic right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health.

In its human resources development strategy the Ministry of Health emphasises gender sensitivity. The strategy provides that female candidates would be “encouraged and supported to join the health professions including by consideration of special admission criteria to health training institutions”.

Implementation:

The Ministry of Health has made significant progress in ensuring access to health care services through restoration of health facilities damaged by war, through provision of supplies and adequate drugs and equipments. The expansion of health services to communities where they are lacking through establishment of new facilities and through training of qualified health personnel. Access to health services has increased from 45% in 1991 to 75% in 2002 (MoH, 2004).

The government has invested in health education, family planning education for women, antenatal services, provision of delivery services for women, immunization services and various growth-monitoring services for children made. Children under five and pregnant women have been the main targets for nutrition growth and development assessment.

The adoption of the ‘Safe Motherhood’ and ‘Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses’ (IMCI) programs coordinated under PMC has been a major stride towards the improvement of mother and child health.

The MoH’s PHC Department through its Family and Community health unit focuses on the following activities:²

- Improving maternal health through the Safe Motherhood program
- Providing reproductive health services, including adolescent reproductive health and family planning services
- Providing school health services
- Creating awareness on avoiding harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation
- Capacity building activities for the implementation of IMCI and other child health programs.

The Ministry has extended the coverage of emergency obstetric care for women living in inaccessible remote areas, and recently has taken initiative to expand and train the periphery health staff on Life Saving Skills and already covering most health facilities.

² Eritrea Health Profile 2000, MoH May 2001

Mortality rates among children under-five decreased from 155 per 1000 live births in 1995 to 93 in 2002 - a 40% reduction in 8 years, while the infant mortality rate dropped by 33% (from 72 to 48 deaths per 1000 live births) over the same period (EDHS, 2002). This reduction is mainly attributed to improvements in health care coverage, including vaccinations for major childhood diseases. Immunization coverage for under-five children has improved tremendously with over 84 % of one year olds vaccinated against measles.

An important indicator of women's health and survival is the percentage of deliveries attended by skilled health personnel. According to the EDHS this rate increased from 21% to 28% between 1995 and 2001. Antenatal coverage has increased from 49% to 71% over the same period. The EDHS in 2002 did not, for technical/methodological reasons, include an analysis of the maternal mortality rate, which stood at 998 per 10,000 live births in 1995. However, the increase in the rate of births attended by skilled health personnel, in addition to the overall improvement and expansion of primary health care delivery and the accompanying reduction in child mortality rates discussed above, are considered as proxy indicators for a possible reduction in maternal mortality.

According to the Eritrea DHS 2002, the proportion of women who actually reach formal health facilities for care when in the case of complications (met need) has increased from 43% to 53%. Using data from the National Health Management Information System (NHMIS) in 2003, the 'met need' has increased from 32% in 1998 to about 63% in 2002 (MoH, 2004).

Between 1991 and 2002, health service infrastructures increased substantially. For example, the number of health stations more than tripled from 72 to 225, while that of health centres increased from 31 to 52. Hospitals (including rural/mini hospitals) increased from 12 to 23. (MoH, 2004)

HAMSET (a programme to combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria, STDs and Tuberculosis) is a major initiative coordinated by the Ministry of Health that aims at tackling the main causes of the country's leading diseases. It supports and coordinates the efforts of several ministries, women's and youth organizations and communities in terms of awareness raising and prevention initiatives. Women & children are prime beneficiaries of HAMSET project. A joint program on 'safe life' in connection with HIV/AIDS has also been launched by the Ministry of Health, NUEW, NUEYS and other stakeholders in an attempt to reduce unsafe sex, prostitution and to discourage young women and men's involvement in such acts.

Table 4. Trends in key health indicators – the gender dimension

Indicator	1995	2002	Trend
Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births)	998	N.A.	N.A.
Percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel	20.6	28.3	+
Percentage of preg. women who received antenatal care	49.2	70.8	+
Met need* for Emergency Obstetric care (%)	43.0	53%	+
Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)**	136.0	93.0	+
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	72.0	48.0	+
Percentage of children, 12-23 months, who received all required vaccinations	5.2	37.7	+
One year olds fully immunized against measles	51.0	84.2	+

Sources: EDHS 1995 & 2002; MoH

* 'Met Need' refers to the proportion of women who actually reach formal health facilities for care when they have complications

** 1995 figures are adjusted from EDHS 1995 (EDHS 2002)

There are around 3470 qualified health staff operating under MoH of which, women comprise 52 percent. Registered nurses, midwife nurses, health assistants, and dental technicians are professions dominated by women. However, female presence in senior and administrative posts is much lower. Of the 23 Unit heads, for example, there are six women (26%). There is one woman Division-head out of six and no woman in a Director General post.

Gaps and Challenges:

- The mortality ratio is still among the highest in sub-Saharan Africa, due to lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities which are contributing factors in the spread of communicable diseases. Acute respiratory infections, diarrheal diseases, malaria and malnutrition are most likely the underlying causes of child deaths in Eritrea.
- Abortions and their complications continued (for the last five years) to feature among the top five common causes of admission for all conditions amongst 5 yr and above. It was the second leading cause of admission in 2002. This could be a reflection of unmet need/demand for family planning services in the entire health system in Eritrea. The low contraceptive prevalence rate, which is only 8%, will also support that the unmet need for family planning is very low (MoH, 2004).
- Female Genital Mutilation remains a major threat to women and girls' health and wellbeing in Eritrea. 89 percent of women had been circumcised, and there has been slight decline (6 percent) in prevalence since 1995. The decline is more among younger generation (under 25) than among older women. Prevalence remained low in the capital.

