

**CAMEROON NON GOVERNMENTAL  
ORGANIZATIONS SHADOW REPORT TO CEDAW:**

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE  
CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF  
ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION  
AGAINST WOMEN**

***Compiled by:***

- ***WIRA (Women In Research And Action)***
- ***NEPED (Network for Peace and Development)***
- ***FIDA Cameroon (International Federation of Women Lawyers)***
- ***ACAFEJ (Association Camerounaise des femmes Juristes)***

***Coordinated by Women In Research And Action (WIRA)  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENT</b> .....	4
<b>PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS</b> .....	5-6
<b>LIST OF ACRONYMS</b> .....	7-8
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	9-12
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	13-16
<b>ANALYSIS OF CAMEROON'S COMBINED REPORT BY ARTICLES</b>	17
<b>ARTICLE 1: DEFINITION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN</b>	
17	
1.1 OVERVIEW .....	17
1.2 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	18
1.3 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	18
<b>ARTICLE 2: OBLIGATION OF THE STATE TO ELIMINATE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN TO IMPLEMENT PRINCIPLES OF EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN</b> .....	18
2.1 OVERVIEW .....	18
2.2 IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF CONCLUDING COMMENTS .....	19
2.3 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	19
2.4 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	20
<b>ARTICLE 3: THE DEVELOPMENT AND ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN</b> .....	20
3.1 OVERVIEW .....	20
3.2 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	20
3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	21
<b>ARTICLE 4: SPECIAL MEASURES FOR ACCELERATION OF EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN</b> .....	22
4.1 OVERVIEW .....	22
4.2 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	22
4.3 IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF CONCLUDING COMMENTS .....	23
4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	23
<b>ARTICLE 5: GENDER ROLES AND STEREOTYPING</b> .....	23
5.1 OVERVIEW .....	23
5.2 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	23
5.3 IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF THE CONCLUDING COMMENTS .....	24
5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	24
<b>ARTICLE 6: TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND EXPLOITATION OF PROSTITUTION OF WOMEN</b> .....	25
6.1 OVERVIEW .....	25
6.2 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	25
6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	25
<b>ARTICLE 7: WOMEN IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE</b> .....	26

7.1 OVERVIEW .....	26
7.2 IMPLEMENTAION STATUS OF CEDAW .....	27
7.4 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	28
7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	30
<b>ARTICLE 8: INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION .....</b>	<b>31</b>
8.1 OVERVIEW .....	31
8.2 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	31
8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	32
<b>ARTICLE 9: NATIONALITY .....</b>	<b>32</b>
9.1 OVERVIEW .....	32
9.2 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	32
9.3 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	33
<b>ARTICLE 10: EDUCATION .....</b>	<b>33</b>
10.1 OVERVIEW .....	33
10.2 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	34
10.3 IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF CONCLUDING COMMENTS .....	34
10.4 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	35
<b>ARTICLE 11: EMPLOYMENT .....</b>	<b>36</b>
11.1 OVERVIEW .....	36
11.2 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	36
11.3 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	36
<b>ARTICLE 12: EQUALITY IN ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE .....</b>	<b>37</b>
12.1 OVERVIEW .....	37
12.2 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	37
12.3 IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF CONCLUDING COMMENTS .....	37
12.4 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	39
<b>ARTICLE 13: SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS .....</b>	<b>39</b>
13.1 OVERVIEW .....	39
13.2 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	40
13.3 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	40
<b>ARTICLE 14: RURAL WOMAN .....</b>	<b>41</b>
14.1 OVERVIEW .....	41
14.2 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	41
14.3 IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF CONCLUDING COMMENTS .....	44
14.4 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	44
<b>ARTICLE 15: EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW IN CIVIL MATTERS .....</b>	<b>45</b>
15.1 OVERVIEW .....	45
15.2 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	45
15.3 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	46
<b>ARTICLE 16: EQUALITY IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LAW .....</b>	<b>46</b>
16.1 OVERVIEW .....	46
16.2 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN .....	46
16.3 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	47
<b>VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>49</b>

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## **PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS**

- Women In Research and Action (WIRA)
- International Federation of Female Lawyers (FIDA)
- Association Camerounaise des Femmes Juristes (ACAFEJ)
- Network for Peace and Development (NEPED)
- Association de Lutte Contre les Violences faites aux Femmes (ALVF)
- Gender Lenses (GL)
- FESADE
- More Women in Politics (MWP)
- CEFEPROD
- CAWOLED
- Kumba Association of Women Groups (KAWG)
- Women on The Front Line
- IEDEA
- Réseau des Associations oeuvrant Contre les Violences faites aux Femmes (RACVFF)
- CSCCD
- IAC
- CWMNET
- FAWECAM
- Association of Commonwealth Ladies in Gender and Development (ACOLAGID)
- IFCD
- Human Rights Focus (HRF)
- Association Camerounaise des Femmes Ingénieurs en Agriculture (ACAFIA)
- Women in Alternative Action (WAA)
- Alternative to Violence on Women (AVW)
- Centre for Human Rights and Peace Advocacy (CHRAPA)
- Women in Action against Gender Based Violence (WA Cameroon)
- Ecumenical Service for Peace
- Association of South West Women development Organisation
- Global Education and Environmental Development (GEED Foundation)
- Cameroon Gender and Development Network (CAMGADNET)
- Mbororo Cultural and Development Association (MBOSCUDA)
- Female Education in Mathematics and Science in Africa (FEMSA)
- Community Initiative for Sustainable Development (COMINSUD)
- Gender Parity and Development Organisation (GEPDOR)
- Cercle d'Information et de Vulgarisation des Instruments Nationaux et Internationaux des Droits de Personne (CIVINIDP)
- Centre For Women's Mobilisation
- Ecumenical Missions for peace and Development

