REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Questionnaire
on implementation of
the Beijing Platform for Action (1995)
and
the Outcome of the Twenty-third Special Session of
the General Assembly (2000)

Republic of Korea
Part One: Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment

In implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, the Republic of Korea (ROK) has focused on the following sections with particular importance/priority:

- H: Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women
- F: Women and the Economy
- D: Violence against Women
- I: Human Rights of Women
- J: Women and the Media

The ROK government, as a result, has had the most success in the aforementioned areas.

The government’s efforts to establish institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women have produced the most tangible results. The Women’s Development Act was enacted in 1995, followed by the Basic Plan for Women’s Policies and the Women’s Development Fund. In terms of governmental organization, the Ministry of Gender Equality was established for overseeing women’s policies in a more holistic manner. Inter-ministerial coordination became more effective through the founding of the Women’s Policy Coordination Committee in 2002, and the Woman’s Affairs Committee was created to deal with women’s issues in the legislative branch.

The government has also made strenuous efforts to introduce gender perspective in the policy-making and budgetary process in order to predict the impact of government policies on women.

The Women’s Development Act was legislated with the aim of promoting gender equality and fostering women’s development in all realms of the society, including the political, economic, and social. Under this Act, a Basic Plan was drawn up every five years, and the Women’s Development Fund was set up for the implementation of various projects to enhance women’s status and for supporting the building and operation of women’s facilities. As of December 2003, the Fund accumulated so far amounts to 46.7 billion won.

The First Basic Plan for Women’s Policies covering the period between 1998 and 2002 can be defined as a phase for building the institutional framework which made way for the abolishment of some major gender-discriminatory laws and practices, expansion of women’s participation in policy-making, and bolstering of maternal protection. The Second Plan covering the period between 2003~2007, has adopted as its objectives the imbuement of gender-equal perspective in all government policies, fostering of a gender-equal basis for family-related policies, and the realization of a truly gender-equal society. To this end, the government has adopted the following policy objectives.

1. Fostering a mutually-complementing partnership between both genders
2. Promotion of women’s competitiveness in an information-based society
3. Bolstering women’s representation in all sectors
4. Enhancing women’s welfare and human rights protection
Under F: Women and the Economy, the government assisted women in the home in finding employment through vocational retraining centers and helped female students in newly emerging occupations. Efforts were also made to encourage women’s entrepreneurship and to promote the role of women in the traditionally male-dominated sectors, through such measures as financially assisting women technicians in setting up their own businesses, operating business incubation centers for women, giving grants to women in farming and fishing, and supporting women scientists.

As for abolishing gender-discriminatory laws and regulations, the government has rectified a total of 771 national legislation and regulations. It is of significant importance that in the process, gender-sensitive perspective was introduced to provisions formerly discriminatory to women. The Gender Discrimination Prevention and Relief Act was enacted in 1999, and the Labor Standards Act as well as the Equal Employment Act all underwent scrutiny for gender-discriminatory elements in 2001. Committees or commissions established in accordance with these laws, namely, the Committee on Gender Equality Promotion, the Labor Relations Commission and the Equal Employment Committee provide redress measures for violations. As an added protection, the National Human Rights Commission, founded in 2001, is also mandated to conduct investigations for human rights violations of women and for gender discrimination, and to provide recourse if necessary.

However, despite the progress in institutional framework for the enhancement of women’s status, the level of gender mainstreaming in the government and in the society as a whole leaves much to be desired. The small ratio women in positions of responsibility both in the government and in the private sector, both at 5%, speak for themselves. Further, despite the progress made in repealing or amending discriminatory laws, there is much to be done to achieve de facto gender equality which can be enjoyed by women in all aspects of life. Similarly, although it is encouraging that measures to encourage women’s participation in decision-making roles and in electoral positions are meeting with success, with the number of women elected to the National Assembly in 2004 shown to have more than double at 13%, women still constitute a minority in the public office and politics.

