



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
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(CEDAW)

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER
ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL
FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Initial reports of States parties

CAMEROON

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INTRODUCTION

Women have always made a considerable contribution to the development of the society in which they live. However, their contribution has gone unappreciated and, what is worse, they have been held back by a variety of constraints linked with the socio-cultural, economic and political realities.

Accordingly, some time ago, the international community, through the United Nations, opted to establish an egalitarian framework within which women can flourish and play a full part in the life of society.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the United Nations on 18 December 1979, is one of the instruments prepared within this framework.

Cameroon, as a member of this world institution, effectively ratified the Convention on 23 August 1994 and fully supports all international instruments in general and those which promote human rights in particular.

This document is intended to meet the demands of article 18 of the above-mentioned Convention which requires States Parties to submit a report on the various legislative, judicial, administrative or other measures adopted to give effect to the Convention and on the progress made in this respect.

Despite the fact that the Convention calls for an initial report within one year of ratification and periodic reports every four years or at the express request of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, this is Cameroon's first report.

The report is in two parts:

- the first part describes the general background to the implementation of the Convention in Cameroon;
- the second part provides specific information concerning each provision of the Convention.

PART ONE

GENERAL BACKGROUND TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW OF CAMEROON

I.1. LAND, PEOPLE AND ECONOMY

1. The land

Situated in Central Africa, at the eastern end of the Gulf of Guinea, above the Equator, between 2 and 13 degrees North and 9 and 16 degrees East, the territory of Cameroon, triangular in shape, covers a total area of 475,000 km². It is bounded on the North by Chad, on the South by the Republics of Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and the Congo, on the East by the Central African Republic and on the West by Nigeria. In addition, it has an Atlantic coast 400 km long.

Cameroon is notable for the diversity of its natural environments:

- the southern 42 per cent of the country is covered by a luxuriant forest, nearly 20 million hectares in extent;
- the northern part of Cameroon, which has a dry tropical climate, is savannah country consisting of vast prairies on the high plateaux of Adamaoua and steppes in the Far North;
- the West and North-West, which have a wet tropical climate, are regions of mountain ranges which stretch from the South-West coast to the Mandara mountains in the Far North of the country. This mountain chain culminates in Mount Cameroon, an approximately 4,100 m high peak.

2. The people

The first inhabitants of Cameroon were the pygmies.

After them came the Sudanese and Bantu settlers. These migrations were halted by the European invasion (German, French and British) in the nineteenth century.

The population of Cameroon is now made up of more than 230 ethnic groups defined on the basis of dialect and belonging to three broad cultural communities:

- the Bantus of the South, Littoral, South-West, Centre and East provinces;
- the semi-Bantus of the West and North-West provinces;

/...

- the Sudanese of the province of Adamaoua and the North and Far North provinces.

The pygmies, who are not included in this broad classification, live in the Centre, South and East provinces.

Far from being a source of conflict and divisiveness, this ethnic diversity is regarded by government and people as mutually enriching.

The population of Cameroon is estimated to number 13,650,000 (projections based on the general census of 1987) which corresponds to a density of 29.1 per km².

It can be broken down as follows:

- 51.1 per cent women and 48.9 per cent men;
- 40 per cent under 15, 50 per cent between 16 and 64, and 10 per cent over 65;
- 1/3 in the towns and 2/3 in the rural areas.

Average life expectancy is 59 for women and 54.5 for men.

The illiteracy rate is 30 per cent for men and 50 per cent for women.

The crude birth rate is 38.2 per 1,000; the crude death rate is 10.1 per 1,000; the population growth rate is 2.81 per 1,000.

The general fertility rate is 166.5 births per 1,000 women of child-bearing age.

There are about 4 million foreigners, nationals of various countries around the world, who live peaceably alongside the native population.

The HCR report for 1998 estimates the number of refugees living in Cameroon at 47,057. Of these 6,007 are being assisted by the HCR, namely:

- 3,053 Chadians;
- 1,227 Rwandans;
- 332 Burundians;
- 182 Congolese (Kinshasa);
- 230 Congolese (Brazzaville);
- 180 Sudanese;
- 167 Liberians;
- 636 other nationalities.

3. The economy

The Cameroonian economy is mainly based on the primary sector. Almost 75 per cent of the economically active population is employed in agriculture, in the broad sense of the term. Agriculture more or less enables the country to feed itself, generates about one third of hard-currency earnings and 15 per cent of government revenue, and contributes 24 per cent to GDP.

The tertiary sector employs 20 per cent of the active population, while the industrial sector is still in the embryonic stage.

Many women find employment in the informal sector.

Cameroon has experienced a decade of economic crisis aggravated by the implementation of structural adjustment plans since 1987 and by the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994. Now, however, it has returned to the path of growth: about 5 per cent in terms of GDP in 1996/1997. Nevertheless, the effects of the recovery were still not very apparent in 1997/1998, as evidenced by the following main indicators:

- per capita income (about US\$ 600);
- gross domestic product (CFAF 4,948 billion);
- inflation rate (about 2 per cent);
- external debt (CFAF 3,756 billion);
- unemployment rate (about 25 per cent of the active population).

Some 40 per cent of Cameroonians live below the poverty threshold (US\$ 345 per person per year). Moreover, the rural population is particularly exposed and it is now possible to observe a certain feminization of the poverty effect.

I.2. LEGAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEM

1. The legal system

Cameroon's dual legal system (Napoleonic code plus common law) is part of its colonial legacy from the British and French mandates and trusteeships. This dualism is further complicated by the coexistence of customary and written law.

2. The political system

Cameroon acquired international sovereignty in 1960. On 1 October 1961, East (French) and West (British) Cameroon were united. Following the referendum held on 20 May 1972 Cameroon became a unitary State.

Under the Constitution of 18 January 1996, Cameroon is a democratic decentralized unitary State with a semi-presidential form of government.

There is separation of the executive, legislative and judicial powers.

A de facto single party system prevailed in Cameroon from 1966 to 1990, the year in which the Political Parties Act (Law No. 90/56 of 19 December 1990) was promulgated.

Since that change was made, five elections have been held:

- in 1992, 5 political parties participated in the presidential elections and 32 in the legislative elections;
- in January 1996, 36 political parties participated in the municipal elections. Of these 15 won seats on municipal councils and many mayors are members of opposition parties;
- in the months of May and August 1997, 44 political parties participated in the legislative elections. The present legislature includes deputies from 7 political groupings;
- in October 1997, 9 parties put forward candidates to run in the presidential elections.

The various organs of State as defined in the Constitution are as follows:

(a) Executive power

The President of the Republic is the Head of State. Elected by the whole of the nation, he is the symbol of national unity, he defines the policy of the nation, ensures respect for the Constitution and, through his arbitration, ensures the proper functioning of the public authorities. Moreover, he is the guarantor of the independence of the nation and of its territorial integrity, of the permanency and continuity of the State and of respect for international

The Senate, which is not yet effectively in place, represents the regional and local authorities. It is composed of 100 members, 70 of whom are elected by indirect universal suffrage on a regional basis while the other 30 are appointed by the President of the Republic.

(c) Judicial power

Under article 37 of the Constitution, justice is administered in the territory of the Republic in the name of the people of Cameroon.

- the principle of two-tier proceedings whereby any citizen of Cameroon may bring the same case before the competent court of first instance (trial court) and then, if he or she fails to obtain satisfaction, before the court of second instance (appeal court);
- the Supreme Court, which does not decide on the facts but satisfies itself that the law has been strictly observed.

Within the legal and institutional arsenal which Cameroon has accumulated for the purpose of defending human rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women takes pride of place in view of its importance for the female population.

The legal, political and administrative measures adopted to give effect to this Convention form the subject of the next chapter, which is devoted to the procedure for the incorporation of the Convention in the domestic legal system and its place in the national institutions responsible for promoting the cause of women.

CHAPTER II

LEGAL, POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES ADOPTED TO GIVE EFFECT TO THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

II.1. INCORPORATION OF THE CONVENTION IN THE DOMESTIC LEGAL SYSTEM

The procedure for the incorporation of international conventions in the Cameroonian legal system requires their ratification by the President of the Republic with the express authorization of the legislative power. The President ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women under Decree No. 88/993 of 15 July 1988 pursuant to Law No. 88/010 of 15 July 1988 authorizing him to do so.

1. The place of the Convention in the domestic legal system

The revised Constitution of 18 January 1996 put an end to all controversy concerning the legal force of the Preamble to the Constitution. Thus, article 65 states: "The Preamble shall be part and parcel of this Constitution. It shall have legal force." This stipulation is of primary importance insofar as the Preamble refers to the international human rights conventions in the following terms: "We, the people of Cameroon ... affirm our attachment to the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and all duly ratified international conventions relating thereto". There can be no doubt that the Convention forms part of the conventions relating to human rights, which are not simple treaty provisions within the meaning of art. 45 of the Constitution but constitutional norms in accordance with the above-mentioned art. 65.

2. Consequences of the constitutionalization of the Convention

The main result of giving the Convention the status of a set of constitutional norms is its primacy over the infra-constitutional instruments, namely laws, ordinances and regulations.

In accordance with the hierarchical principle, which requires legal norms to conform to the basic law, all previous legislation must be reviewed to eliminate any provisions that may be contrary to the spirit of the Convention.

II.2. NATIONAL MACHINERY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

In Cameroon, the question of the advancement of women is not the responsibility of the Government alone. Thus, alongside the public institutions which have been gradually built up over the last two decades, there exist numerous private organizations established as a result of the liberalization of political, cultural and economic life.

1. The public institutions for the advancement of women

Well before the ratification of the Convention, Cameroon was already taking an undeniable interest in questions relating to the advancement of women, as reflected in the establishment of appropriate government bodies.

- Thus, as early as 1975, the year of the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City, a Ministry of Social Affairs was set up. This included a service responsible for demographic action and the advancement of women attached to the Social Development Directorate.
- In 1984, on the eve of the Second World Conference on Women in Nairobi, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was established by Decree No. 84/95 of 26 March 1984.
- With the economic crisis, which became increasingly serious after 1987, Cameroon adopted a structural adjustment plan which called for a cutback in public expenditure and, among other measures, the restructuring of the Government. Thus, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs were merged by Decree No. 88/1281 of 21 September 1988 which established the Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs (MINASCOF). This ministerial department included a Directorate for the Advancement of Women which, despite the reorganization of the Ministry under Decree No. 95/100 of 9 June 1995, retains the following functions:
 - drafting and supervising the implementation of policies, programmes and action plans relating to the advancement of women;
 - monitoring organizations for the advancement of women;
 - preparing, participating in and following up national and international meetings concerned with the advancement of women;
 - designing, developing and popularizing intermediate technologies;
 - technical relations with international organizations for the advancement of women.
- Later, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was re-established by Decree No. 97/205 of 7 December 1997 on the organization of the Government. In contrast to the spirit of the decree of February 1984, which restricted the role of the Ministry of Women's Affairs essentially to carrying out studies, the new Ministry had its powers of intervention reinforced and a general secretariat, a general inspectorate, specialized technical directorates and local departments in the provinces were placed under its authority.