- DEHERI Monitor
- Cameroon Teachers' Trade Union
- International Media Consultants Services
- Nkoni Women's Association
- Trauma Center
- Organisation of Associations for Women's Empowerment in Cameroon  
OAEWCA)
- SOS Women Cameroon

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSRO	Civil Status Registration Ordinance
CPDM	Cameroon People's Democratic Movement
EDS 111-	Direction Nationale du Deuxième Recensement Général de la Population et de L'habitat et Macro International Inc, Enquête Démographique et de Santé-Cameroun (EDS/DHS, 1991)[hereinafter called EDS Cameroun 1991].
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
HIV	Human Immune Deficiency Virus
IRIC	Institute for International Relations in Cameroon
MINADER	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MINPROFF	Ministry of the Promotion of the Woman and the Family
NCHRF	National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms
NEO	National Elections Observatory
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPARV	National Program for Agricultural Research & Vulgarisation
NSIF	National Social Insurance Fund
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategic Plan
PTA	Parent Teachers' Association

PREPAFEN	Project Poverty Reduction and Action on Behalf of Women in the Far North Province
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund For Women
VAW	Violence Against Women

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The government of Cameroon ratified CEDAW on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1994 without reservations. Ratification obligates the state party to utilise all measures at its disposal to ensure the effective implementation of CEDAW and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women as soon as possible.

To ensure the effective implementation of CEDAW in Cameroon, there is the essential necessity for the state to domesticate it so that provisions of this instrument are introduced into national laws to facilitate enforcement.

This shadow report has been prepared in a bid to supplement the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> combined periodic reports of the government of Cameroon (hereafter state report) to the CEDAW Committee. It is representative of the perspective of some civil society organisations in Cameroon as far as government's implementation of CEDAW is concerned. As a final product of several civil society organisations' contributions, it is hoped that this attempt will assist the Committee to have a more profound view of the level of implementation of CEDAW in Cameroon in order to constructively engage the government and other stakeholders towards a better implementation of CEDAW.

A bird's eye view of the state's report gives the impression that the country has greatly advanced as far as implementation of CEDAW is concerned. While this is true to an extent this shadow report attempts to reveal not only the gaps and challenges in government's efforts at implementation, but also other realities in the country.

The report is presented according to the articles of CEDAW and with respect to each article, there is an effort to:

- 1- Briefly indicate what the state's report states.
- 2- Identify critical areas of concern which needs urgent attention.
- 3- Comment on the level of the implementation of the CEDAW Committee's Concluding Comments on the government of Cameroon's initial report to the CEDAW Committee of 2000 (Concluding Comments).
- 4- Propose recommendations to improve on the level of implementation of CEDAW in Cameroon.

Lastly, VAW is presented at the end of this report because being transversal; it affects women adversely and hampers the attainment of equality in Cameroon. It needs also to be highlighted because as stated in the official report, the draft bill on the Punishment and Prevention of Gender Based Violence (hereafter draft bill on Gender Based Violence) is pending and its eventual adoption will go a long way in advancing the implementation of CEDAW in Cameroon thus combating discrimination and improving the status of women in the country.

### **Article 1: Definition of discrimination against women**

In Cameroon, there is no legal definition of discrimination as provided for in CEDAW and although there is a draft bill on Gender Based Violence in which the definition of discrimination is found, it remains a draft bill and as such, it is not applicable until it is enacted into law. CEDAW and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights are yet to be incorporated into national law; consequently its implementation is weak.

### **Article 2: Obligation of the state to eliminate discrimination against women**

A plethora of discriminatory laws still exists and adequate measures have not yet been taken to introduce anti-discriminatory laws.

### **Articles 3-4: Measures for ensuring the full advancement of women and temporary special measures**

The government has tried to create structures like the Ministry for Women's Empowerment and the Family, Women's Observatory, Women's Empowerment Centres and has provided scholarships for girls. These structures do not receive adequate resources to ensure optimal functioning. There are no mechanisms put in place to ensure implementation of the measures that these institutions are responsible for promoting.

### **Article 5: Gender roles and stereotypes**

Old age cultural practices, customs and traditions continue to exist and constitute a hindrance to efforts of government and civil society organisations to improve the status of women in all areas. VAW is rampant with no instruments in place for redress.

### **Article 6: Trafficking in women and exploitation for prostitution**

Although Cameroon has ratified various sub-regional, regional and international instruments to combat trafficking and exploitation, trafficking, prostitution and sexual exploitation continue to be on the rise. Cameroon is not only a place of transit for traffic of infants but has also become a source and destination for children and victims of trafficking.

### **Article 7: women in political & public life**

In Cameroon, women are not legally excluded from participating in politics. However, the reality is that, few women are found in the top ranks of political parties.