In reducing violence against women and promoting women’s human rights, the government has taken a firm stand against all forms of violence against women by legislating the Act on Sexual Violence and Protection of Victims Thereof, and the Special Act on Domestic Violence in 1994 and 1997 respectively. The Gender Discrimination and Relief Act and the amendment in 2002 to the Equal Employment Act both ban sexual harassment, while the Child Welfare Act enforces protection against child sexual abuse. Since 2001, hotline 1366 for women needing protection from domestic violence, sexual violence, and trafficking is in operation, and the Comprehensive Action Plan to Eliminate Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence is in force since 2002.

On the understanding that prostitution usually involves use of violence, coercion, or fraud against women, government is also making efforts to stop the exploitation of women through prostitution. The Task Force for the Elimination of Prostitution, comprising of various ministries, was set up under the Office of Prime Minister in June 2003, and a Comprehensive Action Plan to Prevent Prostitution was drawn up in March 2004. Major steps were taken for the elimination of prostitution and trafficking in women for sexual exploitation when the Act on the Elimination of
Prostitution and Protection of Victims Thereof and the Act on the Prohibition of Arrangement of Prostitution and Etc. were enacted in March 2004. These laws lay down heavier penalties for forced prostitution and trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, stipulated confiscation of profits from these crimes, and provided for protection of and assistance to victims of forced prostitution and/or trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Preventing and eliminating violence against women in all its forms such as domestic violence, sexual violence and harassment, and forced prostitution constitutes an integral part of safeguarding women’s human rights, and the government has sought to set up a comprehensive network of protective measures from all forms of violence against women.

As for creating a gender-equal society in the digital era, an action plan was implemented to allow women to actively participate in, and benefit from, innovations in the information age. Under this plan, efforts are being made to facilitate women’s access to rapidly evolving information technologies and to allow women to enter the ICT-related workforce. These efforts by the government have been noted in the Secretary-General’s Report submitted to the forty-seventh Commission on the Status of Women as a model case.
Part Two: Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the further initiatives and actions identified in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

Reducing poverty and supporting women’s economic activities

The government has introduced policies, including legislative measures such as the enactment of the Basic Livelihood Act in 1999, to promote the welfare of women, who are more vulnerable to becoming marginalized socially and economically. The Act is designed with the concept of productive welfare, to do more than offer handouts, to instead empower the needy in the long term. Measures taken under the Act include financial aid to low-income families headed by women, such as scholarships for the children, and financial assistance to ease the reintegration of single mothers and their children into society from relevant facilities.

The government has also established a working-level group to study institutional measures on the means of protecting women in poverty as well as helping them become financially independent. The economic situation for women worsened in the midst of the economic crisis of the late 1990’s, as the increasing flexibility of the labor market caused many women to lose their jobs or to be reduced to part-time workers in the restructuring process. The result was an astounding number of households that have been plunged into poverty, the bulk of which were households headed by single women, and as such, policy emphasis was placed on helping these households become financially viable.

In order to encourage women to take part in meaningful economic activities, 14 business incubation centers for women were established since 2000, and workshops on women’s entrepreneurial skills are held periodically throughout the country. Between 2000 to 2002, a total of 20,000 women benefited from 380 sessions of such workshops.

Special efforts were made to provide information and training to full-time homemakers on promising economic opportunities. Women in the employment-seeking age group, such as vocational highschool and university graduates, are encouraged to start their own businesses. Opportunities to explore and discover the diversity of occupations are also offered to these women through a unique event called “Occupation Fest” sponsored by the government.

For women’s vocational training, there are 51 Women’s Human Resource Development Centers, which started with the Women Worker’s Centers. 30,000 women receive training at these centers annually. To help women put their training to use, a 10 billion won-fund was carved out of the Women’s Development Fund to provide loans up to 100 million won per person to women who have government-issued certificates for skills or have completed training at the Women’s Human Resource Development Center and wish to set up their own businesses. In 2004, women heads of low-income households became eligible for loans up to 500 million won for starting their own businesses.

In addition to assisting women set up their own businesses, the government is making an effort to help women broaden their choice of occupations, especially in the traditionally male-
dominated fields such as farming and fishing. For example, since October 2000, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is spearheading efforts to help women farmers by implementing the Five-Year Plan for the Training of Women Farmers. In 2001, the Basic Act on Fostering and Assisting Women in Agriculture and Fishery was enacted, which aims to assess the economic and social situation of women in agricultural and fishing industries and provide expertise and other assistance.