(a) The ministries

The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MINCOF)

According to article 5.8 of Decree No. 97/205 of 7 December 1997 on the organization of the Government: "The Ministry of Women's Affairs is responsible for drafting and implementing measures relating to social observance of the rights of the women of Cameroon, the elimination of all discrimination against women and the strengthening of the guarantees of equality in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres.

To this end it shall:

- study and submit to the Government proposals for facilitating the employment of women in administration, agriculture, trade and industry;
- provide liaison with the national and international political organizations for the advancement of women;
- supervise the bodies providing training for women, other than the educational establishments of the Ministry of National Education."

The Ministry of Agriculture (MINAGRI), together with the Community Development Directorate and the women's agricultural activities service;

The Ministry of Public Investments and Territorial Development (MINIPAT), together with the women's activities planning service.

(b) The specialized institutions for the advancement of women

The Consultative Committee for the Advancement of Women

Established by Decree No. 84/324 of 23 May 1984 and placed under the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Committee is responsible for:

- studying questions relating to the activities and vocational training of the women of Cameroon or to their status and conditions;
- issuing opinions on draft texts concerning the economic, social and cultural advancement of women under consideration by the Ministry of Women's Affairs;
- proposing to the Ministry of Women's Affairs any action or programme designed to ensure the optimum participation of women in the development effort.

Institutions and organizations providing guidance and training for women

* Centres for the Advancement of Women

These are integrated structures of the Ministry of Women's Affairs. They provide social and vocational guidance for girls lacking an education and for women in urban and peri-urban areas.

* Protected Workshops

The Protected Workshops, which are managed by the Ministry of Social Affairs, are specialized retraining and reintegration establishments for young women who are socially maladjusted, at moral risk or from needy families. An example is the Yaoundé Dressmaking Workshop for Disabled Women (BOBINE D'OR).

The purpose of this Ministry-run workshop is to provide disabled women with vocational training as dressmakers and an appropriate social education with a view to their socio-economic integration. It helps to find work and accommodation for its trainees when they have completed their training.

* Appropriate Technology Centres

Their role is:

- to provide training, further training, retraining and specialist training for women in agro-pastoral, domestic and craft work;
- to promote research in the agro-pastoral, domestic and craft fields with a view to making women's work less long and arduous;
- to identify, develop and popularize appropriate technologies for the benefit of women and make them easier to acquire, with a view to increasing agro-pastoral and craft output;
- to improve methods of preserving and processing various crops, with a view to reducing post-harvest losses.

Only the centre in Maroua is operational.

There are other State bodies active in the appropriate technology field, such as:

- the National Centre for Research and Experimentation in Agricultural Mechanization (CENNEMA);
- the National Technology Development Committee (CNDI);
- the Institute of Agronomic Research for Development (IRAD).

What is more, art. 3(2) of the Municipal Elections Act includes the fair representation of women among the essential criteria to be applied in compiling electoral lists.

5. The Civil Service Regulations

According to arts. 12 and 13, access to the Civil Service is open, without discrimination, to anyone of Cameroonian nationality who satisfies the age conditions, i.e. who is not under 17 or over 30 for officials of categories C and D, or over 35 for officials of categories A and B, subject to the fulfilment of certain physical fitness and character requirements.

Despite the existence of laws and regulations on the equality of men and women with respect to the enjoyment of certain rights, there is, strictly speaking, no proper legal definition of discrimination.

I.2. LACK OF A LEGAL DEFINITION OF DISCRIMINATION

Although Cameroon has adopted the principles set out in the international conventions relating to human rights in general and the equality of men and women and non-discrimination with respect to women in particular, the definition of discrimination given in art. 1 of the Convention is not explicitly reproduced in any Cameroonian text. The references to discrimination in the legislation are based on race, religion and sex.

The embodiment of the principle of equality is not in itself sufficient to change behaviour and mentalities that have become entrenched over centuries of respect for tradition, particularly when allowance is made for the coexistence of written and customary law within the Cameroonian legal system. The lack of a legal definition of discrimination and corresponding sanctions accounts, in part, for the survival of such discrimination within the family and in society at large.

I.3. EXISTENCE OF PROVISIONS AND PRACTICES THAT DISCRIMINATE AGAINST WOMEN

Despite texts which lay down principles of gender equality, there are certain areas in which the legal status of women displays weaknesses:

1. Written law

(a) Discrimination as regards women's right to work. The right and freedom to engage in an economic activity are limited by:

- Article 223 of the Civil Code and article 74 of Ordinance 81/02 of 29 June 1981 concerning the powers of the husband to object to his wife's pursuit of a separate trade or profession;
- Article 7 of the Commercial Code which authorizes the husband to put an end to his wife's economic activity simply by notifying his objection to the Registrar of the Commercial Court.

(b) Discrimination with respect to the right to settle in any place. This right is reserved exclusively for the husband who, as head of the family, decides where the family home shall be.

(c) Discrimination with respect to the exercise and enjoyment of the right of ownership.

Under the Constitution, ownership means the right guaranteed to everyone by law to use, enjoy and dispose of property. However, under arts. 1421 and 1428 of the Civil Code concerning the administration of assets forming part of the marital community property and art. 559 of the Commercial Code on bankruptcy a married woman does not have complete enjoyment of that right.

(d) Administration of assets forming part of the community property

This is entrusted to the husband who may sell, transfer or mortgage community property without the consent of his wife (art. 1421 of the Civil Code).

"The husband shall administer all the personal property of his wife. He may independently exercise any right of action to recover movable property or to protect or recover possession vested in the wife. He shall be responsible for any physical depreciation of his wife's personal property due to failure to take protective action" (art. 1128 of the Civil Code).

(e) Bankruptcy of a trader husband

Although the provisions of arts. 557 and 558 of the Commercial Code protect the married woman in the event of the bankruptcy of her trader husband, art. 559 of the Code restricts the free enjoyment of the assets by the wife of the bankrupt.

Article 557: "If the husband goes bankrupt, the wife, whose contributions of immovables do not form part of the community property, shall take back the said immovables in kind, together with those which she may have received by succession, by gift between living persons or under a will."

(f) Discrimination with respect to equality of rights

- The exercise of guardianship in the event of deprivation of legal capacity

It follows from art. 506 of the Civil Code that in the event of the wife being deprived of legal capacity the husband automatically becomes her guardian. Article 507 of the Civil Code, on the other hand, discriminates against the married woman since it clearly states that: "The wife may be appointed guardian of her husband. In this case, the family council shall decide the form and conditions of administration, subject to an appeal to the courts by a wife who believes herself to have been wronged by the family's decision".

- The definition and punishment of the offence of adultery

Where the criminal law is concerned, art. 361 of the Cameroonian Criminal Code punishes adultery differently according to the sex of the offender. Thus, a wife's adultery is punishable as soon as it is found that she has had sexual relations with a man other than her husband, no matter how frequently and no matter where. The husband, on the other hand, is liable to be punished only if he has had sexual relations with women other than his wife or wives in the matrimonial home or if he has habitually had such relations outside the matrimonial home.

By imposing these conditions with regard to the punishment of the offence of male adultery, the law makes it difficult to prove adultery by the husband, who is thereby afforded special protection.

On the other hand, adultery by either of the spouses is a violation of the duty of fidelity which may be cited indiscriminately by the husband or wife as an absolute ground for divorce (arts. 229 and 230 of the Civil Code).

It follows from the above provisions that the wife is, in some respects, a person lacking in legal capacity who must be protected by her husband and, indeed, the wife's state of inferiority is further accentuated by customary practices and de facto discrimination.

2. Customary practices

The statistics reveal discrimination associated with practices that are rooted in custom and tradition.

Thus, the figures on the percentage of women in the Government reveal the following trend:

- In 1984, there were 5 women out of 43 members of the Government, or 11.6 per cent;
- In 1997, there were 3 women out of 45, or 6.6 per cent.

Similarly, in the central administration the percentage of women holding responsible positions is less than 20 per cent. It is also worth noting that

women's careers progress more slowly and there are no women holding high office (Governor, Prefect, Sub-Prefect or District Head).

1. Ministry of Women's Affairs

The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MINCOF) was established, with specific functions, by the Government Organization Act (Decree No. 97/205 of 7 December 1997).

The Ministry of Women's Affairs plays a watchdog role and performs the following functions:

- the institutionalization of International Women's Day on which public opinion is made aware of the problems of women. Thus, in 1998, the chosen theme for the celebration of International Women's Day in Cameroon was "Practices and customs that discriminate against women".

The discussion of this subject led to:

- the listing of the various customs and practices that discriminate against women;
- the noting of the adverse consequences of these practices for women, the family and society as a whole;
- the drafting of specific proposals with a view to the eventual elimination of these customs and practices.
- informing women of their rights by distributing rights brochures;
- the establishment of focal points in certain ministerial departments;
- the establishment of institutions for the guidance and training of women, such as:
 - centres for the advancement of women;
 - appropriate technology centres;
 - social centres;
 - home-workshops;
 - protected workshops;
 - leadership pools;
 - dressmaking workshop for disabled women.
- the establishment of the Committee of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians (CFEMP);
- the launching of projects such as:

- the advancement of women in the Civil Service;
- the drafting of a programme of guidance and advice for girls and women in Africa (under the aegis of UNESCO/ISESCO and the Ministry of National Education (MINEDUC)).
- contributing to projects and programmes concerning women initiated by other ministerial departments, such as:
 - the financing programme for agricultural and community microprojects (FIMAC);
 - the national agricultural extension services programme (PNVA);
 - the Central Rural Reform Unit (CUROR);
 - the Fund for the Support of Rural Organizations (FONDAOR).
- with the Ministry of Public Investments and Territorial Development:
 - the project to reduce poverty and promote the advancement of women. The corresponding loan agreement was signed with the African Development Bank in February 1998.
- with the Ministry of Public Health:
 - the nutrition education programme.
- with the Ministry of National Education:
 - the girls' non-formal education project in collaboration with UNICEF.
- material support for women's groups;
- financial support for women in distress;
- the granting of loans to women under bilateral and multilateral cooperation projects such as:
 - Productive Microprojects for the Benefit of Women in Cameroon (MPPF-CAM/CIDA);
 - Women, Population and Development (UNFPA).
- the development of association activities.