Municipal elections are organised following a list system. It has been observed that women are often found at the bottom of the list. The consequence is that if a political party does not have an absolute majority during elections and the seats of that municipality have to be shared with other political parties, counsellors are chosen from the top of party lists. Candidate at the bottom of such party lists are left out. Women's representation in elective and decision making positions remains very weak.

Female members of political parties are also involved in singing, dancing and fanfare during political events, while more men are debating political issues.

### **Article 8: Representation at international level**

In Cameroon, the principle of non-discrimination is upheld. Women have the same rights and opportunities to represent the government at the international level. However, the small percentage of women representing Cameroon internationally is a reflection of the few women who enter into the institute of international relations and other institutions for training of diplomats.

### **Article 9: Women and nationality**

Nationality in Cameroon is governed by law. At a glance, the law gives the impression of equality between men and women in matters of attribution, change, loss or conservation of nationality. In reality while a foreign woman who marries a Cameroonian man can upon her express

consent demand to acquire Cameroonian nationality at the time of the the celebration of the marriage.

### **Article 10: Education**

In Cameroon, the government has made basic education free and compulsory. Primary schools have been implanted in almost all villages. Public secondary schools have been opened in almost all sub-divisions where students pay minimal fees upon admission. However, primary schools suffer a lack of trained teachers in spite of recent efforts by government to recruit contract teachers. In spite of the above, the level of scholarisation of the girl child is less than that of the boy partly due to socio-cultural issues.

### **Article 11: Employment**

Equality between men and women as regards employment is guaranteed by the constitution, the general civil service regulations and the labour code. However, there are more men in the formal sector than women. Women are more present in the informal sector which is not yet much organised.

### **Article 12: Women and health care**

In the area of health, the law does not discriminate between men and women as far as access to health care in hospitals are concerned. Special emphasis has been placed on reproductive health issues, family planning and the fight against HIV/AIDS. The government takes care of pregnant women who are infected with the virus. However, access to health services is more feasible in the urban centres than the rural areas. Even more serious is the fact that health structures especially in the rural areas lack trained personnel. Despite all what government has done to ameliorate the health situation, women's health remains more vulnerable than that of men.

### **Article 13: Social and Economic rights**

The law does not discriminate against women as far as family benefits are concerned. However, the law does not give the women the right to exercise any economic activity as this can depend on the whims and caprices of the husband. Although women are free to take part in sporting activities, patriarchal attitudes about gender roles and

responsibilities limit the woman to house work and farming round the clock.

#### **Article 14: The rural woman**

The majority of women in Cameroon live in rural areas. They play an important role in development of rural areas especially in the area of food security. However, they lack access to basic social facilities. Government efforts to improve on the living conditions of the rural women are not sustainable due to lack of commitment by implementation mechanisms.

#### **Article 16: Equality in marriage and family**

Cameroon is a patriarchal society in which customs and traditions thrive and are promoted in spite of existing modern laws, which protect women. In marriage, the woman is subordinate to the man; she is seen as property due to the bride price paid by the husband. Furthermore, some of these laws are discriminatory. While boys marry at 18 years, girls marry at 15 years. Polygamy is a legal form of marriage. The inequality which reigns in marriages and families has created a fertile ground for violence against women particularly domestic violence.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) also known as the Bill of Rights for Women is a landmark Convention for the promotion and protection of women's human rights the world over.

The Cameroon government became a party to CEDAW by its ratification without reservation on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of August 1994. Ratification bestows on the government the obligation to promote and protect the rights of women as well as denoting its will to guarantee women the full enjoyment of their rights. It also requires the government to meet its obligation of reporting by submitting periodic reports on the level or degree of implementation of CEDAW. Cameroon submitted its initial report in June 2000 and the current report submitted is the state report. This shadow report seeks to supplement the state report in order to contribute to the amelioration of the unequal status of Cameroonian women.

After the initial report, the Government of Cameroon has taken some measures to ameliorate the unequal status of women. The question is whether these measures and the implementation of such laws and regulations are sufficient to contribute towards the advancement of women. Are Cameroonian women enjoying these rights free from discrimination?

# **ANALYSIS OF CAMEROON'S COMBINED SECOND AND THIRD PERIODIC REPORTS BY ARTICLES**

## **Introduction**

The state report has extensively stated international and national instruments, regulations and policies which have been adopted by the state since the presentation of its initial report. Consequently, this report will not restate these measures but will endeavour to examine each article by:

- Commenting on the official report and by giving an overview of the situation,
- Identifying critical areas of concern,
- Commenting on the implementation status of the Concluding Comments of the CEDAW Committee,
- And by finally making recommendations to help build strategies for a better implementation of CEDAW in Cameroon.

## **Article 1: Definition of Discrimination Against Women**

### **1.1 Overview**

Although the government report states that Cameroon's body of laws including the Constitution embodies the principle of equality between men and women, there is no legal definition of discrimination provided for by any law. The embodiment of the principle of equality in the preamble of the 1996 Constitution<sup>1</sup> as amended in April 2008 is not sufficient enough to meet with the standards required by CEDAW, because discriminatory laws and practices still prevail.

CEDAW is not yet incorporated into national laws. Article 45 of the Constitution states that duly approved or ratified treaties and International Agreements shall, following their promulgation, override national laws. This statement does not confer any rights or redress. Enforcement is therefore weak, since criminal sanctions have to be enacted into law before becoming applicable.