The Ministry of Science and Technology has legislated the Act on Fostering and Assisting Women in Science in December 2002, followed by the Basic Plan on Women Scientists in order to encourage women to enter the field of science. In accordance with the Plan, public research institutes and government-funded institutes are recommended to fill annual quotas with women. Under this scheme, women are expected to make up 20% of all positions in these institutes by 2007.

**Women in Decision-making**

Steadfast efforts such as establishing quota systems to encourage the participation of women in public service have paid off, as can be seen by the increase in the ratio of women in public service from 27.3% in 1995 to 42.9% in 2002. From 2003, the quota system gave way to the Gender Equality Employment Initiative, which ensures a 30% quota for each gender in competitive recruiting processes by selecting additional recruits who have scored above the cut-off line among candidates of the under-represented gender. In addition, a 5 year Action Plan is being implemented with a view to securing 10% of all higher level positions for women by 2006. As of 2003, 6.4% of the higher level positions in the national government and 5.4% of local governments are filled by women.

In addition, the practice of awarding extra credits to those who have completed the military service has been scrapped as of January 2001 pursuant to the judgment rendered by the Constitutional Court that it constitutes gender discrimination.

In parallel with these efforts, the government is also taking measures to improve women’s representation on government advisory committees. As a result, the ratio of women on various government committees has increased from 17.6 in 1999 to 31.6% in 2003, and is expected to reach a target rate of 40% by 2007.

Further, the government has been committed to increasing women’s participation in politics. To this end, a quota was introduced whereby a certain proportion of candidates on a party’s proportional representation list for the National Assembly must be women. At present, the quota stands at 50%. Financial aid is offered to political parties as an added incentive to recruit more women candidates. These measures have met with success, when 11 women were elected to the National Assembly from proportional representation (24%), and 49 (67.1%) women were elected to the City and Provincial Council in 2002. In the 2004 general elections, a total of 39 women were elected to the National Assembly, bringing female representation up from 5.9% to 13%.
Women and Education

The Basic Education Act, amended in 2002 to include a provision on the promotion of gender equality through education, directs the national and local governments to take specific measures to this end. Accordingly, efforts were made to create more gender-equal highschool curricula, for example, by integrating the formerly sex-segregated courses such as “technology and industry” and “household skills” into a single course for both boys and girls.

Efforts were also made to mitigate the tendency of girls to favor certain areas of study over others, especially over math and sciences. In order to deal with this imbalance, the government has developed tools and programs to encourage girls to foster an interest in subjects traditionally regarded as male territory. The development of girl-friendly introductory courses to science, science camps, and dissemination of information brochures on higher learning in sciences are some of the measures taken by the government. Since 2003, guidelines on a gender-equal education for teachers are being distributed both in hard copy and through the internet.

Realizing gender equality through education is not limited to a specific age group. With the entry into force of the Continuing Education Act in 1999, access to education for adults became greater, resulting in increased opportunities to narrow the gap in education between men and women.

Making room for women in teaching positions at institutions of higher learning is another important goal for the government. Despite the high percentage of women receiving higher education (36.8%) and attaining Ph. Ds (23.8%), not enough is being done to ensure that women are given a fair share of teaching positions in institutions of higher learning.

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources has required that female professors make up a significant proportion of the faculty body as a qualification for receiving governmental financial grants to universities, and has recommended that measures be taken to ensure that female professors make up a meaningful portion of major administrative positions and committees within state and national universities. In June 2003, a total of 200 teaching positions in various state and national universities have been created, to be filled solely by female professors, followed by an amendment to the Act on Civil Servants in Teaching Positions a month later, which laid the legal foundation for a quota system for the mandatory recruitment of female professors. In the future, special emphasis will be placed on on-going efforts to ensure not only the entry into teaching positions by women, but also the extent to which efforts have been made to enhance female professors’ status and role after they have entered the work force at institutions of higher learning.