These efforts by the Ministry of Women's Affa. TD±¼((MPPF-CAMAMAMAMAMAMAMAMatoauc)]T

2. Consultative Committee for the Advancement of Women

Since it was established, the Committee has held only three ordinary meetings, the repeated restructuring of the supervisory Ministry having resulted in its operations being placed on the back burner. A study is currently being conducted with a view to its revitalization.

Associations and NGOs, whose activities are encouraged by the State, work alongside these public institutions for the advancement of women.

There are groups of these associations active in different fields, for example:

(a) In economic development:

- ACAFIA (Cameroonian Association of Women Agricultural Engineers);
- AID-CAMEROUN (Support for Development Initiatives);
- CIFEDI (Committee for the Integration of Women in Industrial Development);

(b) In the protection of women's rights:

- ACAFEJ (Cameroonian Association of Women Lawyers);
- ALVF (Association to Combat Violence against Women);
- COCADEF (Cameroonian Committee for Women's Rights);

(c) In women's health:

- CAMNAFAW (Cameroonian National Association for Family Welfare);
- FESADE (Women-Health-Development);
- ACAFEM (Cameroonian Association of Women Doctors);

(d) In training:

- CERFEPROD (Women's Group for the Promotion of Development);

(e) In socio-cultural development:

- FOCARFE (Cameroonian Women's Foundation for Rational Environmental Action);

(f) In promoting peace:

- FAWECAM (Forum of African Women Educationalists/Cameroon);

(g) In advocacy:

- the Women's Caucus;
- LEFE (League for the Education of Women and Children).

With regard to legislative measures taken to ensure the full development and advancement of women, it should be noted that since Cameroon ratified the Convention no legislation has been adopted with a view to its implementation.

At the same time, although some of the above-mentioned discriminatory provisions remain in force, it is nonetheless true that e-mention2bhr4HbDOment of

CHAPTER II

TEMPORARY SPECIAL MEASURES AIMED AT ACCELERATING
DE FACTO EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

(Article 4)

The Constitution of 18 January 1996 guarantees compulsory primary education. This reflects the political will to provide access to education for all, without discrimination.

Even though discrimination is nowhere precisely defined, Cameroon has taken a number of specific measures to accelerate equality between men and women. These measures relate to three particular areas: education, health and employment.

II.1. EDUCATION

The authorities have taken measures relating to both formal and non-formal education.

1. State of formal education

In Cameroon, the right of access to education applies equally to boys and girls. However, the proportion of girls among the children attending school is low and there are subsequent disparities associated with socio-cultural attitudes and practices stemming from the hostile environment in which the girls have to live.

In general, the enrolment rate is declining: from 78 per cent in 1984 to 61 per cent in 1995.

- At the primary education level, girls account for less than half the total, or barely 46 per cent. The percentage varies from province to province and between the two educational systems (French-speaking and English-speaking), which are not harmonized.
- At the secondary education level, girls make up less than 42 per cent of the total.

2. Non-formal education

To encourage the education of girls and women no longer of the required age for first enrolment in the formal system, the Government has provided certain alternative schemes run by several different ministries:

- the Ministry of Youth and Sports with its youth and recreation and functional literacy centres;
- the Ministry of Social Affairs with its social centres and specialized institutions;

/...

- the Ministry of Women's Affairs with, for example, its Centres for the Advancement of Women;
- the Ministry of National Education with its SAR-SM (Craft and Rural Sections-Domestic Sections);
- the Ministry of Employment, Labour and Social Insurance with its vocational training centres;
- the Ministry of Agriculture with its rural advisory services;
- the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries with its zootechnical and veterinary training centres.

In addition to these public non-formal education initiatives, there are others undertaken by denominational and lay organizations.

3. Special educational measures

- Circular Letter No. 10/A/562/MINEDUC/ESG of 10 January 1980 concerning the readmission of a pupil suspended in connection with a case of pregnancy;
- launch of the national functional literacy programme in 1988;
- commemoration of Literacy Day since 1992;
- preparation and implementation of programmes specially designed for women in both national languages (META languages in the North-West, the TOUROU project in the Far North, experience with the NUFII programme) and official languages (experience of the International Linguistics Society);
- assumption of the Vice-Presidency of the UNESCO National Commission by the Ministry of Women's Affairs;
- presence of Cameroon at various international meetings: conferences of African Ministers of Education at Addis Ababa in 1961 and Nairobi in 1968, Lagos Action Plan (1986), Caracas (1988), Ouagadougou (1993), Copenhagen (1995).

Similarly, following the world conference on education for all (1990), in 1991 Cameroon adopted a declaration of general education policy whose essential aim is to meet the educational needs of all the target populations by the year 2000.

The resulting framework of action includes specific objectives in the field of women's education, namely:

- strengthening the public non-formal education structures;
- reducing regional educational disparities taking sex and age into account.

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Likewise, the national action plan for children assigns the following objectives to be achieved by the year 2000:

- improved access to basic education for all;
- reduced disparities, with special emphasis on the most deprived regions;
- priority to be given to enrolling girls and keeping them in school.

It was on this basis that the Cameroonian Education Forum (1995) recommended, among other things, access to education for disadvantaged groups. This led to the adoption of a declaration on the new education policy (1996) which reaffirmed the political will of the Government to:

- combat educational exclusion;
- reduce regional inequalities;
- remove obstacles to the education of girls.

Finally, the new law on educational guidance is strengthening the compulsory aspect of primary education and facilitating non-discriminatory access to education for all.

These temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women also concern the field of health.

II.2. HEALTH

Clearly, in the absence of special measures in the field of health the degree of development cannot be properly assessed. In most cases women do not have easy access to health care. Despite the efforts of the authorities to promote the health of all social groups, women, because of their adverse circumstances, experience difficulty in obtaining access to health care facilities.

Nevertheless, there are measures which protect women's interests in the health field. For example,

- Law No. 90/062 of 19 December 1990 granting a special exemption for health care units. It is a feature of this law that the income from the services provided must be devoted, on a priority basis, to the operation of the health facilities. This measure enables women, the main target group, to benefit from these services more cheaply;
- the Labour Code Act (Law No. 92/007 of 14 August 1992). Articles 84 and 85 of the Act read as follows:

Article 84

- "(1) Any pregnant woman whose condition has been medically confirmed may terminate her contract without notice and without having to pay any compensation as a result. During this period, the employer may not terminate the contract of employment of the woman concerned on grounds of pregnancy.
- (2) Every pregnant woman has the right to fourteen (14) weeks of maternity leave beginning four (4) weeks before the expected date of confinement. This leave may be extended by six (6) weeks in the event of illness, duly confirmed, resulting from either pregnancy or childbirth. At no time during this period of leave may the employer terminate the employment contract of the woman concerned.
- (3) When confinement takes place before the expected date, the rest period shall be extended to make up the fourteen (14) weeks of leave to which the employee is entitled.
- (4) When confinement takes place after the expected date, the pre-confinement leave shall be extended to the date of confinement without the post-confinement leave being reduced."

Article 85

- "(1) During a period of fifteen (15) months following the birth of the child, the mother shall have the right to rest breaks for nursing purposes.
- (2) The total duration of these rest breaks may not exceed one (1) hour per working day.
- (3) During this period, the mother may terminate her contract without notice under the conditions laid down in Art. 84(1) above."
- Law No. 96/03 of 4 January 1996 establishing a framework law in the field of health relating to the protection and advancement of vulnerable groups, particularly women and children;
 - free pre-natal monitoring in mother and child protection centres and free examination of infants;
 - training for women in health problems to enable them to promote health in their families and the community.

II.3. EMPLOYMENT

The terms of the Labour Code, which offers broad protection for women and children, exclude discrimination in this field. In practice, some employers refuse to recruit women for certain jobs because of the maternity question.

The Labour Code makes no provision for the care of babies whose mother dies in childbirth.

On the other hand, it regulates the daytime and night working hours for women.

Article 80 fixes the length of the working week at 40 hours.

Article 82 deals with night work. Thus, women and children must have at least 12 consecutive hours of rest. Similarly, women may not be employed to do night work in industry.

The law lays down penalties for non-compliance with these regulations to protect women.

II.4. PENALTIES FOR NON-COMPLIANCE

These penalties relate to the fields of education, health and employment.

1. Education

If discrimination is found, the victim can assert her rights by appealing to higher administrative authority or to the courts.

Another difficulty is the effective application of the regulations in force.

2. Health

Article 338 of the Criminal Code protects pregnant women who are victims of violence. Thus, "anyone who by using violence against a pregnant woman or a child in the process of being born causes, even unintentionally, the death or permanent disablement of the child shall be liable to imprisonment for five to

CHAPTER III

STEREOTYPED ROLES FOR MEN AND WOMEN

(Article 5)

The roles of men and women vary with the type of society though, fundamentally, the man continues to be perceived as the head of the family. In many cases, especially in rural areas, this is one of the most tenacious stereotypes, although in the cities under the influence of various factors it is tending to fade.

Despite this trend and the laws in force, the women of Cameroon continue to be subjected to numerous forms of discrimination in the political, economic, legal, social and cultural fields. Below, we identify some of these forms of discrimination and examine the strategies adopted by the authorities to lessen their adverse effects.

III.1. IDENTIFICATION OF CERTAIN PRACTICES AND CUSTOMS THAT DISCRIMINATE AGAINST WOMEN

- Forced and early marriages;
- limited access to productive resources;
- female genital mutilation;
- limited freedom of expression;
- restricted role in the community;
- inferior status relative to men;
- exclusion of women from certain religious responsibilities;
- domestic and other violence;
- harassment and sexual abuse;
- food taboos and prohibitions;
- abusive widowhood rites;
- subjection of women in the field of reproductive health;
- principle of stereotyped socialization;
- exclusion of women from certain high offices of State (Governor, Prefect, Sub-Prefect, District Head).

Strategies have been adopted with a view to mitigating the ill effects of this discrimination.

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III.2. ACTION STRATEGIES

The various strategies are listed below, followed by the principal actors.

1. The strategies

These strategies, which feature in the Declaration of Policy for the Integration of Women in Development (PANIFD), include:

- promoting and installing machinery to ensure the full development of women's potential;
- eliminating the cultural taboos that are holding back the development of young women through awareness-raising and education;
- improving women's awareness of family planning and popularizing education in responsible parenthood;
- providing drinking water supplies for rural communities;
- promoting the rights of women;
- promoting direct intervention on behalf of women victims of violence;
- adopting measures to encourage the integration or reintegration of poor and marginalized women into the economically active population.