The ratification of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW (OP-CEDAW) in 2005, in consonance with Concluding Comment No.64 has been highly applauded. However, the incorporation of CEDAW into law as

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<sup>1</sup> Law n° 96-06 of January 18, to amend the Constitution of 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1972

mentioned in the state report is still being awaited. It is our hope that, the proposed law will go a long way to alleviate discrimination as required by CEDAW.

Ratification of CEDAW and OP-CEDAW is not in itself sufficient to change behaviours and attitudes which have become entrenched over centuries particularly when allowance is made for the co-existence of written and customary laws within the Cameroonian legal system.

## **1.2 Critical Areas of Concern**

- Most discriminatory laws that were in place before the 2000 initial report of the Cameroon to the CEDAW Committee are still in existence.
- The government of Cameroon has been slow in enacting into law an appropriate definition of discrimination. The draft law on Gender Based Violence which carries the definition of discrimination is not yet a law unless it is enacted.

## **1.3 Recommendations**

- The definition of discrimination as provided in CEDAW should be incorporated into the draft law on Gender Based Violence and promulgated into law as a matter of urgency (The CEDAW Committee recommended that the government address violence against Cameroonian women in Concluding Comments 49 & 50).
- All laws that are discriminatory against women should be repealed.

## **Article 2: Obligation of the State to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women and to Implement Principles of Equality between Men and Women.**

### **2.1 Overview**

In explaining the actions it had taken with regard to implementing Article 2, the state report refers to answers given in the report under article one. This, we think is not sufficient as the reality of the issues must be addressed. There is a plethora of discriminatory laws and adequate measures have not yet been taken to introduce anti-discriminatory legislation or to amend existing discriminatory aspects in personal and civil law. Cameroon has not yet developed legal provisions for the

incorporation of the principles and provisions of CEDAW into domestic application.

However we applauded the efforts of the Cameroon Supreme Court in fighting discrimination against women's inheritance rights. Worthy of note is the landmark case of Chibikom Peter Fru and 4 others v Zamcho Florence Lum<sup>2</sup> where the Supreme Court decided that a married daughter should administer and inherit her deceased father's estate. The Supreme Court held that any custom which denied a woman property or inheritance right simply because she was a woman was repugnant to natural justice and discriminatory.

## **2.2 Implementation Status of Concluding Comments**

The CEDAW Committee in Concluding Comment No. 46 recommended that the state should undertake a comprehensive reform of legislation as a matter of URGENCY in order to promote and protect equality and human rights for women. It also recommended the introduction of effective legal remedies and a review and revision of customary laws that infringe on the human rights of women.

The government always refers to two draft bills namely the Family Code and the law on Gender Based Violence. But these draft bills still need to be adopted and it is generally believed by all and sundry that this process is very slow.

## **2.3 Critical Areas of Concern**

There is a plethora of discriminatory laws. Few examples are worthy of note include:

- Section 361 of the Penal Code whereby, the onus of proof for the offence of adultery is higher for the woman than for the man. While an isolated act of sexual intercourse by a married woman is sufficient to constitute adultery, the man can only be seen to commit adultery either when it is done in his matrimonial home or it is established as habitual acts elsewhere. The word 'habitual' is subjective and this can give rise to varied interpretations. This is double standards and therefore discriminatory.

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<sup>2</sup> Supreme Court Judgment n° 14/L of 4<sup>th</sup> February 1993

- Section 49 of the Civil Status Registration Ordinance (CSRO) includes polygamy as a form of marriage. It is favourable to men and minimises the value of women.
- Section 74(2) of the CSRO gives the husband the right to object to his wife exercising a trade of her own except where she can prove that it is for the interest of the family. This same right is not accorded to the wife.
- Article 77 (2) of the CSRO<sup>3</sup> requires a widow to observe a period of widowhood of 180 days from the date her husband died before contracting another valid marriage. It does not provide similar requirements to the widower who may be free to marry as soon as he wishes.
- Article 215 of the Civil Code gives the husband the reserved right to decide on the family home. He is the head of the family as per section 213 of the same Code.

Steps towards repealing these discriminatory laws need to be concretised. The draft laws on Gender Based Violence and the Family Code still have to see the light of day. These draft laws have been on the table for too long and due to complete silence on the issue one cannot help but wonder why the process seems to have lost momentum.

## **2.4 Recommendations**

- CEDAW should be domesticated as a matter of priority.
- All discriminatory laws should be repealed.
- The Family Code and the draft law on Gender Based Violence should be promulgated into law as a matter of urgency.
- Extensive public awareness on national and international legal instruments should be carried out to enable the population particularly women to know their provisions and better assert their rights.

### **Article 3: The Development and Advancement of Women**

#### **3.1 Overview**

It is the responsibility of the government to promote the rights of women and make sure they advance in all spheres of their lives. The government of Cameroon has indicated its goodwill by taking political, institutional, and legislative measures and putting relevant programmes in place.

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<sup>3</sup> Civil Status Registration Ordinance 1981

The government's response to Concluding Comment No. 52 particularly concerns PRSP plan of action. We salute their effort in having all these programmes but they have not been implemented and the government has failed to take actions that produce tangible impact on the lives of women.