2.4 Women's Economic Empowerment / Poverty

NATIONAL GENDER ACTION PLAN – STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Improve women's entrepreneurship skills and expand credit schemes for women
 - Strengthen education and marketable skills of women in order to improve their employment opportunities
 - Establish (improve) working conditions that are supportive to women in employment
 - Increase recognition and contribution of women's work in the national economy accounting system
 - ...
-

Policy/Legislation:

Through direct affirmative action and other measures the PRSP resolves to enhance women's participation in the political, economic and social spheres and pledges to make women both active participants in and target beneficiaries of the specific poverty reduction activities outlined in the strategy. It further specifies measures to improve women's access to employment openings in both the public and private sectors, as well as enhance their opportunities to access land, financial credit and skills-training services.

The PRSP also specifies policies aimed at the social protection of women, beside other disadvantaged groups of society, through measures that include direct support and social security.

The government also prepared a National Food Security Strategy containing two main components: a national strategy and a household-level strategy. One of the four pillars of the household food security component of the strategy is to enhance the capabilities of

particularly rural women by way of: (i) improving the supply of clean drinking water; (ii) enhancing women's access to productive resources – including land, credit, and technology, as well as skills training; and (iii) promoting and developing agricultural techniques in the areas of production, post-harvest and marketing with a view to reducing the chores and freeing up more time for productive and child care activities. Furthermore, the strategy details measures for addressing some of the needs of women in the areas of micro and small-scale enterprise development.

A new Labour Proclamation issued in 2001 provides for the legal protection of women in employment. The proclamation stipulates equal employment opportunity and maternity protection benefits for women. Article 65 of the proclamation - on general protection measures - reads:

1. Women may not be discriminated against as regards opportunity or treatment in employment and remuneration, on the basis of their sex.
2. The Minister may, where a woman complains against discrimination pursuant to sub-Article (1) hereof, decide whether there is discrimination on the basis of her sex. The Minister may, where he/she decides there is discrimination, order the employer concerned to rectify the situation.
3. The woman or the employer may appeal against the decision of the Minister to the high court within fifteen days from the day they receive a copy of the decision

Further, Article 41 stipulates that “an employer shall pay equal starting wages for the same type of work”, while Article 65 protects the rights of women employees with regard to maternity leave and benefits. Article 67 provides for suitable working conditions for pregnant women. According to Article 23 of the Proclamation, an employee's gender is considered a non-legitimate ground for terminating a contract, a principle reinforced under Article 67.

Implementation:

Eritrea's 1994 Land Proclamation was a major piece of legislation as far as women's right to land ownership is concerned. Entrenched traditional attitudes, however, have been slowing women's access to land. To counter this, the NUEW has been focussing on this issue as part of its advocacy programmes. In 2002, for example, fifty legal officers from various parts of the country were trained to advocate for women's right to land ownership.

Though still remain disadvantaged in many respects, Eritrean women have started gaining unprecedented **access to resources**. In a sharp departure from previous practice, more and more women throughout the country are acquiring **land** for farming, residential and other purposes. In the Region of Debub, one of Eritrea's six administrative regions, for example, 37,922 women, representing 33% of all recipients, were allotted land between 1998 and 1999. In the Central Region 27% of the total beneficiaries were women.

Women are also increasingly benefiting from the main micro-credit programmes in the country. In 2001, 37% of all clients of ECDF³'s 'Savings And Micro Credit Programme' were women. From about 440 women (30% of beneficiaries) at the start of the programme in 1996, the number of women beneficiaries had reached over 4000 by 2001. While all beneficiaries of NUEW's micro-credit scheme are women (the number increased from 1760

³ Eritrean Community Development Fund

in 1997 to 2200 in 2002 of which 77% had fully repaid their loans), the proportion on women clients if ACORD⁴'s programme has steadily increased from 26% in 1998 to 57% in 2003.

The Savings & Micro Credit Program (SMCP) was one component of the larger ECDF program. The ECDF itself, a community-based fund for the development of rural social and economic infrastructures, was designed as a gender sensitive program in line with government gender policy. Hence a gender action plan was developed to ensure that women benefit equally from ECDF-financed activities, and play an active role in the identification, design and management of sub-projects. Key elements of the ECDF-GAP are summarized as follows:

- Monitoring and supervising the impact of ECDF activities on women
- Increasing and strengthening the participation of women in ECDF activities
- Training to support women's participation
- Improving poor or disadvantaged women's access to and control over economic assets.

In general terms women and the community at large have gained considerably from all ECDF-financed activities, namely, micro credit, rural water supply, building of feeder roads to expand the road network addressing the transportation issues, construction of schools and health centres and multi- purpose community centres.

Overall some 1.15 million individuals benefited from the ECDF programme interventions over a period of five years (1996-2000) at an average investment per capita of about US\$23 (WB 2002). Among the programme's results were the following:

- Education: access to school facilities for about 375,000 children at the primary, middle and secondary levels of whom 48% were girls;
- Health: Improved access to health facilities and health care services for at least 180,000 individuals, of whom over 50% were women;
- Rural water supply: increased access to safe drinking water for at least 210,000 individuals, significantly reducing the burden on women;
- Savings and micro-credit: 11,800 individuals benefited from the scheme of whom 37% were women. Average household income increased by 20%.
- Women also benefited from new rural market infrastructures, representing 80% of the more than 1000 beneficiaries involved in small-scale trading activities.

As indicated earlier, 37% of the beneficiaries' of the SMCP are women, comprising female-headed households, former (demobilised) combatants, women returnees and IDPs⁵.

Evaluation of the programme revealed that improvements in their lives were noticeable, as they were able to sustain themselves economically and introduce a change of life in their respective families. This activity has also enabled women to join the informal sector by involving themselves in various economic activities i.e. poultry, dairy milk supply, small trades etc. (NUEW)

In addition to micro-credit provision, and s part of its women's economic empowerment programme, the NUEW continued to work in supporting rural women with small enterprise start-up and business skills training. It also continued to advocate for facilitating their access to land, credit and other productive resources.