2. The actors

The principal actors involved in implementing these strategies are:

- the authorities;
- the NGOs and various associations;
- the religious communities;
- the media.

CHAPTER IV

SUPPRESSION OF EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN

(Article 6)

IV.1. EXTENT OF PROSTITUTION

Prostitution is a social scourge which is rife in both urban and rural areas, being practised by both men and women. This scourge is now so widespread that it has become difficult to identify and count the prostitutes.

Before the economic crisis, there was a strategy for identifying and recording prostitutes so that they could be given medical attention.

Prostitution affects both old and young. Its causes include:

- poverty;
- the economic crisis and its consequences (unemployment, redundancy);
- moral decline;
- early and forced marriages;

Some youth centres also engage in information, education and communication (IEC) activities.

There is no sex tourism in Cameroon. Nevertheless, a new law to regulate tourist activity has just been passed by the National Assembly since such activity could in itself encourage trafficking in women. Thus, article 5 of Law No. 98/006 of 14 April 1998 stipulates that: "The Government shall ensure compliance with the tourism charter and the tourism code of the World Tourism Organization inviting States and individuals to prevent any possibility of tourism being used for the purpose of exploiting others. In this respect, appropriate measures should be taken to combat sex tourism involving children".

2. Punitive measures

In Cameroon, the Criminal Code identifies prostitution, procuring and the corruption of minors as punishable offences.

(a) Prostitution: art. 343

- "(1) Anyone of either sex who habitually engages in sexual acts with others, for remuneration, shall be liable to imprisonment for six months to five years and a fine of 20,000 to 500,000 francs [...]
- (2) Anyone who, with a view to prostitution or sexual immorality, proceeds publicly by gestures, words, written messages or any other means to solicit persons of either sex shall be liable to the same penalties."

(b) Procuring: art. 294

- "(1) Anyone who incites, aids or facilitates the prostitution of others or shares, even occasionally, in the proceeds of the prostitution of others or receives subsidies from a person engaged in prostitution shall be liable to imprisonment for six months to five years and a fine of 20,000 to 1,000,000 francs.
- (2) Anyone who, while living with a person engaged in prostitution,
- (2) Anyo3e whnment

- (4) In the cases mentioned under subparagraph (3) above, the application of the provisions of art. 48 shall be mandatory.

Table 1. Percentage of women in the National Assembly since 1960

Year	Number of members	Number of women	Percentage	Remarks
1960-1965	137	1	0.8	Assembly of Federated States
	50	2	4	Federal Assembly
1966-1970	141	2	1.4	Assembly of Federated States
	50	2	4	Federal Assembly
1970-1973	137	5	3.6	Assembly of Federated States
	50	2	4	Federal Assembly
1973-1978	120	7	5.8	Single chamber One-party
1978-1983	120	12	10	Single chamber One-party
1983-1988	120	17	14.2	Single chamber One-party
1988-1992	180	26	14.5	Single chamber One-party
1992-1997	180	23	12.8	Single chamber Multi-party
1997	180	10	5.5	National Assembly

Source: Cameroon Tribune, No. 6644 of 21 July 1998.

This table shows that since 1992 the percentage of women in the multi-party Assembly has fallen sharply. This is due, in particular, to the small numbers of women being nominated, starting with the preliminaries. Moreover, some political parties will not put women at the head of their lists. In 1992, out of 49 lists submitted by the RDPC, only 4 were headed by women. Out of the 46 lists submitted by the UNDP, 2 were headed by women. The MDR and the UPC had no women at the head of their lists.

Between 1960 and 1992, women held only one important post in the executive office of the National Assembly, that of secretary.

In 1992, there were two women in the executive office: one (1) quester and one (1) secretary.

In 1997, for the first time, women occupied the following posts:

- 2 posts of secretary in the office of the National Assembly;
- 1 post of committee chairman;
- 1 post of vice-chairman of a parliamentary group;

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- 1 woman among the 13 members of the Chairmen's Conference which takes important parliamentary decisions.

2. The Economic and Social Council

The Economic and Social Council is one of the country's constitutional political institutions. The number of women members is negligible.

3. The Government

- 1984: 5 women in the Government (2 ministers and 3 deputy ministers) as compared with 43 men, or 11.6 per cent of women;
- 1992: 2 women members of a Government consisting of 44 ministers, i.e. 4.5 per cent;
- 1997: 3 women ministers out of 45, or 6.6 per cent.

4. Women and local government

Women have difficulty in obtaining access to elective office because of the nominations procedures which are stacked against them.

- In 1987, women accounted for 9.19 per cent of total nominations and 8 per cent of those elected;
- In 1996, the figures were 13.69 per cent of nominations and 10.68 per cent of those elected.

Despite the political will to guarantee equal opportunity of access to elective and administrative posts, there is still discrimination against women even in the political parties, where they mainly serve as grassroots activists.

5. Women and the political parties

The activities of the political parties and associations are based on the laws that regulate them. Every citizen, without distinction as to sex, is free to set up a political party.

Out of the approximately 130 political parties active in Cameroon, only one was set up by a woman. However, three parties are headed by women.

V.2. WOMEN IN ADMINISTRATION

The number of women occupying strategic posts in the civil service, the private sector and quasi-public enterprises falls well below the quota of 30 per cent determined by mutual agreement at the World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995.

Out of 150,643 civil servants, 46,110 or 30.6 per cent are women. They are divided up among the various categories as follows:

Table 3. Distribution of women in the civil service, by category

<u>Category</u>

Table 4. Distribution of women in the public services,
 by profession

Profession	Total number	Number of women	Percentage
Administration, general	4 158	991	23.83
Administration, school and university	45	4	8.8
Administration, public health	45	2	0.8
Social affairs	542	202	37.27
Agriculture	5 162	526	10.19
Aeronautics	69	6	8.69
Accountancy	509	81	15.9
Surveying	995	54	5.12
Diplomacy	154	21	13.63
Demograp	2		

Profession	Total number	Number of women	Percentage
Registration, stamps and administration	262	90	53.32
Statistics	502	35	6.97
Geographical services	16	1	6.25
Employment and social security	416	79	18.99
Translation, interpretation	174	27	15.51
Sanitary engineering	75	24	28.23
Medical technology	981	307	31.29

V.3. WOMEN AND THE LEGAL PROFESSION

CHAPTER VI
WOMEN AND INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION

(Article 8)

The women of Cameroon can represent their country on an equal footing with men.

In reality, however, as the following figures show, women are under-represented in diplomacy and the international organizations.

VI.2. DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS

Table 9. Percentage of women in diplomatic missions

Post	Men	Women
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International organization	Post	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
ITU	-	1	0	1	0
UNESCO	D1	1	0	1	0
	P5	2	0	2	0
	P4	1	0	1	0
	P3	1	0	1	0
WMO	P	0	1	1	100
ILO	D1	1	0	1	0
	P	4	0	4	0
ITTO	-	1	0	1	0
IMF	-	4	0	4	0
ADB	-	1	0	1	0
UNFPA	-	4	0	4	0
CTCA	Senior officials	2	0	2	0
IBRD	Assistants to Directors and the like	5	2	7	28.5
BEAC	Senior officials	46	2	48	4.1
WFP	-	2	0	2	0
UNIDO	-	3	0	3	0
IPU	-	1	0	1	0
WIPO	-	1	0	1	0
WHO	P5	3	1	4	25
	P4	2	0	2	0
	P3	4	0	4	0
UNICEF	-	2	0	2	0
ECA	P5	1	0	1	0
	P4	5	0	5	0
	P3	2	0	2	0
ACP-EEC	-	3	0	3	0

Source: MINREX, DAG, 1998.

CHAPTER VII

ACQUISITION/ATTRIBUTION, CHANGE AND RETENTION OF NATIONALITY

(Article 9)

The same law does make a distinction between the attribution of Cameroonian nationality by origin and the acquisition of that nationality after birth.

VII.2. ACQUISITION/ATTRIBUTION, CHANGE AND RETENTION OF CAMEROONIAN NATIONALITY

1. Attribution of Cameroonian nationality by origin

Cameroonian nationality is attributed on the basis of filial relation or birth in Cameroon.

(a) Filial relation

Articles 6, 7 and 8 of the above-mentioned Law No. 68 list six possible circumstances:

According to article 6, a child has Cameroonian nationality if it is "a legitimate child of Cameroonian parents" or "a natural child, when both parents with respect to whom filiation has been established are Cameroonian".

According to article 7, a child has Cameroonian nationality if it is "a legitimate child one of whose parents is Cameroonian" or "a natural child when the parent with respect to whom filiation was established in the first instance is Cameroonian while the other parent is a foreign national, subject to the right of the minor to renounce Cameroonian nationality during the six months before he comes of age if he was not born in Cameroon or if, in accordance with the national law of that foreigner, he is able to avail himself of the latter's nationality."

According to article 8, a child has Cameroonian nationality if it is "a legitimate child of a Cameroonian mother and a father who has no nationality or whose nationality is unknown" or "a natural child when the parent with respect to whom filiation was established in the second instance is Cameroonian, if the other parent has no nationality or his/her nationality is unknown."

(b) Birth in Cameroon

CHAPTER VIII

ACCESS OF WOMEN TO EDUCATION

(Article 10)

The Constitution establishes the compulsory nature of primary education and the right of all, without discrimination, to receive an education. In practice, however, socio-cultural factors may lead some parents and some families to favour the education of boys to the detriment of the education of girls, on the grounds that the latter are unproductive and destined to establish families elsewhere.

VIII.1. CONDITIONS FOR VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE, ACCESS TO STUDIES AND ACHIEVEMENT OF DIPLOMAS IN EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS OF ALL CATEGORIES

The Cameroonian educational system makes no distinction between girls and boys. The proportion of girls falls progressively as the level of education rises, particularly in the sciences.

1. Primary education

In Cameroon, primary education is the level with the largest number of pupils, estimated at about 2 million in 1997. The enrolment rate is steadily falling. Thus, from 78 per cent in 1984 it dropped to 61 per cent in 1995.¹

The following table shows the trend in the number of primary school pupils between 1990 and 1995.

Table 12. Trend in the number of primary school pupils between 1990 and 1995

Year	Girls	Boys	Total	Percentage girls
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education are training to be typists and secretaries or taking so-called women's courses (sewing, domestic science, social services).