### **3.2 Critical Areas of Concern**

- Government's initiative in establishing the above mentioned institutions and translating policies into action do not match the desired level of advancement.
- In reference to the government's response in Chapter 3 Section 373 of the PRSP devoted to the advancement of women by way of government initiative; namely the four areas of focus page 18-19 are not backed by visible measures probably due to lack of adequate resources and lack of dissemination of information, sensitization and public education campaigns. Even though the government has the good will to advance women's status, some structures put in place are weak and therefore not effective. Adequate resources are not budgeted for them to attain their goals and objectives.
  - In 2005 the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family which is in charge of the advancement of women was allocated a budget of 3.244.800.000CFA francs representing only 0.18 of the countries budget of 1,721,000,000,000,CFA francs.<sup>4</sup>
  - In 2006, of a budget of 1861,000,000,000 only 398300000 was allocated to the same ministry representing 0.2% of the total budget.<sup>5</sup>Women's empowerment and advancement will be more of a reality when adequate resources will be allocated for the purpose.
- There is a law on Legal Aid.<sup>6</sup> However, getting access to Legal Aid is cumbersome. It requires the production of documents, which are expensive as well as time consuming to compile especially for poor women. Although women in need seek assistance from women's groups and other civil society organisations which provide legal aid services and shelters, the state needs to do more to empower women to have access to positive existing laws.

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<sup>4</sup> Dynamique Citoyenne, Budget Monitoring Training Manual, pp 17-18

<sup>5</sup> Dynamique Citoyenne, Budget Monitoring Training Manual, pp 24-25

<sup>6</sup> Decree n° 76/521of 9/11 1976

- Gender budgeting initiatives are still to find firm ground in Cameroon.

The Committee's recommendations especially Concluding Comment no. 48 has not been adhered to due to lack of allocation of adequate resources.

### **3.3 Recommendations**

- Government should allocate sufficient resources for targeted programmes in order to promote the advancement of women.
- Government has to take steps towards activating already created structures in order to achieve full advancement of women.
- The law on Legal Aid should be reformed in order to simplify access to Legal Aid Services.
- Gender budget initiatives need to be developed in all sectors in order to achieve equitable distribution of resources.
- Gender disaggregated data needs to be maintained by all ministries and governments departments.
- In response to Concluding Comment no. 52, the government's intended action indicated, needs to be translated to concrete action.
- Gender should be mainstreamed in laws and policies.

## **Article 4: Special Measures for Acceleration of Equality between Men and Women**

### **4.1 Overview**

Governments effort in putting in place special measures designed to accelerate equality between men and women in the educational and medical sectors are highly commended. They include setting aside 40% of scholarships for girls, and a "child friendly", "special girl friendly school project" designed to give particular encouragement to girls to attend school. There are also special programmes on the campaign against HIV/AIDS (e.g. the programme for the prevention of transmission of HIV/AIDS from mother to child).

### **4.2 Critical Areas of Concern**

- The efforts made by the government to accelerate equality between men and women are inadequate. Even those that exist benefit only a limited number of women. Statistics reveal that the maternal

mortality rate has increased from 430 in 1998 to 669 deaths per 100.000 births.<sup>7</sup>

- There is also the lack of monitoring mechanisms for implementing these measures. There are neither adequate policies nor programmes aimed at accelerating the de facto equality of women.
- Although measures have been taken in the field of education (40% of scholarship for girls, child friendly-girl friendly school) and in the area of HIV/AIDS, these measures are more formal than substantial.
- Adequate special measures have not been taken in the political sphere. Women have difficulties in competing effectively with men. Even the Beijing Platform of Action quota of 30% is yet to be a reality.

### **Implementation Status of Concluding Comments**

The government has adopted programmes to implement Concluding Comment no. 58 concerning the promotion of female access to basic and secondary education but programmes initiated need to be closely monitored and adult female literacy needs more attention.

#### **4.4 Recommendations**

- The government should adopt special temporary measures for the advancement of women as well as establishing monitoring mechanisms for effective implementation of programmes.
- The government should introduce and implement the 30% quota<sup>8</sup> system for elective positions and appointments at decision making positions.
- More resources should be made available towards women's issues to ensure women's advancement.

### **Article 5: Gender Roles and Stereotypes.**

#### **5.1 Overview**

The first sentence in the state report is to the effect that age-old cultural practices, customs and traditions continue to be a hindrance to actions pursued by public authorities in order to improve the status of women in all areas. The report at pp. 21-23 identifies behaviour, prejudices and

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<sup>7</sup> EDS 111,2004

<sup>8</sup> Beijing Platform of Action

attitudes that discriminate against women as well as the obstacles to the elimination of these stereotypes and prejudices.

The report has addressed many issues but societal awareness of these efforts and the implementation of policies to eradicate these practices and stereotypes need to be reinforced especially in rural areas where these practices are rife.