⁴ ACORD is an NGO

⁵ Internally displaced people

Another indicator of women's economic empowerment is their ownership of business enterprises. 41% of all business licenses issued in the Central Region (Asmara and surrounding areas) over the last five years were to women.

Table 5: Business licenses issued in the Central Region, 1999-2003

Year	Business licenses issued			
	Male	Female	Total	% Female
1999	706	406	1,112	36.5%
2000	510	504	1,014	49.7%
2001	733	557	1,290	43.2%
2002	901	633	1,534	41.3%
2003	820	442	1,262	35.0%
	3,670	2,542	6,212	40.9%

Source: Business License Office, Asmara

Over 400 businesswomen are currently members of the Eritrean National Chamber of Commerce (ENCC) holding 16% of the total membership and 13% of the board of directors. Recently, ENCC established a women's business development unit mandated to encourage and empower women in business by providing relevant business training programmes, promote information sharing and networking and create a data bank of Eritrean women in business.⁶

The Ministry of Agriculture conducts various programs to support local farmers both women and men. Under the Emergency Reconstruction program (ERP) for instance, crop seeds have been distributed and over 40,000 people took part in cash-for-work in the hillside terracing and afforestation programme. Women were active participants in these programmes. (NUEW, CEDAW Rep., 2002).

Under this project in 2001, 9900 women farmers were supported with smallholder poultry programs giving chicks, six-month feed supplies and building materials per household. Grants were also given in dairy goats for fattening purposes and eventually for milking and meat selling; two beehives per woman were also granted to encourage rural women in bee-keeping activities. Most beneficiaries are female-headed households. In general to encourage women's participation in agriculture and assist poor farmers 72,349 chicks, 2931 dairy goats, 71.65kgs of vegetable seeds, 31,333 different farm tools and equipment and 12 motor pumps were distributed to farmers including 3,800 women farmers.⁷

Farmers who wanted to expand their small range farming activities to commercial farming had access to micro credit loans within the ministry. About 1300 people received loans for agricultural activities.

The Farmer Advisory Services (FAS) is a new approach to extension services introduced by the MoA to enable local farmers organize themselves, identify their knowledge and skills requirements and improve their agricultural production and eventually improve their livelihoods.⁸ FAS committees are organized at village level where women farmers are members, whereas at the Sub-regional level the NUEW holds a seat together with other stakeholders. Although this mechanism is of a recent undertaking, it is bringing rural women

⁶ ENCC , WBDU report, 2002

⁷ MoA, annual report 2001, planning & statistics office

⁸ Ministry of Agriculture. FAS, annual progress report, 2001

on the agenda and is including them in the planning and decision making process of all agricultural activities in their respective communities.

Gaps And Challenges:

- Traditional attitudes have posed some obstacles vis-à-vis land ownership by women. In the Southern Region, for example, delays in land distribution were reported as a result. Widowed women facing difficulties in acquiring land in their spouses' village were cited in this respect.
- Limited entrepreneurial skills and knowledge and/or ability to access markets are some of the concerns facing women in business.

2.5 Women and Conflicts – Human Rights of Women – Violence Against Women

NATIONAL GENDER ACTION PLAN – STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN

- *Improve the Deficiencies in human rights laws for women*
- Eradicate harmful Cultural practices, like FGM, test of virginity, arranged under age marriages
- Strengthen/ improve health facilities and services for treatment of complications Arising from harmful practices

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

- Eradicate practices of rape, wife battering, female repression & FGM
- Strengthen the implementation and monitoring of international and regional human rights instruments and enable female and male to know how to use them

WOMEN IN SITUATIONS OF ARMED CONFLICT

- Eradicate the Social cultural Prejudices against women ex-combatants and land mine victims
 - Establish and formalize a system of identification & reunification of family members
 - Initiate schemes to rehabilitate collapsed economies of destabilized households and land mine victims
-

2.5.1 Human Rights of Women

Policy/Legislation:

As described in Chapter 1, the various pieces of legislation and official policies guarantee equal rights of women and provide protection of women's rights.

Implementation:

The NUEW continued to build capacity for women through various training activities, seminar and workshops, with a view to raising women's awareness and building their capacity to fight for their rights. The training, in 2002, of fifty legal officers on gender-sensitive land distribution was part of this work.

As explained earlier, women were also pro-actively sensitised to run for locality and community court elections, resulting in a major surge in women's representation in local elected bodies.

Gaps And Challenges:

However, there is a general lack of awareness of the existence of these laws by both women and men. The starting point for women's enjoyment of their rights is a systematic identification of these rights, combined with public awareness for the general population.

2.5.2 Women In Conflict Situations

The Situation:

The recent conflict with Ethiopia, which erupted in 1998 and escalated in May 2000, resulted in the displacement of over 1.1 million people from areas the along the border with Ethiopia. Of the displaced, women constituted 25%, children 65% and the remaining 10% are elderly

men. With the mobilization of the most able-bodied men into national service, more women had to assume the role of the family's breadwinner, creating a surge in female-headed households. The situation created a more daunting task of assisting even more female-headed households to be self-supporting.

Most of the IDPs have now returned to their homes, but 58,000 still remain in camps due to the general insecurity and the presence of land mines all related to the current delays the border demarcation process.

The expulsion from Ethiopia of over 75,000 Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin also caused immense human suffering, particularly among women and children. Due to the abrupt and disorderly nature of the expulsions, thousands of families experienced separations in the process, with children being separated from one or both parents. ERREC's records show that between 1998 and 2000 over 25,000 children, under the age of 18, were left behind.

Programmes:

Various programmes have been implemented (some still on-going) to address the rehabilitation and recovery needs of those affected by the recent conflict and/or drought. Some of the major programmes are: the government's Eritrea Reconstruction Programme (ERP), the post-war recovery programme coordinated by UNDP and implemented by a number of NGOs and the regional governments of Debub and Gash-Barka. ERREC has been the main coordinator of relief assistance to the affected populations. Several UN organisations, bilaterals, as well as national and international NGOs have been cooperating with ERREC.