4. Higher education

According to the aforementioned study, girls account for about 23 per cent of the total number of students in higher education. Only a few of them are studying science. In 1991, only 17 per cent of the students enrolled in the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Yaoundé were girls.

VIII.2. ACCESS TO THE SAME CURRICULA AND EXAMINATIONS AND TO SCHOOL

VIII.5. ACCESS TO PROGRAMMES OF CONTINUING EDUCATION, INCLUDING ADULT AND FUNCTIONAL LITERACY PROGRAMMES

The Government of Cameroon is making a notable effort in the field of access to basic education for all, but the illiteracy rate among women is still high. Moreover, serious disparities remain between regions, the big cities and the rural areas and between age groups. For example, in the provinces of the Far North 64 per cent of the children who could be enrolled are not, and the difference between the enrolment rates for girls and boys is 14 per cent as compared with 9 per cent nationally.

The main obstacles to the development of education for girls are pinpointed in a study of the factors with a negative effect on the underenrolment of girls in Cameroon's schools commissioned by the Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs and revised by the NGO AGRO-PME (Small and Medium-Sized Agricultural Enterprises):

- lack of a birth certificate, which impedes enrolment and access to official examinations;
- early and undesired marriages and pregnancies;
- socio-cultural traditions that restrict the participation of women in social life;
- a mistaken social perception of the modern school on the part of parents and the community;
- the intensive exploitation of girl labour on farms and in households;
- curricula that fail to meet the basic educational needs of the target groups in terms of local cultural values.

With the assistance of UNICEF, the Government has introduced a basic education programme for girls in the northern provinces.

The three components of this programme are as follows:

- girls' basic education project;
- social mobilization project on behalf of young girls;
- girls' non-formal basic education project.

This programme aims to improve access to school for girls by 10 per cent a year and to reduce the drop-out rate by 15 per cent.

In addition, the fact that women constitute a majority of the Cameroonian population (51 per cent), together with their low level of education, has led various ministerial departments and specialized agencies [Youth and Sports, Agriculture, Livestock, Women's Affairs, Employment and Labour, Social Affairs, National Employment Foundation] to adopt functional literacy programmes and non-formal basic education as a means of reaching this important group.

In parallel with this government action, several denominational and lay, as well as community, NGOs have developed alternative education and literacy programmes.

These alternatives are intended to serve as a bridge back to the normal education cycle or as a means of integration into the labour market. However, their impact is being blunted by a number of constraints:

- shortage of structures and qualified personnel;

The Ministry of Youth and Sports has about 115 youth and recreation centres and 75 literacy centres and supervises 60 youth movements and associations.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs has 26 operational centres for the advancement of women and plans to have one centre in each departmental capital (or 58 altogether).

Moreover, 84 rural leadership pools are open and 37 closed because of the freeze on recruitment to the civil service and retirements.

The Ministry of Social Affairs has 100 or so social centres and home-workshops.

The Ministry of Agriculture has rural promotion structures.

- financial constraints leading to the defection of beneficiaries;
- shortage of teaching materials and equipment;
- conservative attitudes;
- the negative aspects of certain religious factors;
- curricula and content ill-adapted to the needs and resources of the community and to the social demand for labour;
- lack of coordination and collaboration;
- failure to exploit non-formal education structures;
- non-acceptance of the certificates and attestations issued by such structures in relation to the professional scale in force;
- lack of competitiveness of the graduates of this system on the job market and their difficulty in integrating into the formal education system.

VIII.6. REDUCTION OF DROP-OUT RATES

In general, the school drop-out rate varies with the cycle:

- at the primary level, the estimated rate is 6.4 per cent for girls as compared with 5.6 per cent for boys;
- at the secondary level, it is 14.2 per cent for girls as compared with 10.6 per cent for boys.

The differences are more pronounced in higher education.

Moreover, since 1992, there has been a decline in the enrolment rate for girls as a result of the economic crisis, which has aggravated the problem of the protection, safety and retention of girls at school.

Aware of this problem, the Government has set up an informal basic education project which is based on a social mobilization approach and has been developed in the field in the Far North region, with the support of UNICEF. This project is currently being extended to the East province.

The project objectives are as follows:

- to convince the national community of the need for education for girls;
- to limit the dropping out and under-enrolment associated with socio-economic and cultural factors;
- to eliminate all forms of prejudice and discrimination with regard to schooling for young girls;
- to encourage a change of mentality and a more favourable social perception of school and the role of girls;
- to make girls and their parents more aware of the advantages of a better basic education;
- to keep pregnant girls in school;
- to extend the age of school admission for girls in those areas where enrolment is low and the population consists of marginal groups (pygmies, bororos, hill people, inhabitants of inaccessible or frontier areas);
- to increase the supply of education, even in low-density areas;
- to intensify advocacy campaigns and mobilize society on behalf of women;
- to introduce education into family life in order to reduce the early and/or undesired pregnancy rate;

- to increase the number of girls enrolled in school;
- to reduce wastage by improving attendance among girls, with particular emphasis on the regions with low enrolment.

VIII.7. OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY IN SPORTS AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

There are no restrictions except in cases of physical incapacity and/or where medically inadvisable.

Both males and females are admitted to the National Youth and Sports Institute (INJS) and girls can practise any sport there.

Moreover, women's football teams participate in competitions at both national and international level. The State assigns sports and physical education teachers to the traditional and non-formal educational establishments under a programme funded from the State budget. Girls and boys compete in all disciplines in the games organized annually by the National School Sports Federation (FENASCO).

VIII.8. ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON HEALTH, FAMILY WELL-BEING AND FAMILY PLANNING

The Ministry of Women's Affairs is promoting a women's education programme in the context of non-formal basic education and functional education involving:

- information;
- awareness-raising;
- education (educational chats);
- training;
- social mobilization.

Education programmes have been set up within the context of the AIDS programme and in connection with sexual mutilation, family planning, fundamental rights, and the education and/or protection of young girls.

CHAPTER IX

ACCESS OF WOMEN TO EMPLOYMENT

(Article 11)

In the Cameroonian context in general, in 1987 women accounted for about 42 per cent of the economically active population in work. They were most numerous in agriculture with 50 per cent of the total, followed by services (about 25 per cent) and industry (15 per cent). Moreover, they made up 15 per cent of dependent workers.

- On 30 June 1992, in the public sector or administration, they accounted for about 28 per cent of the establishment. Today, however, this figure needs to be revised downwards because of staff cutbacks and the lowering of the retirement age, which has particularly affected the lower grades where women are over-represented.
- As for the informal sector, it includes most of the self-employed, including a high proportion of the economically active female population (about 58 per cent in 1987).

Moreover, one head of household in five is a woman. It should be noted that in Cameroon the domestic work done by women is not yet taken into account in the system of national accounts.

With respect to standard of living, most Cameroonian households are classed below the poverty threshold. Women, who make up 51.9 per cent of those living in these households, are the ones who suffer most hardship. At the same time, the middle households, which account for 18.3 per cent of the population, have a composition that is only 48.4 per cent female and 51.6 per cent male.

This tendency for the proportion of women to fall as the standard of living rises is common to all the regions.

Table 14. Percentage of women by standard of living and by region

Standard of
living/region

3. The right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service and the right to vocational training and retraining

In general, the law does not discriminate against women.

Article 2 of the Labour Code is explicit as regards the right to job security: "The State must do everything possible to help citizens to find a job and to retain it once found". Furthermore, paragraph 2 of the same article prohibits forced or compulsory labour.

Similarly, article 24 of the Civil Service Regulations states that "The civil servant shall enjoy the following rights vis-à-vis the administration:

- the right to protection;
- the right to remuneration;
- the right to a pension;
- the right to health;
- the right to in-service training;
- the right to leave;
- the right to participation."

All these rights are applicable to and enjoyed by men and women without distinction.

4. The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work

On 25 May 1970, Cameroon ratified ILO Convention No. 100 of 1951 on equality of remuneration. The provisions of this Convention are incorporated in art. 61(2) of the Labour Code which states: "For the same conditions of work and level of skill, the wage shall be the same for all workers, regardless of their origin, sex, age or status".

With regard to the system for the evaluation of the quality of work, the Civil Service Regulations (Section 1, Chapter III, art. 42) read as follows: "As soon as the fiscal year has ended and at the latest by 31 August of each year, the professional performance of the civil servant shall be evaluated in terms of the objectives assigned, the time allowed for their achievement and the quality of the results."

Paragraph 2 of the same article goes further, stipulating that the evaluation shall determine the course of the official's career, particularly as regards promotion or redundancy.

5. The right to social security, particularly in cases of retirement, unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age and other incapacity to work, as well as the right to paid leave

The right to social security is enshrined in Social Security Organization Ordinance No. 73-17 of 22 May 1973.

Article 1 of the Ordinance reads as follows: "There shall be set up a social security organization responsible, within the framework of general government policy, for administering the various benefits for which the social and family protection legislation provides."

Only dependent workers fall within the areas of social security currently covered in Cameroon. Moreover, regardless of gender, unemployment benefit does not feature among the various benefits provided.

6. The right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction

Title VI of the Labour Code deals with occupational health and safety.

In accordance with art. 95 of the Code, hygiene and safety conditions in the workplace are defined by order of the Minister responsible for labour matters. Thus, Order No. 39/MTPS/IMT of 24 November 1984 lays down general measures.

As far as health is concerned, art. 98 of the same Code requires every enterprise and every establishment of whatever description, public or private, lay or religious, civil or military, including those associated with the exercise of liberal professions and those controlled by trade associations or trade unions, to organize a medical and health service for the benefit of the employees.

The provisions of the Civil Service Regulations similarly protect the health and safety of civil servants. Thus, art. 25 stipulates that "The State is required to protect the official against any threats, abuse, violence, assault, insults or slander to which he may be exposed because or when he is performing his functions." Later, art. 31(2) stipulates that "The State is required to protect the official against work-related accidents and occupational diseases."

Article 84(1) of the Labour Code throws light on the question of safeguarding the reproductive function. The substance of this article is reproduced below in the section devoted to the legislation for the protection of the working woman.

The availability of 14 weeks of maternity leave for women and 3 days of paternity leave for men likewise reflects the authorities' concern to safeguard the function of reproduction.

Alongside these common provisions which apply equally to men and women (recruitment, working hours, rest periods, remuneration, hygiene and safety measures, premature termination of an employment contract), the Cameroonian

4. The right of women to rest during the nursing period

Article 85(1) stipulates that "During a period of fifteen (15) months following the birth of the child, the mother shall have the right to rest breaks for nursing purposes" while, according to paragraph 3 of the same article, "During this period, the mother may terminate her contract without notice."