## **5.2 Critical Areas of Concern**

- The methods of socialisation and cultural practice are highly skewed in favour of men. For example a widow who refuses to practice widowhood rites is often considered as being responsible of her husband's death whereas the reverse is not true for a widower. This practice of widowhood rites is a way of life in spite of the provisions of Art. 77(2) of the Civil Status Registration Ordinance which stipulates that, "in the event of death of the husband his heirs shall have no rights over the widow, nor over her freedom or the share of property belonging to her ..."
- The man as the head of the family by law and custom is master over his wife.
- The execution of domestic chores and childcare is the exclusive responsibility of the woman.
- It is the duty for a wife to work hard and bring her proceeds to her husband to use as he deems fit.
- Community adhere to the cultural norm that only sons ought to inherit from parents by denying daughters inheritance rights.
- Girls are sex objects as soon as they start reaching the age of puberty. This stereotyped perception of girls is a reason for some mothers to practice breast ironing on their daughters.
- Women in the Cameroonian society are portrayed as frail, feeble-minded and with limited reasoning faculties, a notion handed down from generations to generations, making her an object of suppression by fathers, brothers and sons.

## **5.2 Implementation Status of the Concluding Comments**

The Committee's Concluding Comment no. 54 (which directed the government to adopt legislation to prohibit discriminatory cultural practices and to carry out public awareness campaigns to change stereotypes about the roles of men and women) has not been sufficiently carried out as public awareness, information and training programmes

targeting community leaders, women and general public have not been systematic in order to attain the required results. Community leaders and tribal chiefs are the custodians of our culture and traditions. There is therefore the need to constructively engage them in the process. It is clear that the problem is fundamental and huge.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

- The government needs to implement Concluding Comment no. 54 by carrying out systematic and extensive public awareness and training programmes targeting all stakeholders in order to change the attitude of the society towards women and also change the perception of women towards themselves.
- The government has to adopt policies to appoint qualified women to all positions without discrimination.
- Encourage girls to venture into male dominated occupations.
- Review all laws in order to identify and amend all discriminatory laws.
- Implement policies seeking to empower women economically.
- Institute a national dialogue on stereotypes as is the case for other broad based national problems (e.g. HIV and AIDS and democracy).

## **Article 6: Trafficking of women and Exploitation of Prostitution of Women**

### **6.1 Overview**

Trafficking, prostitution and sexual exploitation of women are gaining ground in recent years. This is due to poverty that continues to increase and the new wave of information technology particularly the internet which has become the conduit for pornography. Women and girls who are vulnerable have become targets for prostitution and trafficking nationally and internationally leading to all forms of abuses. Cameroon is not only a transit for traffic of infants but has also become a source and destination of children, who are victims of trafficking.

### **6.2 Critical Areas of Concern**

The state's report shows that the government has ratified various sub regional, regional and international instruments to combat trafficking and exploitation of persons including the Convention Against Trans-National

Organised Crime with its three protocols, one of which deals with women and children. It is however important to note that the ratification of these instruments and the enactment of law No 2005/015 of December 2005 Against Trafficking in Women and Children does not suffice to suppress trafficking and exploitation of prostitution of women. It is worth noting that most of the steps taken as mentioned in the state's report pertain to children. It is therefore clear that, adequate measures to combat trafficking and prostitution which concerns mostly women needs to be addressed by the state. These include poverty reduction, creation of employment opportunities access to adequate education and health care.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

- Domesticate and apply all ratified regional and international instruments indicated in the state's report.
- The government needs to sensitise and educate women and girls on career options, provide sustainable capacity building for women and provide poverty alleviation measures including employment in order that prostitution should not be considered as the only option.
- Punish perpetrators and facilitators who are involved in the traffic of women and children for the sex industry and other forms of exploitation.
- Develop a specialised corps on trafficking of children and women within the forces of law and order.
- Provide structures for rehabilitation and reintegration of victims.
- Provide effective monitoring of our porous borders to check the trafficking of persons.

## **Article 7: Women in Political and Public Life**

### **7.1 Overview**

Women as well as men can freely exercise their civic rights through the ballot box. This right to vote is not dependent on any property or literacy requirement. Therefore women are not excluded from this part of political participation. They are not often found in the top ranks of political parties but are at the bottom where they are involved in singing, dancing and fanfare during political events, while more men are debating political issues. Civil society organisations have contributed in mobilising women to compete for positions within political parties. Some NGOs, carried out extensive and comprehensive sensitisation campaigns, educating women on the importance of exercising their civic rights and take up leadership positions in their various political parties.

Women are eligible to contest elections, a right enshrined in the Constitution, but in practice it is an up hill task for women because in

addition to the usual obstacles to women's political participation, political parties have to endorse candidates for elections. The electoral law does not give room for independent candidates, thereby constituting a hindrance for women who may be capable to run as independent candidates.

Most political parties do not have any laws instituted in their statutes that protect the interest of female candidates especially that of prescribed quota representation for women as advocated by many.

During the 2007 legislative and municipal elections the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) however, tried through a circular letter to ensure the endorsement of one female candidate where there were three contesting seats.<sup>9</sup> Although this move was highly appreciated by women, it was insufficient because it was not strictly implemented throughout the national territory by the party. On the other hand, the instructions did not cover municipal elections.

However, during the last twin legislative and parliamentary elections of July 2007, there was an increase in women's participation as well as a slight increase in positions held by women.

The political arena does not favour the woman because of her limited financial resources. The effort of the Ministry of the Promotion of the Woman and Family is lauded in making provisions for financial assistance to qualified female candidates during the 2007 legislative elections.

Though commendable, the fact that the support was only made on the eve of the elections did not yield expected results.

It can be noted that of the 180 members of Parliament, only 22 are women making a 12.2% aggregate. The financial assistance equally failed in another aspect because consideration was not accorded to local female councillors who also needed it.