2.5.3 Violence Against Women

The most predominant forms of violence against Eritrea women are certain traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and virginity checks. Domestic violence occurs and the rate of reported rape cases, though modest, is, albeit, on the increase. It is believed that many rape cases are not filed for fear of social alienation that the victim could face.

All these are manifestations of the lower value traditionally placed on women and their unequal status. While government has drafted laws that guarantee protection of women, there is a need for continuous education of the public on the harmful impact of violence (traditional and non-traditional) on women and society in general.

Through patient campaigning based on long-term strategic view, the NUEW, together with partners, is resolved to fight FGM. In deed, in line with its advocacy approach of focussing on one particular area each year, or each period, the NUEW has FGM as a main area of focus for the year 2004. An important ally in this campaign is the NUEYS, which also has combating FGM as one of its main programme areas.

PART THREE: Institutional Development

In Eritrea, the mandate to oversee the promotion of gender equality and mainstreaming and the empowerment of women rests with the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW). The NUEW's mission is to ensure that all Eritrean women confidently stand for their rights and equally participate in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres of the country and share in the benefits.

The NUEW, established in 1979 as a non-governmental organization, with the mandate to mobilize women to fight for Eritrea's Independence and Women's Equality, continued its commitment after independence for the latter objective.

Through this organization women's participation in the armed struggle for independence was enhanced and a solid foundation of equal opportunity & participation of women in all walks of life was laid.

As the main champion of Eritrean women's equality and empowerment, the NUEW advocates for the following:

- Promulgation and implementation of laws that protect women's rights in the family, including entitlement rights, and other civil laws;
- Equal access to education and employment opportunities: equal pay for equal work and equal rights to skills development and promotion;
- Improved access to adequate health care, paid maternity leave, and child care services;
- Eradication of harmful traditional practices that endanger women's health and well-being;
- Reduction of poverty among Eritrean women and their families.

The NUEW's specific objectives are to:

1. Eliminate all forms of discrimination against women
2. Create an environment conducive to the effective and meaningful participation of women in all sectors of national development.
3. Enhance the quality of life for women as well as the community at large
4. Sensitize and enhance gender awareness among women and society at large
5. Eradicate illiteracy among women, and provide skills training
6. Build the institutional capacity of NUEW
7. Ensure and increase women's participation in decision making and political leadership
8. Improve women's health and fight against harmful traditional practices
9. Strive to have a productive, creative workforce of women who can play a decisive role in the national economy
10. Conduct research on women's issues and disseminate relevant information
11. Promote women's legal rights
12. Strive to alleviate and socialize domestic chores.

Recognising the history, organisational goals and outreach capacity of the NUEW, therefore, the Government mandated the Union to assume the role of national machinery to promote gender mainstreaming.

Following its founding congress in 1979, the membership and network of the NUEW expanded considerably within and outside Eritrea embracing women with various social backgrounds. Currently, the NUEW has over 200,000 members and has branches at the

regional, sub-regional and community levels throughout Eritrea. Its membership also extends within Eritreans living overseas where the NUEW has 58 branch offices in 18 countries around the world.

Throughout its history, the NUEW proved to be an effective organisation with widespread, solid grass-roots presence. Moreover, the wide-range of projects and activities carried out over the years by the NUEW, benefiting tens of thousands of mainly poor rural women, have contributed to the credibility and trust it enjoys among Eritrean women. The NUEW also boasts a wide network of both national partners, ranging from government ministries to non-governmental and community organisations, institutions of learning and the private sector, as well as international partners both in the immediate region and elsewhere, established over the years through joint activities and cooperation. The NUEW has also managed to organize a strong and effective network of women within the country and the Diaspora.

Considering that ensuring women's rights is not an exclusive responsibility of women and their organizations, other government and non-government entities are also contributing their input towards women's development agendas.

The NUEW, therefore, works in close coordination and cooperation with concerned government sectors, local /International NGO's and the community at large. Among other activities, it has managed to conduct sensitization programs of the constitutional and legal provisions, within the community and women. The Ministry of Education for instance, has taken concrete action to combat gender stereotyping within the education system i.e. revising and engendering curriculum, printing new textbooks featuring progressive roles of girls/women and organizing gender sensitization workshops for school personnel

The NUEW has played and continues to play a key role in advocating for, monitoring, and evaluating the formulation/planning and implementation of government policies and programs from a gender perspective

A five years National Plan of action on gender development has been developed by the NUEW, relevant legal provisions enacted and gender focal points appointed in some Ministries.

A mechanism for coordinating the implementation and monitoring of the NGAP is has yet to be fully instituted. This is in line with government and NUEW approach to focus on building capacity in the various partner institutions before embarking on the formation of elaborate institutional structures.

Although some ministries have already established a system of collecting and keeping statistics in a gender-disaggregated style, a consistent approach that embraces all government line ministries, private sector, non governmental organizations and other concerned institutions needs to be integrated and streamlined.

In the framework of the National Gender Action Plan indicators have been developed for each set of planned actions and objectives in each area of priority. These will be used for monitoring progress in each area. The framework also indicates the key actors under each strategic objective.

The **Centre** for Gender Research, Studies and Resources is in the process of establishment at the University of Asmara. This Centre will not only enable generation of gender disaggregated data for national policy planning but will also enhance capacity in generating the required knowledge and developing the information needed for strategic approaches to mainstreaming gender in all sectors and at different levels of the country.

PART FOUR: Main Challenges and Actions to Address Them

The legal and policy environment in Eritrea is indeed favourable to gender equity and the empowerment of women. From the constitution to the various laws and regulations to sector policies, a conducive environment has been put in place. The key challenge is rather in operationalising the different laws and policies due to lack of capacity on the one hand and certain traditional attitudes in society on the other.

Technical capacity to mainstream gender in all aspects of operational policies, programmes and projects is a main handicap. Gender budgeting is a case in point.

