
Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women
Eighth session

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Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women: Equatorial Guinea

Initial report

132. The Committee considered the initial report of Equatorial Guinea (CEDAW/C/5/Add.50 and Amend.1) at its 136th and 138th meetings, on 22 and 23 February 1989 (CEDAW/C/SR.136 and 138).

133. The representative of Equatorial Guinea, in introducing the initial report, said that it consisted of a general overview of rules and regulations adopted by the Government to ensure that women enjoyed the same rights and opportunities as men in all spheres of life and of a comparison of the different articles of the Convention with the laws and regulations of Equatorial Guinea. She indicated that the report also described concrete measures to ensure the full exercise of women's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights granted by the decree that had established, at the ministerial level, the Department for the Promotion of Women. The main assignments of the Department included planning activities related to the role of women in the fields of labour and employment, health, education and the evaluation of training projects, analysis, investment, management and budget.

134. The representative pointed out some of the difficulties encountered by women in exercising their rights, as recognized by the law. Other difficulties encountered were reflected in the number of girls who dropped out of school at an early age and the number of cases of early maternity, as well as in the insufficient number of schools and teachers.

135. The Committee noted the great effort that the Government had made to present its report. The members of the Committee recognized the technical difficulties that developing countries usually experienced in preparing reports, such as the lack of statistics, data and other information material. The commitment of the Government to promote women's issues was acknowledged. The members expressed the hope that the experience gained by the representative would improve subsequent reports on Equatorial Guinea and help to implement concrete measures for the advancement of women. The Committee also hoped that future reports would fill the gaps in the current report.

136. Questions were raised about the the Department for the Promotion of Women, including its organization, budget, the number of women it employed, and its work in regard to women's health and education. The Committee wished to know about the development of women's programmes by the Department and what financial resources were available for them. Details of the measures taken to publicize the Convention were requested; members asked about the degree of awareness of the Convention that was promoted by the Department, not only for the benefit of women themselves, but also to bring about changes in the de jure and de facto policies.

137. More information was requested on whether the consciousness-raising and training seminars provided opportunities for distributing and discussing the Convention, including the role women played in society, measures to protect mothers, and the difficulties of implementing measures that were possibly not in accordance with the country's practices and customs. It was asked whether any guidance was given to mothers in determining when they should have children. It was also asked whether there were any other programmes, in addition to the consciousness-raising and training seminars, to improve the living standards of women.

138. With respect to article 2 of the Convention, it was asked what the situation of women was within the context of the Fundamental Law prohibiting discrimination, as well as whether there was any provision for sanctions and, if so, who implemented them.

139. As regards the special classification of temporary measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality, questions were asked about the minimum age for marriage, whether it was influenced by law and custom, and whether any legal protection was accorded to women who did not wish to marry or bear children.

140. Regarding measures to modify social and cultural patterns of the conduct of women, it was stated that it was difficult to formulate questions because no information had been provided in the report. The Committee expressed the wish for information on programmes aimed at changing attitudes towards the stereotyped roles of women and men.

141. Several members of the Committee said that, although it appeared from information in the report (CEDAW/C/5/Add.50) that prostitution was a punishable offence, they would like to know whether prostitution resulted from unemployment and if there was a possibility of changing the situation by providing employment for women. It was asked whether measures had been taken to ensure that prostitution was not practised and whether any measures were in force to assist women involved in prostitution.

142. Details were requested regarding the political participation of women: the number of women involved in political parties, the number of political parties, and the right of women to participate in those political parties and in local government. The Committee requested that the information provided on the political participation of women in the report (CEDAW/C/5/Add.50) be expanded. It was asked how many women's organizations existed in Equatorial Guinea.

143. Regarding the representation of women and their participation at the international level, details were requested about the number of women representing the country abroad and the number of women appointed to represent the Government at home. It was also asked whether there were women representing the country at the

United Nations, the International Labour Organisation, and other United Nations organizations, and whether there were any women ambassadors or women holding posts within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

144. Several members of the Committee requested more information on the educational curricula and on the general participation of women in education and, in particular, the number of girls in full-time attendance in schools. It was asked whether there was a co-educational system, and if there had been an improvement in the number of women involved in the process of education. Comments were also requested on how early pregnancy affected the attendance of women at secondary school, and whether women had to drop out of school because of marriage and the lack of assistance in child care. Inquiries were made about the number of girls who were obliged to drop out of school. Information was requested on whether husbands supported and encouraged their wives to exercise their rights to education. It was asked what the rates of illiteracy were among women and men and whether there was any connection between school drop-out rates, early pregnancy, illiteracy and low pay, and prostitution. With regard to the promotion of education facilities in rural areas, it was asked whether the situation of women was improving and what proportion of women dropped out of school after having borne a child. Information was also requested on the levels of women's participation in higher education, and whether there had been any breakthrough by women at the tertiary level and in such non-traditional areas as engineering and computer science.

145. Information was requested on the extent of unemployment in Equatorial Guinea, and whether women could take vocational training courses. It was asked whether the principle of equal pay for equal work was respected by employers and, if not, what remedies were available, what procedures had to be followed and whether an inspectorate of labour, the courts or trade unions were involved. Information was requested on what concrete statutory provisions existed to protect pregnant working women. It was asked whether maternity leave was available and, if so, what its duration was and whether pregnant women were required to work at night. It was also asked how many women were in paid employment and how many were housewives.

146. Members of the Committee asked about the Government's goals with respect to family planning, and whether family planning programmes were linked to women's health; further, if there was a contradiction between the goals of the Government and those of the programmes, members wanted to know how the problem was resolved. Information was requested on the levels of infant and child mortality and the situation regarding sanitation and access to safe water.