The general trend shows that a majority of women endorsed as candidates for elections have often been alternate rather than substantive candidates (i.e. 19 female parliamentarians and 33 alternates in the 2002 against 161 males). Substantive candidates are the real candidates while alternate candidates take the place of the substantive candidate only in case of

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<sup>9</sup> CPDM central committee ref. note for 2007 legislative/municipal elections

vacancy. In the 2007 parliamentary elections, the 22 women elected were all alternate members. During the 2002 municipal elections, of the 9963 candidates, only 1302 were women making a 13.1% of the 337 elected mayors, only 10 are women constituting 2.9%. This is relatively low.

## **7.2 Critical Areas of Concern**

- The low trend of women's participation also stems from the fact that political parties do not have any veritable policy to promote equality in their parties.
- Women in political parties are usually mobilised for trivialities like dancing, singing and fanfare, while serious political decisions and activities subtly become the preserve of men. This may go a long way to explain why in a party like the CPDM, in which the women's wing is found all over the national territory surprisingly had no female counsellor in 18 councils out of 337 councils during the 2002 municipal elections.
- Participation of women in public life through appointments to senior positions of responsibility has gradually improved over the years in Cameroon. It is left at the discretion of the head of State to appoint women to occupy higher positions.
- No woman has ever been appointed as Governor or Senior Divisional Officer since the country's independence. The appointment of 2 women in the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation as sub prefects is innovative but rather timid. There are 270 sub prefects in the country and a good number of women are qualified civil administrators worthy of being appointed. Further to that, of the 54 District Heads, none is a woman. This scenario makes it clear in the minds of most Cameroonians that particular jobs are the exclusive reserve of a particular sex. Hence young Cameroonians grow with that notion and instinctively choose their lanes as such.
- There has been a considerable increase in the number of female graduates from the International Relations Institute (IRIC) in recent years but the government seems to be reluctant to appoint female ambassadors. Presently, there is no female ambassador after the passing away of the only female Ambassador ever appointed.
- The number of women recommended by the state to represent Cameroon abroad is relatively low as compared to men i.e. only one woman serves as a Commissioner for Trade in the African Union and one is a Judge of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania.

### **7.3 Implementation Status of CEDAW**

In response to the Committee's Concluding Comments nos. 55 and 56, in view to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions, the government of Cameroon has carried out a number of measures. Two women have been appointed as administrators in two Sub Divisions out of a total of 337 as of 2007. This gives an insignificant value of 0.8902%. Furthermore, the government has made several efforts to involve women in the organisational level of elections. Women are appointed at all levels of the National Elections Observatory (NEO). However, this representation is still insignificant compared to the number of men.

#### **Some Statistics on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life**

Number of Female Parliamentarians from 1973 to present date:

Legislative Year	No. of Parliamentarians	Number of Women	Percentage of Female Parliamentarians
1973-1978	120	7	5.85%
1978-1983	120	12	10%
1983-1988	120	17	14.25%
1988-1992	180	26	14.25%
1992-1997	180	23	12.8%
1997-2002	180	10	5.65%
2002-2007	180	19	10.6%
2007-2012	180	22	12.2%

#### ***MINPROFF and MINTAD Reports 2004-2007***

#### **Women Elected By Province as Councillors**

Province	Total Councillors	Number of women	Percentage of Women Councillors
Adamaoua	503	46	9.1%

Centre	1834	344	18.8%
East	848	102	12%
Extreme North	1475	76	5.2%
Littoral	917	142	15.5%
North	647	48	7.4%
North West	1034	108	10.4%
West	1225	184	15%
South	665	105	15.8%
South- West	815	147	18%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>9963</b>	<b>1302</b>	<b>13.1%</b>

### Elected Mayors By Sex And Province

Province	Adamaoua	Centre	Extreme North	Littoral	North	North West	West	South	SW	East
Mayors	17	68	45	31	19	32	41	25	27	32
Men	17	64	45	30	19	32	41	22	26	31
Women	-	4	-	1	-	-	-	3	1	1

### Women in Selected Senior Posts

Post	Number of Women
Minister	5
Vice Minister	1
S. G. in Ministry or University	6
University Rector	1
University Vice Rector	2
D.G. of State Companies	0
Plenipotentiary Minister	5
State representatives in International Institutions	2
Sub Divisional Officer	3
Senior Traditional Rulers	2
Chief Superintendents of Police	3
Senior Officers in the Armed Forces	3

Senior Officers in Penitentiary Administration	1
National Assembly Members	22
Alternate Members	39
Mayors	10
Deputy Mayors	128

***MINPROFF AND MINAD STATISTICS OF 2004 AND 2007 RESPECTIVELY***

Women still occupy limited places in the judiciary as can be seen clearly in this chart.

<b>Profession</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Total</b>
Magistrates	642	184	826
Lawyers	1072	280	1352
Sheriff/Bailiffs	257	62	319
Notary Publics	26	16	42

**7.5 Recommendations**

- The government should focus on implementing Concluding Comment no. 56 together with ensuring that the 30% quota as provided for by the Beijing Platform for Action is attained.
- The government should encourage political parties to promote gender equality.
- Efforts to encourage and sensitise female candidates for electoral office should begin early enough and information on any support programme should be fully disseminated to ensure the expected results.
- The government should work more and more in partnership with NGOs and donor agencies in sensitisation campaigns to improve women's political participation.
- Qualified women should equally be appointed as men into top administrative positions.
- The state should step up efforts to recommend more Cameroonian women to senior positions in international institutions and organisations.