Efforts are being stepped up by the government, and the NUEW in particular, to address this issue. Agreement has been reached to establish a Center for Gender Research, Studies and Resources in the University of Asmara. The centre is expected to play a pivotal role in building capacity within various public and private institutions for gender-sensitive planning, implementation and monitoring. Capacity for gender mainstreaming, budgeting, gender disaggregated data, gender-conscious monitoring and enforcement will be at the centre of the planned capacity building actions. Indeed, the NUEW approach to implementing the National Action Plan is based on emphasizing capacity building as an essential requirement for effective implementation and enforcement. As capacity is gradually built within key stakeholder entities, it will be possible to implement planned actions and enforce all legal and regulatory provisions on an incremental basis.

As the NUEW embarks on making the transition from an organization that was set up to make emergency responses to one that focuses on strategic planning for more effective policy formulation and programming for the advancement of women and children, its capacity needs have also evolved. Consequently, the need for capacity building within the organisation is currently in such areas as: organisational planning and management, policy planning with gender focus, mainstreaming gender in sector ministries, communication and information dissemination, advocacy and outreach, application of international human rights instruments and women's rights as well as monitoring.

As the government of Eritrea and the NUEW promote gender mainstreaming, they are also cognizant of the need to continue implementing programmes and projects specifically targeted at women. This is imperative in our Eritrean society where, considering the significant gender disparities in all aspects of life, a pro-active approach to enhance women's participation is a matter of necessity. Eritrea's strategy is, therefore, to pursue gender mainstreaming side by side women-specific programmes. In addition to a wide range of programmes and projects aimed at enhancing women's access to productive resources, skills training etc, the limited affirmative action initiatives, pertaining to quotas in legislative bodies and admission rates to certain education institutions, are part of this strategy.

Projects aiming at empowering women economically, including micro-credit schemes, have produced significant changes in the situation of many of the beneficiaries. In the poorer communities of rural Eritrea, where even the smallest economic benefits to women could be quite meaningful, the socio-economic impact is unmistakable. This affects gender relations as well. There is evidence that some husbands may not readily accept the newly acquired economic status of their spouses. This impact needs to be carefully studied and understood in order to avoid any disruptive tendencies and to bring about a new awareness and acceptability of the contributions that both men and women can make to the welfare of their families.

Pregnancy related mortality, HIV/AIDS and harmful traditional practices such as FGM pose considerable dangers to the health and wellbeing of women in Eritrea. A low rate of service utilization is contributing to the problem of mother and child morbidity and mortality. Hence, the reproductive and general health conditions of Eritrean women will continue to be a primary area of focus in the NUEW's programmes and targeted interventions. In the coming years, the Union will intensify work in this area by focusing on the fight against female circumcision, reducing mother and child mortality and will actively engage in combating HIV/AIDS, in close collaboration with Ministry of Health.

Education of mothers has been identified to be the single most important factor in determining the health patterns, economic status and general empowerment of women in Eritrea (EDHS, 2002). It is the resolve of the Eritrean government, therefore, to actively pursue girl's education and women's literacy with increased vigour. The Ministry of Education has already planned to accelerate efforts aimed at increasing female enrolment rates and meet the MDG targets. It will actively encourage increased participation of women in all educational and literacy programmes.

Economic hardship, aggravated by the border conflict and years of protracted drought, have impacted the majority of Eritreans, particularly communities in rural areas and smaller urban centres. Among the hardest hit are female-headed households (GoSE, poverty assessment, 2003). The government will therefore step up activities that focus on women's economic, development and poverty alleviation. This is already at the centre of the national poverty reduction strategy, and the national Food Security Strategy, both to be launched shortly.

Eritrean women have claimed unprecedented gains in the recent local elections as well as elections of community magistrates. The onus is now upon Eritrean women themselves, the Eritrean government and such advocates of gender equality as the NUEW to maintain and consolidate these achievements.

Apart from some key ministries, gender-disaggregated data is not readily available in all government, private sector, and non-governmental organizations. In line with the actions planned in the NGAP, all public institutions will be encouraged to start gender-disaggregating their data.

Annex 1: Trends in various indicators affecting women

DHS 1995 and 2002 COMPARISONS		
	1995	2002
Women's empowerment		
Decision on use of earnings (women who decide themselves)	71.5%	72.6%
Employment		
Not employed in last 12 months	73.0%	76.1%
Fertility		
Total fertility rate (number of children)	6.1	4.8
Fertility regulation		
Knowledge of contraceptive methods	68.0%	88.9%
Exposure to family planning information	36.3%	50.4%
Acceptability of media messages on family planning	56.7%	68.9%
Percentage of women who have ever used any contraceptive method	12.0%	17.3%
Contraceptive prevalence rate	8%	8%
Maternal health		
Percentage of preg. women who received antenatal care	49.2%	70.8%
Percentage of births assisted by a health professional	20.6%	28.3%
Met need* for Emergency Obstetric care	43%	53%
Child vaccinations		
Percentage of children 12-23 months who had received all required vaccinations	5.2%	37.7%
Female circumcision		
Proportion of women who support discontinuing FGM	38.4%	48.7%
Percentage of women circumcised (all circumcision types)	94.5%	88.7%

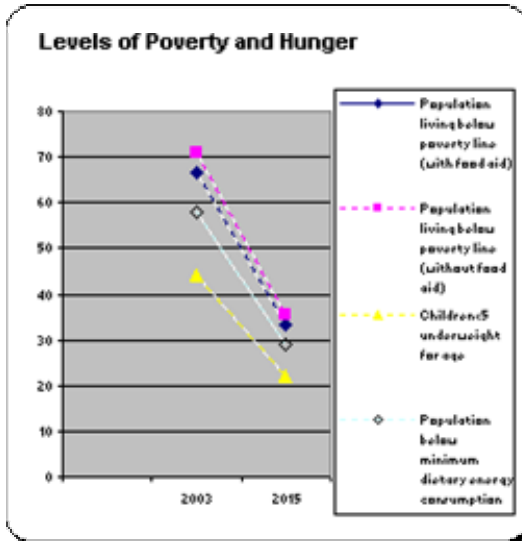
*Met need refers to the proportion of women who actually reach formal health facilities for care when they have complications