147. Another member asked whether there were any programmes to promote employment opportunities in the rural sector, especially to facilitate access to national markets for goods produced by rural women. Noting that the organization of seminars for rural women had led to the establishment of many women's organizations, a member asked about the functions, titles and actual roles of those associations and the effectiveness of the follow-up given to the initial seminars.

148. Regarding the Fundamental Law, a member of the Committee requested details on whether it permitted women to conclude contracts and to choose their place of residence.

149. Members of the Committee requested information on the role of women in the family. Inquiries were made about the incidence of early pregnancy and what measures had been adopted to alleviate the situation.

150. More information was asked in connection with the laws governing marriage and divorce, the administration of property, the sharing of parental responsibilities, the situation of de facto union, children born out of wedlock and the disposal of property in case of the dissolution of marriage. More information was requested in connection with the social status of divorced women and widows, and their children.

151. In replying to questions posed by the Committee, the representative gave a brief historical and geographical overview of Equatorial Guinea.

152. She provided details on the structure and functions of the Department for the Promotion of Women. Created in 1980, it had been an autonomous body under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security since 1982. The budget for the Ministry was 60 million CFA francs, but more complete details would be sent to the Secretariat later. Studies undertaken by the Department on the problems encountered by women in Equatorial Guinea had resulted in the development of a programme of information and training for women. Seminars providing information to women on all aspects of health and their civil and labour rights had been held in 1983, 1984 and 1985. The seminars had been extended over the whole country in 1986. The training workshops held in 1987 were oriented mainly to income-generating activities and the preservation of food. As a result, women had established their own small-scale enterprises in the urban areas and agricultural associations in the rural areas. National and international markets were used for the sale of their products.

153. She noted that persons who violated the articles of the Convention could be prosecuted and, depending on the gravity of the case, fined up to 500,000 CFA francs. The monitoring of the Convention was the responsibility of the Department for the Promotion of Women and the Ministry of Territorial Administration and National Security. Publicity had been given to the Convention by seminars, conferences and the media.

154. The Government was not aware of the existence of prostitution in the country, but it would be considered a crime for which the individuals who practised it would be held responsible and punishable by fines.

155. She noted that the Constitution provided for equal rights and opportunities for women in all areas of public life and they had equal rights to vote, to be elected and to perform public functions.

156. The representative stated that 50 per cent of the personnel in health and education were women. Statistics showed that the number of women appointed at the decision-making levels had improved but was still very low. In 1982, there were two women parliamentarians; in 1986 that figure had increased to four and currently there were eight women among the 60 parliamentarians. In the 18 provinces of the country there were five mayors, one woman was the government delegate to the central district and two were ministers; three women were members of the Central Committee of the Democratic Party and one was an adviser to the President on social and health issues. There was one woman ambassador in a posting abroad, one in the Supreme Court of Justice and several women were chairpersons of rural councils, traditional chiefs and advisers on the status of women. There were no women in international organizations.

157. The representative stated that a woman could acquire the nationality of Equatorial Guinea upon marriage and would not lose it upon marriage to a citizen of another country.

158. The Department for the Promotion of Women had developed an education programme in order to combat the high rate of illiteracy among women. The programme, however, could not be implemented as it was not in the mother tongue of the women to whom it was directed.

159. Co-education existed at all levels of education and the qualifications required for scholarships were equal for men and women. The representative reported that there was no university in Equatorial Guinea. There were various vocational training centres administered by the ministries of education, health and labour, and the Department for the Promotion of Women had a centre for the social promotion of women.

160. In Equatorial Guinea, maternity and children from conception onwards were considered sacred and thus protected under the Constitution. Full protection, under the Constitution, was also accorded to protect the mental and physical well-being of minors to ensure their normal development. The law did not prevent adolescent mothers from returning to school; however, strong religious traditions meant that they were considered an embarrassment to their families, which resulted in the majority of them not resuming their education. The Department had recommended to the Government that all secondary-level education and vocational institutions should be forced to accept adolescent mothers. Consequently a programme was being developed to include sex education in the general educational curriculum. The Department had organized a campaign to educate parents to accept and understand the situation of adolescent mothers.

161. No data were available on unemployment in the country. The Constitution provided for equal pay for work of equal value. Twelve weeks of maternity leave were mandatory, which could commence at the seventh month of pregnancy, upon certification.

162. Despite the economic situation of the country, some child-care facilities had been established but they were not sufficient to meet the needs of working women and adolescent mothers. A centre for maternal and infant care had been established with funds from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities.

163. The health and education campaigns had greatly reduced the rates of infant and maternal mortality. The development of strategies for primary health care and the improvement of sanitation was one of the primary objectives of the Government in the coming years. The family planning project, elaborated by the Ministry of Health, provided advisory services for couples who wished to plan their families in an effort to reduce infant and maternal mortality rates. Abortion was not permitted but contraceptives were available.

164. A national committee on AIDS, in which the Department for the Promotion of Women participated, had been established, and an information campaign had been mounted in all educational centres, hospitals, public places and work places.

165. The media had been used by the Department to disseminate information and to promote awareness of women's rights in rural areas but success had been limited owing to the amount of time rural women had to spend cultivating the land.

166. The Constitution accorded equal rights to women in general, as well as in the employment sector. Women could freely enter into employment contracts. All persons had the right to move freely within the country and to choose their place of residence.

167. The Constitution contained a provision that a person must be over 18 years of age in order to marry. The Constitution protected all marriages contracted in accordance with the law. Marriages had to be dissolved by the same authority under which they had been contracted. Under civil or common law, divorce did not preclude remarriage. Property was distributed in accordance with the Civil Code and traditional practice.

168. Upon the divorce of their parents, children under the age of five traditionally stayed with the mother, and older children were given into the custody of their fathers.