Women and Health

As increasing number of women enter the work force, an awareness on working women’s rights to health services and a sound working environment has evolved rapidly. With the shift in social values, problems associated with the prevalence of sexual intercourse among adolescents such as births out of wedlock and sexually transmitted diseases are on the rise, highlighting the need for coherent policies on the adolescents’ sexual, reproductive health. Another problem unique to
Korea as well as certain Asian cultures is that of the traditional male preference leading to illegal screening of fetuses and selective abortions of female fetuses. The government, recognizing the link between women’s health and the structure of the society on a broader level, is taking a holistic approach in dealing with this important issue, encompassing efforts in all fronts.

Efforts to create an atmosphere conducive to the emotional and physical health of expecting mothers in terms of working conditions and financial aspect have paid off. With the amendments in 2001 aimed at improving maternity-related clauses of the Labor Standards Act, Equal Employment Act, and Employment Insurance Act, women are now entitled to 90 days of maternal leave as opposed to 60 days prior to amendment, financial assistance of up to 1.35 million won and leave for prenatal check-ups. These changes attest to the recognition that society as a whole has the responsibility to share the socio-economic burden of maternity, which, previously, was borne solely by individuals, mothers in particular. Efforts are also being made to promote breast-feeding by providing information on the benefits of breast-feeding.

As for efforts to provide adolescents with the knowledge and information on the importance of sexual, reproductive health, the government is working with women’s organizations to educate adolescents, as well as offering training for counselors, and reaching out to adolescents in shelters and protection facilities.

In an effort to eliminate sex-selective abortions perpetrated under the notion of male-preference, screening of the fetus to determine sex was banned. In 1996, tougher penalties were put in place against medical doctors who performed fetus-screening for the purpose of determining sex, including revocation of license for a single incidence of fetus-screening.

In 2000, a comprehensive study on women’s health by different phase/cycle of life was commissioned by the government, along with efforts in 2003 to obtain statistical data on the overall health of Korean women, which culminated in the publication of “Health-related Statistics of Korean Women”. Through these studies, the government was able to identify 20 policy objectives. These policy objectives will be taken up in conjunction with the tri-annual survey on health and nutrition through which sex-segregated data will be collected.

**Violence against Women**

The legal foundation for the elimination of violence against women was laid in January 1994 with the enactment of the Act on the Punishment of Sexual Violence and Protection of Victims followed by the Special Act on the Punishment of Domestic Violence and the Act on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims in December 1997. The founding of the Ministry of Gender Equality added impetus to efforts to offer protection to victims of violence as well as to develop policies to prevent violence against women at the same time.

The Comprehensive Action Plan to Eliminate Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence, which has been enforced since 2002, outlines 7 areas to stem violence against women, including police intervention, counseling, prevention education and awareness-raising. In particular, **hotline 1366**, a hotline for assisting and advising victims of violence is accessible 24 hours a day, 365 days a
year since 2001. Interpretation service is available to non-Korean victims of trafficking or sexual violence who are in need of protection.

Sexual violence against minors has been on the rise in recent years, which is a great concern to the government. In 2004, a center for child/adolescent victims of sexual violence which provides counseling and therapy was established as a first step to dealing with this troubling trend. In terms of judicial procedure, measures to better protect the privacy and ensure safety of victims of sexual violence with special needs, such as children under 13 years of age or disabled, during investigation or trial were put in place by the amendment of the Act on the Punishment of Sexual Violence and Protection of Victims in December 2003.

For the protection of victims of domestic violence, 175 counseling centers are in operation as of December 2003, 66 of which are funded by the government, along with 37 shelters for battered women. For victims of sexual violence, 115 counseling centers are in operation, 68 of which receive financial aid from the government, along with 12 shelters.

In the Republic of Korea, prostitution is now widely recognized as a crime which often involves use of force or coercion by a third party who arranges and reaps illegal financial gains. In this context, measures are being taken to identify and penalize acts of violence against women related to prostitution. In June 2003, the Task Force for the Elimination of Prostitution was established under the Office of the Prime Minister and a Comprehensive Action Plan to Prevent Prostitution was drawn up in March 2003. There were also important developments in the legislature, namely the enactment of the Act on the Elimination of Prostitution and Protection of Victims Thereof and the Act on the Prohibition of Arrangement of Prostitution and Etc., which together constitute legal grounds to punish perpetrators of trafficking for the purpose of sexual predation or those who arrange prostitution. At the same time, these Acts stipulate measures for the rehabilitation of victims.