5. Prohibition of heavy and dangerous work

Under the terms of art. 83, the nature of the work which women and pregnant women, respectively, are prohibited from doing shall be defined by order of the Minister responsible for labour matters.

6. Prohibition of night work

It follows from art. 82(2) that women and children may not do night work in industry. Article 81 defines night work as any work done between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.

With regard to the provision of the necessary supporting social services, employers are having difficulty in establishing and operating day-care facilities within their enterprises.

Although Cameroon does have legislation containing provisions that protect the working woman, it is nonetheless true that some of these provisions are out of date and need revising.

IX.3. NEED FOR A PERIODIC REVIEW OF THE LEGISLATION FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE WORKING WOMAN

For the time being, there is no formal provision for a periodic review of out-of-date and inappropriate legislation. However, a national commission has been set up within the Prime Minister's services to revise the laws and regulations. Its general objective is to list all these texts and see how they might be reformed.

Although in many cases women are recognized as being entitled to the various fundamental rights, in reality they still face obstacles when it comes to exercising those rights.

1. In the field of employment

In the structured sector, women's employment opportunities are limited by their basic profile since it generally corresponds to parts of the labour market which are already saturated. Similarly, a woman's choice of occupation is often restricted by inappropriate basic training.

Moreover, the hiring practices of some employers infringe upon a woman's freedom to marry since she is often required to provide a certificate showing that she is unmarried.

The informal sector, where working women are more numerous, does not have access to the public social security system.

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With respect to the application of the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value within the context of collective labour agreements, it must be acknowledged that in Cameroon working women generally know little about the administrative and legal systems, which makes it difficult for them to assess

CHAPTER X

ACCESS OF WOMEN TO PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

(Article 12)

The health of the people is a government priority since a country that neglects the people's health can hardly be expected to develop socially and economically. This objective can only be achieved if the political will exists and the health and related sectors are prepared to combine their efforts.

X.1. SECTORAL HEALTH POLICY: MEASURES TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE

The priority objective of sectoral health policy (1992) is "to improve the state of health of the people by making comprehensive quality care more accessible to the whole of the population, with the full participation of the communities."

The essential components of this sectoral health policy, as incorporated in Framework Law No. 96/03 of 4 January 1996, are as follows:

- universal access to essential quality care through the development of health districts;
- reinforcement of the health care systems at every level (central, intermediate and peripheral);
- making essential generic pharmaceutical products affordable to the largest possible number of Cameroonians thanks to the creation of a National Essential Drugs Centre (CENAME);
- involvement of the communities in the co-financing and co-management of the health services (encouragement of dialogue at all levels through the establishment of health committees, management committees, etc.) with a view to their taking their share of responsibility for dealing with health problems;
- development of a partnership between government, the beneficiary communities and all the other interested parties.

This policy, whose operational strategy is based on the Declaration of National Policy for the reorientation of primary health care (PHC) and on a series of measures forming part of the priority programmes for making the health care system viable (one of these programmes is devoted specifically to the health of women and children), consists in giving the largest possible number of persons access to the care they need at a reasonable and bearable cost.

In this context, the health centres are the preferred means of establishing the interface between the community and the health services.

Since mothers and children constitute the most vulnerable group, in both urban and rural areas, MINSANTE has laid down the basic principles of health care provision for mothers and children in a re-updated document entitled "Policy and standards for maternal and child health and family planning services", the aim being to improve the provision and delivery of these services.

Altogether, there are 12 aspects to sectoral health policy:

- controlling endemic diseases and epidemics and epidemiological monitoring;
- primary health care;
- referrals;
- health care for women, children and youth, family planning;
- mental health;
- drugs and pharmaceutical policy;
- traditional medicine;
- infrastructure and equipment;
- rationalization of personnel management;
- health and management information system;
- financing of the health sector;
- operational research.

This policy is being implemented through programmes (including the National Family Health Programme, which incorporates a dozen priority sub-programmes for

To achieve the aim of improving women's health and nutrition, seven priority areas have been marked out:

1. Priority areas

- reduction of risk factors;
- adequacy of health coverage;
- raising the level of education of women;
- higher incomes for women;
- improved household food security;
- educating the public about health and nutrition;
- inclusion of women in health management.

Special attention should be paid to the reduction of risk factors in view of its potential for improving women's health.

The state of women's health remains precarious due to a series of interdependent factors (serial childbirths, food taboos, traditional practices, hard work in the home and on the land) which lessen their ability to work and undermine their constitution. Thus, improved health and nutrition depend on the implementation of strategies designed to solve these problems.

The necessary measures mainly involve:

- developing a programme to support the campaign against the malnutrition and lack of micro-nutrients which are degrading the health of women and children;
- setting up a social mobilization programme to make people, especially men and the traditional authorities, aware of the highly deleterious effects of food taboos and certain traditional practices on the health of women and children;
- increase people's awareness of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS (an IEC campaign has been organized with the support of the mass media);
- promote genital cancer screening and treatment;
- lighten women's workload (especially that of rural women) by facilitating their access at reduced cost to appropriate or intermediate technologies;
- increase the level of access to drinking water in urban and especially rural areas by building new works and introducing a national maintenance policy for the existing installations;

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- intensify the programme of education in responsible parenthood by involving all the groups concerned: young people, parents, adults. The programme should be incorporated into the school system and delivered in both urban centres and rural areas;
- promote the practice of breast-feeding up to the age of at least 6 months.

Within this framework a number of projects are being carried out.

2. Ongoing programmes and projects

- the breast-feeding programme;
- the campaign against iodine-deficiency disorders;
- the campaign against protein-energy malnutrition;
- the campaign against deficiency anaemias;
- the Women-Population-Development project;
- the campaign against AIDS;
- the Maternal and Child Health/Family Planning project;
- the Education in Responsible Parenthood project;
- the Nutrition Education pilot project;
- the COP-MIR project (communication for taking into account population problems in rural areas);
- the Guinea Worm Eradication project;
- the Health-Fertility-Nutrition project, which is in the start-up phase.

By and large, all these projects and programmes are making a real contribution to improving the living conditions of the population in general and women in particular. For example, the campaign against iodine-deficiency disorders has led to the introduction of iodine into cooking salt in Cameroon.

Some of these projects are now being carried out by NGOs.

The public, quasi-public and private hospitals and medical centres are actively engaged in operating these programmes and projects. The public health care units include:

category 1: 2 general hospitals;
category 2: 3 central hospitals;
category 3: 9 provincial hospitals;
categories 4 and 6: 158 district medical centres;
basic medical services: 170 integrated health centres;
gynaecological services: 51 maternal and child welfare and maternity
units.

3. Measures relating to offences against women and children

(d) Infanticide: art. 340

"A mother who is principal perpetrator or accomplice in the manslaughter or murder of her child within a month of its birth shall be liable only to 5 to 10 years' imprisonment. These provisions may not be applied to the other perpetrators or accomplices."

X.2. IDENTIFICATION OF THE ACTORS

In Cameroon, the cause of health receives support from both the Government and the private sector.

1. Public sector

Responsibility for the implementation of the Government's health policy falls mainly upon the Ministry of Health, which collaborates with the other ministries.

(a) Ministry of Health

The seven directorates of the Ministry of Health, organized by Decree No. 95/040 of 7 March 1995, include the Community Health Directorate and the Family Health Sub-Directorate whose main concern is the protection of women and children. The Sub-Directorate is responsible for:

- the promotion and protection of maternal health;
- the inspection and monitoring of maternity hospitals;
- the organization of campaigns against genetic diseases;
- the organization, supervision and protection of maternal health and the health of infants and juveniles;
- the surveillance and nutrition education of mothers and children;
- health education;
- the definition of child protection strategies and action plans.

Moreover, Decree No. 95/013 of 7 February 1995 organizes the basic health services in health districts. This new subdivision of the country into health areas and districts, which is governed by operational and efficiency criteria rather than mere administrative logic, makes it possible to deal comprehensively with all the population's health problems. Thus, children and pregnant women can be best cared for at the health area level because the team working at the centre is familiar with their social and physical environment. Within the context of this reorganization there is provision for activities at every level with a view to solving most of the health and nutritional problems of children and pregnant women.

In addition, Law No. 96/03 of 4 January 1996 establishes the general framework for State action in the health field and the objectives of national

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health policy in Cameroon. According to article 4(3) of this framework law, which is mainly intended to provide a legal basis for the partnership between the State and the communities: "One of the main principles on which national health policy is based is the protection and promotion of the health of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, particularly women, children, adolescents, older persons, the poor and the disabled".

As far as the staffing of the health service is concerned, women are adequately represented in the various branches.

(e) Ministry of Women's Affairs

As part of its task of providing guidance and continuing education for women, the Ministry of Women's Affairs includes in its programmes problems of health and nutrition. This particular service is provided by supporting institutions such as the Centres for the Advancement of Women and the leadership pools, through educational chats, health and nutritional education, diet demonstrations, etc.

(f) Ministry of Economics and Finance

Coordinates, supervises and monitors programmes and projects relating to the advancement of women.

(g) Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries

Organizes the production and quality control of foodstuffs of animal and fish origin.

(h) Ministry of Youth and Sports

Its main responsibility is to inform the public about health problems through its mobile urban health promotion teams.

(i) Ministry of the Environment and Forests

Coordinates the environmental protection and management activities of the different departments. Women are a prime target for awareness-raising in connection with the management of the various natural resources they utilize on a daily basis.

(j) Ministry of Territorial Administration

Together with the local authorities, this department is responsible for public hygiene and health.

(k) Ministry of Social Affairs

Has a directorate responsible for protecting the individual and the family and for grassroots services (Social Centres).

(l) Ministry of Communication

Provides technical supervision of the tripartite MINCOM-UNFPA-UNESCO programme through Information-Education-Communication strategies.

(m) Ministry of Towns

This newly created department has sanitation and highways among its principal responsibilities.

2. Private sector

In the private sector, the denominational and lay bodies merit attention because of the importance of their contribution and their special status as profit-making organizations.

The initiatives of the NGOs and humanitarian organizations should also be noted.

The traditional practitioners play a not inconsiderable part in the management of health problems in Cameroon.

CHAPTER XI
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN

(Article 13)

Women are not yet participating sufficiently in industrial, commercial, formal and craft activities. They are concentrated in the food, textile and clothing branches and excel in food production.

Women account for about 13.5 per cent of the participants in the structured sector and 9 per cent of promoters of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). They head 3.2 per cent of industrial and commercial enterprises and 5.3 per cent of service enterprises.