Annex 2: Eritrea's progress towards MDG targets

(adapted from UNDP, 2003)

MDG 1. Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

Targets 1 & 2. Reduce by half, the proportion of people living under the national poverty line and those who suffer from hunger

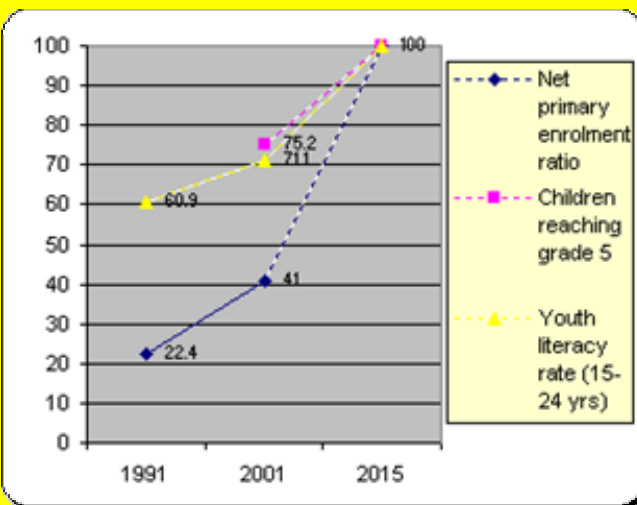


Poverty is widespread in Eritrea with over 66% of population living below the national poverty line. Of these some 37% are considered extremely poor and destitute. When food aid is taken into account over 60% of the population is below national poverty line. In the majority of poor people live in the rural areas, the intensity of poverty is more pronounced in rural areas other than Asmara with over 81% incidence. At present, over 2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance due to the combined effects of drought and war. With an average annual cereal production of 1.2 million metric tons (2002-2002) that meets only 30-35% of the country's food needs, food shortages are chronic. Malnutrition

among children under five remains high even with a slight decrease in 2002 to 39.6% from 43% in 1995. At present, Eritrea is confronted with serious economic challenges including drought and water management and macroeconomic stabilization to promote sustainable growth and poverty reduction. The GOE is currently in the midst of preparing an Interim-Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper aimed at accelerating pro-poor economic growth.

MDG 2. Achieve Universal Primary Education

Target 3. Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

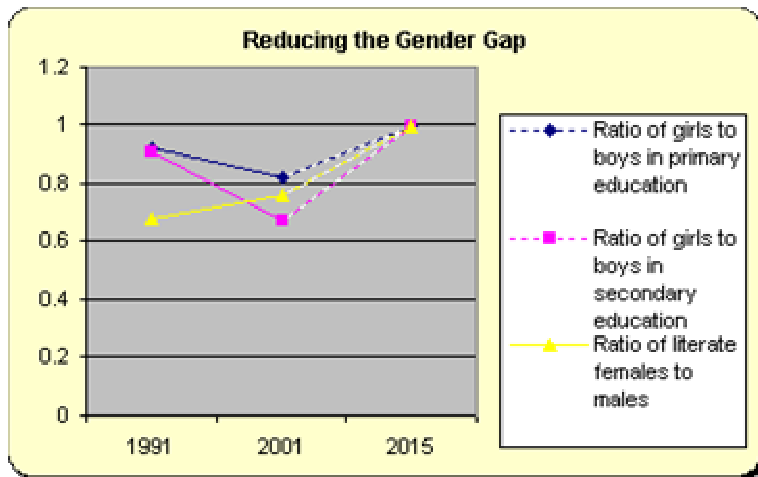


Access to education has improved significantly over the past ten years due to an increase in the number of schools built, particularly in the previously disadvantaged areas. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) have also improved although still low at 52% and 41% respectively.

Data for completion rates at primary level indicates great wastage due to high repetition and drop-out rates.

MDG 3. Promote Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Target 4. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education

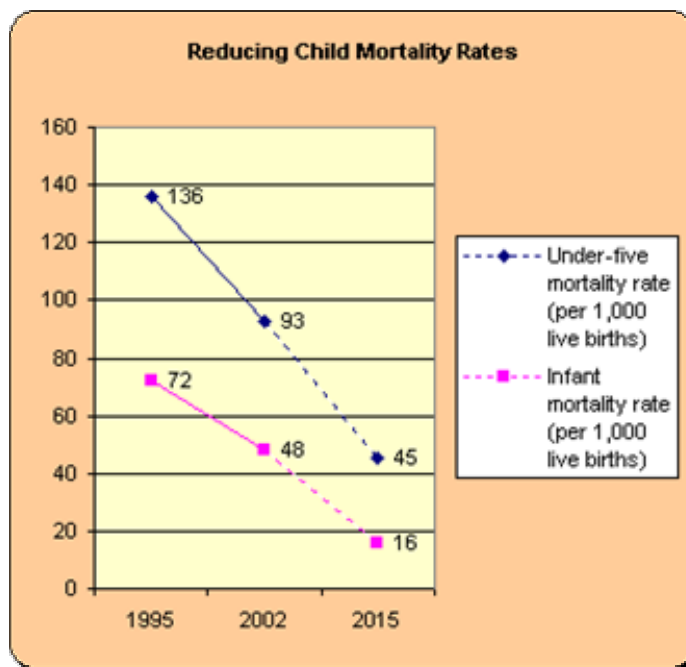


While GER and NER are increasing, gender disparity is not decreasing at the same rate. Although girls' enrolment has increased over the years, more needs to be done to eliminate gender disparity. There are many socio-cultural and economic factors that continue to adversely affect girls' education in Eritrea. Bringing schools closer to

the community and enlisting female teachers are some of the strategies being implemented by MOE to reduce and finally eliminate gender disparity in education at all levels.