The Gender Discrimination Prevention and Relief Act prohibits sexual harassment and stipulates the obligation of employers, in the public or private sector, to take preventive measures against harassment in the workplace. In particular, special care is taken to prevent the occurrence of sexual harassment within government bodies, and a code of conduct was drawn up and distributed. The Ministry of Gender Equality is taking various measures to stem sexual harassment in the workplace, including monitoring, educating, and supporting the training of sexual harassment prevention advocates. The Equal Employment Act also broadly defines sexual harassment as acts of sexual nature or sexual insinuations by the employer, superiors or employees which may cause the victim to feel demeaned and prohibits such acts. This Act obligates the employer to educate all employees on sexual harassment and to penalize acts of sexual harassment in order to create a safe and healthy working environment.

Women and Human Rights

As a State Party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Korean Government has had its 3rd and 4th country report reviewed in 1998, and has submitted its 5th report in 2003. In putting together these reports, the government has made a special effort to encourage the participation of NGOs and interested public throughout the
process. After the review in July 1998, a forum was opened to share the results of the review with NGOs and relevant policy-makers.

With the aim of achieving full adherence to the CEDAW, the government is currently working toward withdrawing its reservation to Article 16, paragraph g, a goal which could be achieved with an amendment to a provision of the Civil Code governing the mandatory succession of the father’s surname by the offspring.

The National Human Rights Commission, founded in 2001, is another important body in charge of investigating human rights violations and discrimination and providing recourse. The Commission defines discrimination based on sex, physical appearance, marital status, maternity, and other familial relations as constituting a violation of equality clause and thus serves as a guardian of women’s human rights.

There were several noteworthy legislative changes conducive to the elimination of gender discrimination in recent years. In accordance with the Gender Discrimination Prevention and Relief Act, enacted in 1999 and amended over the years, the Committee on Gender Equality Promotion was set up to monitor its implementation and to provide redress. In 2003, indirect discrimination was first recognized in cases of acts which may not necessarily constitute discrimination but ultimately result in gender discrimination. With the amendment of the Private International Law in 2001, children of parents of different nationalities were given the choice of choosing between both nationalities, instead of taking the father’s nationality as done previously. In addition, important legislations such as the Labor Standards Act and the Equal Employment Act have been enacted or amended in line with the gender equality agenda, and relevant committees have been established to provide redress.

The Ministry of Gender Equality has placed much emphasis on the importance of education to promote gender equality, and has founded “The Korean Institute for Gender Equality Promotion and Education” in June 2003 for hosting gender-consciousness seminars, gender-sensitive perspective development programs, and women’s leadership programs for policy makers, counselors, NGOs, military personnel, and teachers.

Although many gender-discriminatory laws and institutions have been repealed or rectified, there remains one major challenge to full legal and institutional guarantee of equal rights, i.e., the Family Head System. Under this system, a patriarch heads the family, and the family lineage is succeeded solely by males. The Family Head System has long been identified as the source of gender-discrimination in marriage and the family life, and thus women’s movements have campaigned the abolishment of this male-centered notion of family.

The Ministry of Gender Equality has taken up the abolishment of the Family Head System as an agenda since its inception, and in May 2003, put together a special task force composed of representatives from relevant Ministries, academia, and NGO’s, whose work led to the introduction of a bill in the National Assembly 6 months later on the abolishment of the Family Head System. It is expected that the bill, now pending in the National Assembly, will be reviewed and passed in the near future.
Women and the Media

Strenuous efforts have been made to get rid of gender-stereotyping and gender discrimination pervading the media, in part through the amendment of relevant laws and adoption of guidelines. In addition, commercials and advertisements are monitored for gender-discriminatory depictions, and efforts are made to portray the role of women in a positive light.