In the informal sector, about 18 per cent of enterprises are run by women. They are concentrated in the food trade where they account for about 81 per cent of retail sellers and 9 per cent of wholesalers.

Thus, women represent a considerable human potential in the formal and informal sectors. The development of these human resources is still being impeded by certain obstacles which will be examined in relation to the provisions of article 13.

XI.1. RIGHT TO FAMILY BENEFITS

Strictly speaking, in Cameroon there is no social security system that takes the non-wage earner, including unmarried mothers, into account. On the other hand, there is a social security system that caters for the dependent worker only.

Family benefits are available to both men and women workers without distinction. These benefits consist mainly of housing, family allowances and supplementary benefits, which vary with the number of children, and the partial payment of some of the recipient's medical expenses.

XI.2. RIGHT TO BANK LOANS, MORTGAGES AND OTHER FORMS OF FINANCIAL CREDIT

Although the credit legislation in force in Cameroon does not discriminate against women, there are several factors preventing the majority of them from obtaining access to formal loans.

1. The written law

Legislative provisions restrict women's legal capacity to offer guarantees with a view to obtaining a bank loan.

Thus, the right and freedom to pursue a commercial activity are limited by:

- Article 223 of the Civil Code and article 74 of the Ordinance of 29 June 1981, which recognize the husband's right to object to his wife's pursuing a separate profession;

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- Article 7 of the Commercial Code, which authorizes the husband to put an end to the commercial activity of his wife simply by notifying his objection to the Registrar of the Commercial Court.

2. The terms and conditions offered by the banks

The banks' terms and conditions cannot easily be met by women farmers and traders because of:

- their lack of basic training in management and bookkeeping;
- their poor understanding of the notion of the return on a loan;
- their ignorance of banking and tax procedures;
- their lack of collateral and security.

In practice, some bankers demand the husband's guarantee as one of the conditions for granting a loan.

In order to make a start on overcoming some of these difficulties and obstacles, the Government has taken several specific measures on behalf of women, namely:

- the Priority Programme for the Promotion of SMEs led by the Ministry of Industrial and Commercial Development which specifically targets children, disabled persons and women. It is intended to bring about the swift and harmonious integration of women into the SME promotion effort by:
 - strengthening their ability to create and manage enterprises;
 - eliminating discrimination.

The Cooperative Societies Act (Law No. 92/006 of 16 August 1992) facilitated the establishment of decentralized financial institutions of a kind calculated to encourage entrepreneurship among women.

3. Customary practices

Because of the dead hand of custom, women find it difficult to become owners of property in general and land in particular.

XI.3. RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES, SPORTS AND ALL ASPECTS OF CULTURAL LIFE

The Government of Cameroon guarantees men and women without distinction the possibility of access to sports and leisure activities.

Despite women's enthusiasm for things cultural, their level of involvement is relatively low.

This is attributable to such factors as:

is relatively low (as:) expansion involvement

CHAPTER XII

THE SITUATION OF RURAL WOMEN

(Article 14)

XII.1. GENERAL SITUATION OF RURAL WOMEN

Rural women are playing a crucial role in ensuring food security in Cameroon. They account for 52 per cent of the rural population and produce about 90 per cent of the food.

However, they still experience hardship, suffering in particular from:

- lack of credit for agricultural production and extension activities;
- lack of health care;
- lack of information on the opportunities offered by the international market;
- lack of a basic education;
- the isolation of the production areas;
- difficulties of access to land ownership;
- excessive demands on their time;

~~From the 1990s onwards, the situation of rural women in Cameroon has improved. In 1990, rural women accounted for 52 per cent of the rural population and produced 90 per cent of the food. However, they still experience hardship, suffering in particular from:~~

- training;
- administration of health care.

It should be noted that the situation has improved as a result of the implementation of the National Agricultural Extension Services Programme (PNVA).

Moreover, the easing of the provisions of the Associations Act has encouraged the development of several NGOs and associations working to provide support for rural women.

XII.2. SITUATION OF RURAL WOMEN IN RELATION TO THE PROVISIONS OF ARTICLE 14 OF THE CONVENTION

The situation of rural women can be effectively assessed only in the light of certain leading indicators.

1. Participation in decision-making

The participation of rural women in decision-making, both within the family and in society, is still very low due to a number of obstacles:

- socio-cultural attitudes and inhibitions;
- lack of education in civics and economics;
- lack of financial resources;
- the passivity or timidity of the women;
- the excessive demands on women's time due to their multiple role (mother, wife and participant in development).

2. Access to adequate health care facilities

The authorities are making efforts to bring the health services closer to the people, especially in rural areas, by establishing health districts run by doctors and organizing a minimum package of activities, including reproductive health and nutrition.

3. Social security programmes

In Cameroon, the social security systems do not yet reach the rural population. Moreover, through lack of information and support, rural people find it difficult to obtain access to the insurance-guaranteed public security system.

4. Access to all types of education and training

The law makes no distinction between men and women as regards access to the educational and training establishments. However, rural girls are more likely to drop out of school than their urban sisters.

The main difficulties relating to the organization of self-help groups are as follows:

- the weak internal structuring of the groups;
- the relatively undeveloped spirit of cooperation among the members;
- the lack of land specifically identified as belonging to the group;
- the low literacy rate among rural women.

6. Participation in all community activities

Of necessity, because they make a vital contribution to the stability and functioning of the family, rural women are becoming more and more involved in the management of the village community. At the same time, their exclusion from the administration of the family assets is encouraged by the existence of unfavourable legal provisions. Thus, article 1421 of the Civil Code reads: "The administration of the community property is entrusted to the husband who may sell, transfer or mortgage it without the consent of his wife". Similarly, article 1428 recognizes that: "The husband shall administer all the personal property of his wife. He may independently exercise any right of action to recover movable property or to protect or recover possession vested in the wife. He shall be responsible for any physical depreciation of his wife's personal property due to failure to take protective action".

7. Access of women to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes

Despite their important role in the economy, women still only have limited access to productive resources. According to the Ministry of Agriculture's estimates for 1996, overall, only about 17 per cent of farms are run by women. This national average conceals differences at the provincial level.

Table 16. Percentage of farms run by men and women respectively

Province

Women have difficulty in obtaining bank loans for the following reasons:

- inability to cope with the procedures and guarantee requirements of the commercial banks;
- scarcity of rural lending institutions;
- bankers not interested in projects that only generate low incomes;
- low quota of loans and subsidies available to women's groups;
- low literacy rate;
- limited financial resources;
- lack of business information and know-how;
- lack of organized marketing channels;
- poorly developed communications;
- underfunded NGOs and paucity of trade organizations;
- persistence of socio-cultural practices that restrict women's access to land, despite this being a resource essential to their self-fulfilment.

There are certain agencies that provide start-up support:

- the Rural Organization Support Fund (FONDAOR). Out of 2,290 grants awarded only 16 per cent went to women's groups;
- Decentralized Rural Credit;
- the National Employment Fund (FNE) provides advice and financing;
- the FIMAC programme;
- the Savings and Loan Cooperatives (COOPEC);
- the Women-Population-Development project which finances women's income-generating activities in the Far North and South-West provinces;
- the Productive Microprojects on behalf of the Women of Cameroon (MPPF-CAM) projects whose aim is to increase women's income while initiating them into the principles and rules of entrepreneurship;
- the women's pre-cooperatives and joint initiative groups;
- the First Ladies of Africa Programme for the economic advancement of rural women.

In addition, it should be noted that the diplomatic establishment and certain international organizations are making a significant contribution in this area.

8. Living conditions of rural women, particularly in respect of housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications

The following table sets out the characteristics of rural housing.

Table 17. Characteristics of rural housing in 1976 and 1987

Characteristic	1976	1987
Walls made of permanent materials	6%	7%
Metal, tile or slab roof	31%	54%
Cement floor with or without tiles	7%	15%
Ownership	94%	91%

Source: Demo. 1987, vol. III, Part 9: Summary of preliminary reports.

Thus, as only a small percentage of houses are built of permanent materials with cement floors, most rural people live in flimsy housing, although they generally own it themselves.

As regards access to drinking water, surveys show that the coverage has not improved very much during the last 20 years and in most places the traditional water points have remained the main source of supply.

Table 18. Breakdown of rural housing units by method of drinking water supply

Method of supply	1976	1987
Running water	4.3%	2.2%
Standpipe		

In view of the low rural drinking water coverage (31 per cent) and the defective condition of most of the hydraulic works installed (60 per cent), the Government has launched the following water supply programme:

- one borehole equipped with a pump for every locality with 300 to 500 inhabitants;
- a water supply system for communities with 2,500 to 5,000 inhabitants.

Moreover, hydraulic rehabilitation programmes are being carried out all over the country under the new policy of encouraging the participation of the beneficiary communities in all phases of rural hydraulic engineering projects.

Thus, women are performing the daily chore of supplying the family with drinking water. In some areas, they are obliged to walk several miles in search of water.

As for rural hygiene and environmental sanitation, the latrine is the type of convenience most commonly employed (87.9 per cent of households in 1987) and waste water is allowed to drain away into the soil.

In 1987, the usual form of lighting in rural areas was the petrol lamp, to which 82.7 per cent of the population had access. Electricity is available only to a small privileged minority (4.24 per cent).

Wood is the fuel most commonly used for cooking in rural areas. In 1987, it was used by 96 per cent of households, with the remaining 4 per cent using either oil or gas or electricity.

- They may conclude contracts, carry on a commercial activity on the same footing as a man and practise the profession of their choice.

There is, however, a restriction on the contractual capacity of a married woman. Thus, article 223 of the Civil Code authorizes the husband to object to the pursuit of a profession by his wife if he considers that it could be prejudicial to the interests of the family.

Moreover, article 7 of the Commercial Code empowers the husband to put an end to his wife's economic activity simply by notifying his objection to the Registrar of the Commercial Court.

However, the wife may go to court to seek the withdrawal of the objection on the grounds that her pursuit of a profession is not prejudicial to the interests of the household.

The administration of the community property is entrusted to the husband who may sell, transfer or mortgage it without the consent of his wife (arts. 1421 and 1428 of the Civil Code). If the husband is unable to express his wishes, the wife may represent him only if so authorized by the court (art. 219 of the Civil Code). All these discriminatory provisions have been identified and will definitely not be perpetuated in the new Civil Code in preparation.

XIII.3. NULLITY OF CONTRACTS AND MEASURES DIRECTED AT RESTRICTING THE LEGAL CAPACITY OF WOMEN

When a woman considers that an administrative decision discriminates against her, she may ask the administrative court to set it aside. In the case of a discriminatory private contract, she may apply to the ordinary courts for it to be declared null and void.