MDG 4. Reduce Child Mortality

Target 5. Reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate among children under five

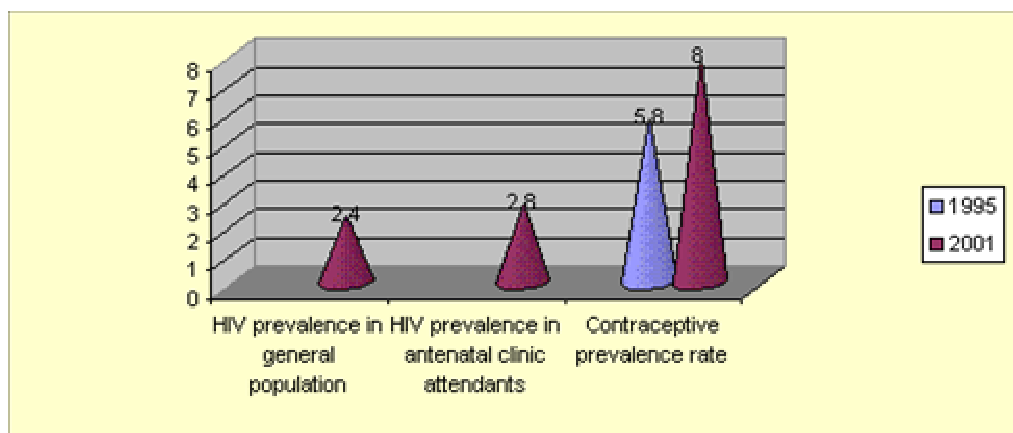


Mortality rates among children under five have decreased since the 1995 EDHS due to improvements in health care coverage, including vaccinations for major childhood diseases. Immunization coverage for under-five children has improved tremendously with over 84 % of one year olds vaccinated against measles. However, the mortality ratio is still among the highest in sub-Saharan Africa, due to lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities which are contributing factors in the spread of communicable diseases. Acute respiratory infections, diarrheal diseases, malaria

and malnutrition are most likely the underlying causes of child deaths in Eritrea.

MDG 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Diseases

Target 7. Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS

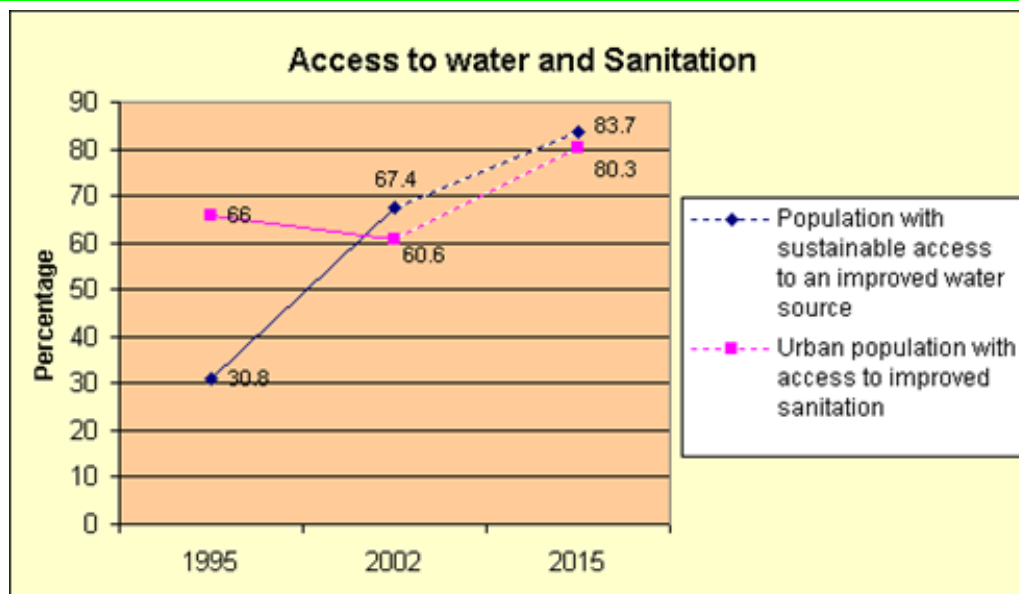


The MOH estimates that the rate of HIV infection is doubling every 18 months and HIV/AIDS was reported as the second leading cause of death at health facilities in 2000, as compared to being the tenth leading cause of death at health facilities in 1996. There is only limited information on sero-prevalence prior to 2001. The 2001 sero-survey and behavioral survey conducted among five population groups shows overall rate in the general population is 2.4% while HIV prevalence among the military is 4.6% and among female bar workers (including CSWs) is 22.8%. The second five-year strategic plan on HIV/AIDS (2003-2007) was recently adopted by all stakeholders aimed at strengthening multi-sector response, with prevention strategies that focus on Behavior Change Communication, Voluntary Counseling and Testing, Prevention of Mother To Child Transmission, STI and blood safety management

MDG 7. Ensure environmental sustainability

Target 10. Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water

Target 11. Improve sanitation facilities for urban dwellers by 2020



Annex 3

Millennium Development Goals and Targets Eritrea's Status at a Glance

By 2015 all 189 United Nations Member States have pledged to:

Goal 1. Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger	MDG Indicator	1994/95	2002
Target 1. Reduce by half, the proportion of people whose income is less than a dollar a day	1. Population living below poverty line	53*	66.40%
	2. Population living below extreme poverty line	-	37%
Target 2. Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger	3. Children under 5 yrs underweight for age	43.70%	44%
	4. Population below minimum dietary energy consumption	-	58%
Goal 2. Achieve Universal Primary Education		1991	2001
Target 3. Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling	5. Net primary enrolment ratio (%)	22.4	41
	6. Children reaching grade 5 (%)	-	75.2
	7. Youth literacy rate (15-24 yrs) (%)	60.9	71.1
Goal 3. Promote Gender Equality & Empower Women		1991	2001
Target 4. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015	8. Ratio of girls to boys in primary education	0.95	0.82
	9. Ratio of girls to boys in secondary education	-	0.67
	10. Ratio of girls to boys in tertiary education	-	0.15
	11. Ratio of literate females to males	0.68	0.76
	12. Female share of non-agricultural wage employment	-	-
	13. Seats in parliament held by women as % of total	...	22
Goal 4. Reduce Child Mortality		1995	2002
Target 5. Reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate among children under five years of age	14. Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	155	93
	15. Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	72	48
	16. One year olds fully immunized against measles	51	84.2
Goal 5. Improve Maternal Health		1995	2002

Target 6. Reduce by three-quarters the maternal mortality ratio	17. Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)	985	**
	18. Births attended by skilled health personnel	21	28

Goal 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases		1995	2002
Target 7. Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS	19. HIV prevalence among pregnant women aged 15-24	1.3	
	20. Contraceptive prevalence rate	5.8	
Target 8. Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases	21. Number of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS	-	
	22. Malaria related mortality rate (per 100,000)	74	
	23. Malaria-related mortality rate among children aged 0-4 (per 100,000)	391	
	24. Malaria cases (per 100,000 people)	3,479	
	25. Children under 5 with fever treated with anti-malarial drugs (%)	3.6	
	26. Tuberculosis related mortality rate (per 100,000 people)	46	
	27. Tuberculosis cases per 100,000 people	249	
	28. Tuberculosis cases detected under DOTS	15	
	29. Tuberculosis cases cured under DOTS	76	

Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability		1995	2002
Target 9. Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse loss of environmental resources	30. Land area covered by forests (%)	13.9	13.5
	31. Ratio of protected area to surface area (2003)		0.04
	32. GDP per unit of energy use		0.1
Target 10. Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water	34. Population with sustainable access to an improved water source	30.8	67.4
	35. Urban population with access to improved sanitation (%)	66	60.6
Target 11. Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020			

* 1994 information on poverty levels is based on a rapid poverty assessment covering 664 households, while the data for 2002 is based on the Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS) that covered over 5000 households nationwide.

** Maternal mortality rates were not included in EDHS 2002, therefore there is no updated information since 1995 EDHS

Sources of data: HDR 2003, EDHS 1995, EDHS 2002, Rapid Poverty Assessment (World Bank, 1994) MOE Education Statistics 2001

Annex 4: Women in Industry

Women entrepreneurs in Manufacturing, Trade and Services sector and growth rate

SECTORS	1996		1998		FEMALE	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	%	Growth rate
Manufacture	2475	249	2581	296	10	18
Trade	36366	6926	40973	7804	16	13
Services	6527	1531	8145	1910	19	25
	45368	8706	51699	10010		

Source: Business Licensing Office, 1998

Women's share in total labour force in Industry, Trade and Service and growth rate

Sectors	1996		1998		% of 1996	% of 1998
	Male	Female	Male	Female		
Manufacturing	18679	8308	16941	7610	31	-8*
Trade	55369	18984	81271	28555	6	50
Service	15408	10826	19563	13595	41	26
Total	89456	38118	117775	49760	30	31

Source: Ministry of Trade and Industry, 1996, 1998.

Annex 5: Literacy and Vocational Training Programmes

Participants in Adult Literacy Programmes, Eritrea; 1997-2003

Year	Enrolled				Graduated			
	Female	Male	Total	% Female	Female	Male	Total	% Female
1997/98	10,922	655	11,577	94.3%	7611	355	7966	95.5%
1998/99	19,439	1,434	20,873	93.1%	13789	660	14449	95.4%
1999/00	49,497	2,835	52,332	94.6%	<i>(Programme interrupted)</i>			
2000/01	51,085	3,361	54,446	93.8%	35438	2,041	37479	94.6%
2001/02	47,719	5,112	52,831	90.3%	34549	3,405	37954	91.0%
2002/03	51,258	5,524	56,782	90.3%	40697	4,190	44887	90.7%
Total	229,920	18,921	248,841	92.4%	132,084	10,651	142,735	92.5%

Vocational training of women

Ministry of Agriculture (staff trained)

Year	Male	Female	Total	% Female
1994	340	72	412	17.5%
1995	306	36	342	10.5%
1996	350	52	402	12.9%
1997	175	20	195	10.3%
1998	180	23	203	11.3%
1999	332	51	383	13.3%
2000	196	60	256	23.4%
2001	223	91	314	29.0%
2002	109	68	177	38.4%
2003	196	48	244	19.7%
Total	2407	521	2928	17.8%

Ministry of Agriculture (Farmers trained)

Year	Male	Female	Total	% Female
1994	1,973	1,812	3,785	47.9%
1995	2,006	913	2,919	31.3%
1996	3,608	1,946	5,554	35.0%
1997	962	1,741	2,703	64.4%
1998	2,264	1,515	3,779	40.1%
1999	2,923	1,342	4,265	31.5%
2000	5,393	1,807	7,200	25.1%
2001	4,562	1,365	5,927	23.0%
2002	4,630	1,504	6,134	24.5%
2003	4,428	1,670	6,098	27.4%
Total	32,749	15,615	48,364	32.3%

Ministry of Defence (National Service programme)

Year	Female	Male	Total	% Female
1999	951	15	966	98.4%
2000	1684	44	1728	97.5%
2001	808	152	960	84.2%

2002	102	112	214	47.7%
Total	3545	323	3868	91.6%

Ministry of Justice: Women trained*

Year	Number	Year	Number	Year	Number
1992	10	1996	17	2000	52
1993	--	1997	23	2001	75
1994	8	1998	51	2002	14
1995	2	1999	33	2003	55

The above does not include the programme in which 90 women were trained as paralegal practitioners mentioned on page