Starting in 1999, a special award is being given to TV shows and programs which have contributed to promoting gender-equality through the media. In the future, gender-sensitivity programs will be devised to educate media personnel.

Women and Environment

Women have always been active advocates of environment protection, and the government is further assisting the quantitative and qualitative expansion of women’s network for environment by providing financial aid to women’s organizations and activities. For example, the Ministry of Environment is assisting an on-line organization called “Housewives for environment-friendly household” and has sponsored a leadership program for women environmentalists.

The government believes the need of mainstreaming of gender-perspective into environmental policies. In this regard, a study was commissioned by the government in 2003 on introducing gender-perspective to environmental policies and strengthening the role of women in this field.

The Girl Child

In an effort to protect minors from harm, including abuse and violence, and to ensure that they are brought up in a safe and healthy environment, the Youth Protection Act was enacted in March 1997, followed by the establishment of the Commission on Youth Protection under the Office of the Prime Minister.

As children and adolescents have become increasingly vulnerable to sexual exploitation over the years, the need for a coordinated and effective counter-measure for their protection has led to several important steps. The first of these is the legislation of the Act on the Protection of Youth from Sexual Exploitation. In accordance with this Act, identities of sex offenders of minors are made public biennially, as a measure which may be strengthened in the future. The government believes that prevention and education are integral to preventing sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, and are providing rehabilitation programs to prevent multiple offenders as well as sex education for adolescents and assistance to victims. However, due to a shortage of facilities and rehabilitation or reintegration programs and support personnel, not all adolescents can benefit from adequate services. The government faces the challenge of developing more outreach programs for adolescent victims of sexual exploitation while making more facilities and rehabilitation services available to ensure their successful reintegration into society.
Women and Armed Conflict

Since the historic Inter-Korean Summit of June 2000, inter-Korean relations have improved, opening the way for increased exchanges and economic cooperation, which in turn led to greater opportunities for interaction between the women of both Koreas. On October 16-17 of 2002, the Inter-Korean Women’s Unification Festival was held at Mount Geumgang in North Korea, where 600 women from both sides gathered for the first time since the division of the Peninsula in 1953 to commemorate and pledge their commitment to the Joint Declaration of the 2000 Inter-Korean Summit. It was a momentous event which offered a glimpse into the potential role women can play in bringing peace to the Korean Peninsula.

The government is encouraging the participation of women in the unification process, and has strived to empower women in this regard. Under the first phase of the Basic Plan for Women’s Policies from 1998 to 2002, measures were taken for the empowerment of women in the unification process including unification education programs for women, special care for North Korean women defectors, and comparative study on gender-related laws and institutions of North Korea. The second phase of the Basic Plan aims at involving more women in the unification process, and preparing women for unification. The Ministry of Unification and the Ministry of Gender Equality are working closely together to develop gender equality agendas within the unification process.

Women and Information & Communications Technology

Under the initiative of the Ministry of Information and Communications, efforts are being made since 1998 to familiarize women with the latest information and communications technology, including government-sponsored workshops on the information technology for women. As of 2002, a total of 63,218 women have completed the course. It should be noted that upon completion of the course, 3,517 of them went on to find jobs in the information and communications technology field and 2,317 received relevant certificates. In addition, from 2000 to 2002, more than 4 million women benefited from government programs on the use of the computer and internet. Many of these programs were held at facilities with day care service, thus making them more accessible to women with children. Women who choose to start their own e-businesses or pursue internet-related fields such as programming and multi-media contents development receive assistance. The Ministry of Gender Equality has launched an Internet portal site “Women-Net”, which houses active on-line communities of women sharing information on diverse subjects such as child care, prevention of domestic and sexual violence, environment, entrepreneurship, among others.