XIII.4. THE RIGHT OF WOMEN TO FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND CHOICE OF RESIDENCE AND DOMICILE

According to the Preamble to the Constitution, "Every person shall have the right to settle in any place and to move about freely, subject to the statutory provisions concerning public order and safety and the keeping of the peace." Since the proclamation of freedoms in 1990, Cameroonian women have enjoyed the freedom to come and go, especially married women for whom the need for the husband's authorization to obtain a visa was a serious infringement of that right.

To conclude, the legislation does not discriminate against women, except in the above-mentioned cases relating to a woman's capacity to administer the community property, to choose and keep a job or economic activity and to choose a domicile. If women are not enjoying their personal rights, it is due more to ignorance and lack of education and to the weight of custom, which continues to bear heavily upon them.

XIV.2. EXERCISE OF CONJUGAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

According to articles 213 and 214 of the Civil Code:

- "The husband shall be the head of the family and the wife shall replace him in his capacity of family head if he is unable to express his wishes because of incapacity, absence or distance or for any other reason.
- The wife shall cooperate with the husband in giving the family moral and material guidance, providing for its upkeep, bringing up the children and preparing them to set up on their own.
- The obligation to assume these responsibilities shall fall principally on the husband. He must provide his wife with all the necessities of life according to his abilities and status.
- The wife shall contribute to the household expenses through her marriage settlement and community contributions and through the withdrawals she may make from the personal resources which she retains the right to administer."

For its part, article 215 of the Civil Code stipulates that "the choice of family residence shall belong to the husband, the wife shall be obliged to live with him and he must accept her. Exceptionally, if the residence chosen by the husband places the family at physical or moral risk, the wife may be authorized to have, for herself and her children, another residence to be determined by the judge."

These are the conjugal rights and responsibilities exercised by women. Their rights in the event of the marriage being dissolved are described below.

XIV.3. THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN THE EVENT OF THE MARRIAGE BEING DISSOLVED

1. Forms of dissolution

Under the terms of article 77 of the Ordinance of 1981 and article 227 of the Civil Code, marriage is dissolved by the death of a spouse or by divorce decreed by the courts.

(a) Dissolution as a result of the death of the husband

In this situation, the law protects the widow. Thus, the above-mentioned article 77 states that "in the event of the death of the husband, his heirs may not claim any right over the person, liberty or share of the estate of the widow who, upon the expiration of a period of 180 days from the death of her husband, may freely remarry, without anyone being able to claim compensation or material benefit by way of dowry or otherwise, whether upon engagement or at the time of the marriage or subsequently."

It should be pointed out that the period of 180 days during which the woman may not marry is intended to avoid any confusion with regard to paternity.

Although this provision favours women, customary practices such as levirate

At the same time, according to article 72: "The total or partial payment of a dowry cannot in any circumstances form the basis for natural paternity which can only result from the existence of a blood relationship between the child and its father."

The law also envisages two situations in which the dowry must be returned. It follows from article 71(2) of the 1981 Ordinance that if the engagement is broken off, the depositary must return it immediately.

Similarly, according to article 73: "In the event of the dissolution of the marriage by divorce, the beneficiary of the dowry may be ordered to repay it, in whole or in part, if the court considers that he or she is totally or partially responsible for the disunion."

Furthermore, article 357 of the Criminal Code characterizes wrongfully demanding a dowry as an offence and punishes with 3 months to 5 years' imprisonment or a fine of 5,000 to 500,000 francs or both:

- anyone who by promising to marry a woman already married or still engaged receives from a third party all or part of a dowry;
- anyone who receives all or part of a dowry without having reimbursed any ousted suitor;
- anyone who, lacking capacity, receives all or part of a dowry with a view to marrying a woman;
- anyone who demands all or part of an excessive dowry on the occasion of the marriage of a daughter over the age of 21 or of a widow or divorcee;
- anyone who, while demanding an excessive dowry, bars for this reason alone the marriage of a daughter under the age of 21.

Other aspects linked with personal and property rights are implicit in article 16 of the Convention, for example, the right of women to have their say concerning family planning, to choose a family name and a profession and to enjoy household property.

XIV.7. THE EXERCISE BY WOMEN OF FAMILY PLANNING AND OTHER PERSONAL RIGHTS

1. The right of women freely to plan births

There is no law or regulation that prevents women from freely and responsibly deciding the number and spacing of their children. They have access, without the need to request authorization from anyone, to the information and services provided by the family planning centres scattered all over the country. However, it should be pointed out that their exercise of this right is impeded, among other things, by illiteracy, poverty, the inaccessibility of information and cultural restraints, especially where rural women are concerned.

Although the right to reproductive health is recognized and respected in Cameroon, nevertheless, before taking any permanent step to control a married woman's procreative function (such as ligating the tubes), the doctors require the husband's prior written authorization which she is obliged to produce.

2. The right of women to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation

(a) Choice of a family name

Law 69/LF/3 of 14 June 1969 regulating the use of names, first names and pseudonyms does not contain any discriminatory provision giving the husband the exclusive right to choose the family name. However, the general practice is for married women to take their husband's name. Thus, a married woman can use two names: her maiden name and the name of her husband.

This right to use the name of the husband is optional. A married woman is not obliged nor is it her duty to take her husband's name. When she is required to identify herself, she is free to use her maiden name rather than that of her husband. However, the use of the husband's name by the wife should not be injurious to him or third parties.

In the event of divorce, the wife may continue to use the name of her husband, unless he forbids it.

(b) The right of women to choose a profession or an occupation

Article 74(1) of the 1981 Ordinance reads as follows: "A married woman may pursue a profession separate from that of her husband." The exercise of this right by the wife is restricted by reservations set out in the following articles:

- According to article 74(2): "The husband may object to the pursuit of such a profession in the interests of the marriage and the children."
- Article 223 of the Civil Code takes a similar line: "A married woman may pursue a profession separate from that of her husband, unless the latter objects."

Nevertheless, the law does make exceptions to the exercise of the husband's right to object.

- The same article continues: "If the husband's objection is not justified by the interests of the family, the wife may be authorized by decision of the court to ignore it, in which case any professional commitments she has entered into since the objection was raised shall be valid."

This latter provision enables women to avoid finding themselves at the mercy of a husband who may sometimes be acting in bad faith.

3. The right of women to own, acquire, manage and dispose of property

Women's right of ownership, which according to the Constitution is the right to use, enjoy and dispose of one's property, is not fully recognized in view of certain provisions of the Civil Code and the Commercial Code relating, respectively, to the administration of statutory community property and bankruptcy.

(a) Provisions of the Civil Code

Article 1421: "The husband shall administer the community property on his own. He may sell, transfer or mortgage it without the consent of his wife."

Article 1428: "The husband shall administer all the personal property of his wife. He may independently exercise any right of action to recover movable property or to protect or recover possession vested in the wife. He may not dispose of his wife's personal real property without her consent. He shall be responsible for any physical depreciation of his wife's personal property due to failure to take protective action."

(b) Provisions of the Commercial Code

Articles 557 and 558: These articles protect a married woman whose trader husband goes bankrupt.

Article 559: This restricts the free enjoyment of her property by the wife of the bankrupt.

Thus, according to this article, "Whatever the regime under which the marriage contract was drawn up, apart from the case envisaged in art. 558 (acquisition of property by inheritance or gift), the legal presumption shall be that the property acquired by the wife of the bankrupt belongs to her husband, has been paid for with his money and must be pooled with the main body of his assets, unless the wife can show otherwise."

Over and above the written provisions which make the woman in some respects "a person lacking legal capacity" who must be protected by the husband, most of our usages and customs incorporate retrograde principles according to which a woman is incapable of owning property and especially land, all the more so as she herself is regarded as an inheritable good.

References

LEGAL TEXTS

A. CONVENTIONS

1. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
2. Universal Declaration of Human Rights
3. ILO Convention No. 100 on Equality of Remuneration, 1951

B. CONSTITUTION

4. Law No. 96-06 of 18 January 1996 to amend the Constitution of 2 June 1972

C. CODES

5. Civil Code
6. Commercial Code
7. Criminal Code (Law No. 65-LF-24 of 12 November 1965 and Law No. 67-LF-1 of 12 June 1967)
8. Labour Code (Law No. 92/007 of 14 August 1992)
9. Cameroonian Nationality Code (Law No. 68-LF-3 of 11 June 1968)

D. LAWS

10. Law No. 69/LF/3 of 14 June 1969 regulating the use of names, first names and pseudonyms
11. Law No. 90/56 of 19 December 1990 on political parties
12. Law No. 90/53 of 19 December 1990 establishing freedom of association
13. Law No. 90/062 of 19 December 1990 granting a special exemption for health care units
14. Law No. 92/006 of 14 August 1992 on cooperative societies and joint initiative groups
15. Law No. 93/015 of 22 December 1993 on economic interest groups
16. Law No. 96/03 of 4 January 1996 establishing a framework law in the field

17. Law No. 98/004 of 14 April 1998 on educational guidance
18. Law No. 98/006 of 14 April 1998 regulating tourism

E. ORDINANCES

19. Ordinance No. 59/66 of 28 November 1959 instituting Cameroonian nationality
20. Ordinance No. 73/17 of 22 May 1973 concerning the organization of social security
21. Ordinance No. 81/02 of 29 June 1981 concerning the organization of civil status and various provisions relating to personal status

F. DECREES

22. Decree No. 84/95 of 26 March 1984 concerning the organization of the Ministry of Women's Affairs
23. Decree No. 84/324 of 28 May 1984 establishing the Consultative Committee for the Advancement of Women
24. Decree No. 88/993 of 15 July 1988 ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
25. Decree No. 88/1281 of 21 September 1988 concerning the organization of the Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs
26. Decree No. 94/199 of 7 October 1994 establishing the Civil Service Regulations
27. Decree No. 95/013 of 7 February 1995 concerning the organization of the basic health services in health districts
28. Decree No. 95/040 of 7 March 1995 concerning the organization of the Ministry of Public Health
29. Decree No. 95/100 of 9 June 1995 establishing the Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs
30. Decree No. 95/205 of 7 December 1995 concerning the organization of the Government

G. ORDER

31. Order No. 84/MTPS/IMT of 24 November 1984 establishing the conditions of hygiene and safety in the workplace

H. CIRCULAR LETTER

32. Circular Letter No. 10/A/562/MINEDUC/ESG/SAP of 10 January 1980 on the readmission of pupils suspended following a case of pregnancy

I. OTHER SOURCES