Recognizing the increasing disparity of information technology access between different groups, the government enacted the Digital Divide Closing Act in January 2001. Under this Act, low-income groups, residents of rural areas, disabled, elderly, and women, who are at a comparative disadvantage in accessing the information and communications technology are given the necessary equipment at no charge or with minimal fee. The Digital Divide Closing Committee was also established by the Act and the Comprehensive Plan on Narrowing the Digital Divide is in implementation during the period between 2001 and 2005.
Part Three: Institutional Development

A. Ministry of Gender Equality

The Ministry of Gender Equality is the national agency in charge of formulating and implementing women’s policies. The Ministry is thus responsible for implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and the Outcome Document of the 23rd Special Session of the UN General Assembly. It is preceded by the Ministry of Political Affairs (II) and the Presidential Commission on Women’s Affairs.

The Minister, as a member of the cabinet, advises the President on women’s affairs, and introduces a gender perspective on major policies at the highest level.

The mandate of the Ministry of Gender Equality is broad, as it is charged with formulating and coordinating women’s policies within the government. More specifically, the Ministry is charged with eliminating gender discrimination, preventing domestic and sexual violence including trafficking as well as protecting victims, developing female human resources, and assisting surviving victims of sexual slavery by the Japanese military during World War II.

The Ministry is also responsible for educating relevant civil servants, corporate personnel, the media, and unions on gender equality. This task is crucial in ensuring that gender perspective is introduced in all public policies and women are treated in a non-discriminatory manner in the workplace.

The Ministry of Gender Equality performs the following functions. First, it assists and cooperates with all ministries of the national government as well as local governments in the formulation of policies which affect women. Second, it develops female human resources. Third, it safeguards the human rights of women against all forms of violence, and lastly, forges partnerships with international organizations and NGOs for the promotion of women’s status.

B. Women’s Policy Coordination Committee

The Women’s Policy Coordination Committee was established under the Office of the Prime Minister in accordance with Article 11 of the newly amended (December 2002) Women’s Development Act. The Committee seeks to bring together and coordinate women’s policies in various areas scattered throughout the government. More specifically, the Committee reviews and coordinates matters related to the implementation of the Basic Plan for Women’s Policies, women’s policies involving more than 2 ministries, and implementation of measures to realize gender equality. The Committee is chaired by the Prime Minister, with the Minister for Gender Equality as vice-chair. The Minister for Finance and Economy, Minister for Education and Human Resources, Minister of Justice, Minister of Government Administration and Home Affairs, Minister of Science and Technology, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Minister of Industry and Resources, Minister of Health and Welfare, Minister of Labor, Minister of Budget, Minister of Office for Government Policy Coordination Office, and Minister for Korean Overseas Information Service are standing members of the Committee, and other ministers are invited by the Chair to attend as deemed necessary.
C. Senior Gender Policy Coordinator

Each central government body is obligated by Article 12 of the Women’s Development Act to appoint a Gender Policy Coordination, at the deputy-ministerial level, who will introduce gender perspective in its policy-making. From May 2003 to date, Gender Policy Coordinators have been appointed across various central bodies. The Gender Policy Coordinator’s primary duty is to analyze relevant policies for any possible impact on women and to enhance women’s status within each body.

D. Women’s Policy Officer

The Women’s Policy Officer in 6 ministries, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs, was initiated by the Presidential Commission on Women’s Affairs in an effort to give gender mainstreaming a head start. Since 2003, the 6 Women’ Policy Officers are supervised by the Gender Policy Coordinators.

The Women’s Policy Officer System is credited with the institutionalization of women’s policies within the government, and has been recognized in 1999 by the UN Commission on the Status of Women as an exemplary model. An assessment of women’s policies by the National Assembly’s Women’s Affairs Committee conducted two years after the creation of the Women’s Policy Officer found that women’s policies were more effectively legislated and implemented at the 6 ministries which appointed Women’s Policy Officers. The result illustrates the importance of gender perspective input from the early stages of policy-making in formulating and implementing gender equal policies which benefit women.

E. Monitoring and Evaluation

The task of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of women’s policies by local governments falls on the joint efforts of the Office for Government Policy Coordination and the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs as part of the annual audit of local governments. The 7 Indicators used in evaluation are as follows: participation of women in advisory committees, preventive measures against sexual harassment and violence and protection of victims, gender equal personnel management, and maternity protection. The civil society and civilian experts take part in the evaluation. It is envisaged that, starting in 2005, a task force will be set up to evaluate the implementation of the second Basic Plan for Women’s Policies (2003-2007).

F. Statistics

Establishing a coherent system of collecting and disseminating accurate statistics on the status of women and gender equality is a challenge. Gender-sensitive methods of collecting data and segregating them by sex are a policy objective of the Second Basic Plan for Women’s Policies. Although most of the statistics published by the Office of Statistics and other government bodies are sex-segregated, and statistics on women’s status are also published annually, they are mostly
rehashes of pre-existing data. As women’s policies are becoming more diverse and complex, the need for new types of data is on the rise, and efforts are being made to meet the demand. For example, the Statistics Office has been collecting data on women’s unpaid labor since 1999, to be organized by 5 year terms. The Ministry of Gender Equality has also completed basic research for the launch of the "Satellite Account of Unpaid Household Labor" for the purpose of quantifying and including in the national income unpaid household labor by women.

The existing methods of data-collection and interpretation need an overhaul to include gender perspective if they are to be useful in developing gender equality agendas in the future. For example, indicators to establish maternity-related statistics on abortion rates, Caesarian and miscarriage rates, family-related statistics such as poverty rates in single mother households, role of family members, employment-related statistics such as unemployment rates, part-time employment rates, as well as social statistics such as day care facilities should be developed. Efforts to educate statistics experts on gender perspective and gender equality are also being made.

G. Cooperation with Women’s Organizations

The government has worked closely with women’s organizations on enhancing the status of women, improving legislations and institutions, promoting the value of gender equality, and developing gender equality agendas. This on-going partnership is based on the Women’s Development Act which stipulates that the government, including local governments, may provide women’s NGOs with necessary administrative and financial assistance. To ensure transparency, partner organizations for joint projects are selected by a committee with the participation of civilian experts, and the output is evaluated in the same process. In 2003, the government commissioned 121 joint projects amounting to 2 billion won, 87 of which were agendas chosen by the Ministry of Gender Equality (cultivation of gender-equal family culture, elimination of violence against women, addressing of gender imbalance, promotion of women’s health, revision of family head system, and encouraging of women’s participation in politics) and 34 of which were general topics relating to the work of partner organizations.
Part Four: Main challenges and actions to address them

Narrowing the gap between de jure and de facto status of women remains the main challenge for the Korean government. Despite the efforts to make gender equality a top priority in government policy-making, the reality is that gender issues are still secondary in comparison to other more seemingly urgent agendas such as development. Because gender issues affect all aspects of our society, be it social, economic, cultural or political, achieving gender equality should be a top priority in policy-making.

Lack of gender-sensitive budget allocations is also a major restraint in pursuing effective gender policies. The National Assembly has adopted in November 2002 a resolution on gender-sensitive budget allocations, and the present administration has been pursuing a gender-equal budget allocation system. Although gender perspective in budget planning is essential in developing more gender equal policies, the lack of expertise and experience in this field is an obstacle which needs to be overcome. So far, only initial studies on gender-sensitive budget allocations have been done, and between the period of 2001 and 2003, test flights for gender-sensitive budget planning and allocation has been conducted in cases of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and the Ministry of Labor. The results will be analyzed for application to other ministries.

While the national machinery on gender equality has had remarkable growth in recent years, restrictions in budget and manpower have undermined the effectiveness of the Ministry of Gender Equality in realizing its goals. It encountered difficulty in directing and coordinating women’s policies due to various reasons, including resistance from the patriarchal ideological remnants in the society, the lack of awareness on gender equality and the under-representation of women in the higher level positions.

As discussed at the 43rd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, in order for a national machinery to function effectively, clear goals, enhanced status, accountability, partnership with civil society, transparent political procedure, adequate financial and human resources, and strong political support are necessary. These points will be taken into account in bolstering Korea’s national machinery. The Ministry will strive to demonstrate that both men and women are beneficiaries of a gender-equal society and that the Ministry seeks to forge a strong partnership with men in order to fulfill its objective. The Ministry will strive to empower women so that they may identify themselves as valuable human resource and work to enhance their status. The Ministry will also make an effort to further strengthen its role as an inter-ministerial coordinator of women’s policies.