- The state should encourage women to participate in the public life of the country.

## **Article 8: International Representation and Participation.**

### **8.1 Overview**

In Cameroon, the principle of non-discrimination is upheld. It therefore means that women have the same rights and opportunities to represent the government at international levels. At the level of training, the Institute of International Relations (IRIC) is open to all qualified persons without any distinction as to sex. Statistics show a steady increase in the number of women admitted into this institution although their numbers are still relatively low.

### **8.2 Critical Areas of Concern**

The paucity in the number of women trained is reflected in the number of them representing the country at the international level. At the regional level, we have women occupying the post of judge at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and another serving as Commissioner for Trade and Industry in the African Union.

The chart below illustrates the challenging disparity between men and women in Cameroon's diplomatic service.

<b>Position</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Ambassador	20	0	0%
Consuls	11	1	0.1%
1 <sup>st</sup> Consul	15	1	6.2%
Consul General	05	0	0%
1 <sup>st</sup> Secretary	40	07	2.8%

The total percentage of women in diplomatic mission is 13.1%. The state therefore has to remain faithful to its engagement in according equal chances to women as well as men in their nominations and appointments at international level.

### **8.3 Recommendations**

- The government should encourage women to apply for jobs at the international level.

- Appoint more women in the diplomatic service.
- Appoint more women to head diplomatic missions abroad.
- Recommend more women to senior positions in international institutions and organisations

## **Article 9: Nationality**

### **9.1 Overview**

Nationality in Cameroon is governed by law no.68/LF/3 of 11<sup>th</sup> June 1968. A cursory look at the law gives the impression of equality between men and women in matters of attribution, change, loss or conservation of nationality. However, this is not the case.

### **9.2 Critical Area of Concern**

- A close look at Article 17 of the law states that, a foreign woman who marries a Cameroonian man can upon her express consent demand to acquire Cameroonian nationality at the time of celebration of the marriage.
- If the woman fails to indicate her intention at the time of the celebration of the marriage, she can only obtain citizenship through a court decision.
- The legislation failed to make provision for a Cameroonian woman who marries a foreign man.
- Citizenship is determined by birth or marriage and by the provisions of Section 7(a) of the Nationality Code; there is no discrimination between the mother and the father. Section 6(a) (b) further clarifies the position of legitimate children born of parents with different nationalities and illegitimate children with one parent of Cameroonian nationality. However, in practice, immigration service seem to attach more weight only to the father's nationality as there are several cases where children of a Cameroonian mother and a foreign father have been detained for lack of residence permit.
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### **9.3 Recommendations**

- The government discriminatory provision in the nationality code should be amended to grant equal rights to all citizens.

## **Article 10: Education**

### **10.1 Overview**

The State has taken a number of measures to promote gender equity in both formal and informal education in Cameroon. Some of these measures have been cited on pages 35-38 of the state's report. While we laud these measures, there are still major problems to be addressed.

### **10.2 Critical Areas of Concern**

- Although women form 52% of the population, the level of scholarisation for girls is lower than that of boys. This cuts across the two types of education existing in Cameroon to wit; formal and informal educational systems. At the primary level, there is hardly any disparity in enrolment partly due to the suppression of fees at this level as per Decree No. 2001/641 of 19<sup>th</sup> February 2001. However, the number of female students declines at the secondary and university levels.
- The same phenomenon is found in the area of success in examinations. At the primary level, girls perform well but their performance declines in secondary schools and universities.
- Some provinces still suffer from less schooling and there is a decline in the rate of schooling in some provinces (e.g. Eastern Province).
- Factors that impede the advancement of literacy for girls include insufficient school infrastructure and trained teachers, poor living conditions compounded by rising poverty, lack of understanding of the importance of sending girls to school, and negative socio-cultural beliefs.
- The policy of free primary education is still to yield expected results as parents still have to bear the brunt of paying huge Parent Teacher Association (PTA) levies in a bid to support ill-equipped institutions.

### **10.3 Implementation Status of Concluding Comments.**

In Concluding Comment no. 58, the CEDAW Committee encouraged the government to intensify its efforts to promote female access to basic and secondary education and to develop programmes specifically designed to reduce female illiteracy.

The government on its part has made basic education both free and compulsory in principle. Primary schools have been implanted in more villages where children are given free primary education. Public secondary schools are being opened in all subdivisions where students are expected to pay minimal sums upon admission.

The government has also opened up some vocational and skill development training institutions in the informal sector where young girls and school drop outs are trained to develop skills so as to facilitate their entering the informal sector and become self-employed. However, these centres are few and are mostly found in urban areas. They are also not well equipped and under-staffed and do not follow the trend of modernisation. Furthermore, specific plans designed to reduce adult female illiteracy are inadequate.

The government has made considerable efforts in the implementation of the Concluding Comments but there is need for more to be done in order to close the gap between boys and girls.

#### **10.4 Recommendations**

- Government should take stringent measures to improve the education of the girl child in areas where there is more need especially in the East, South and Extreme North Provinces.
- Reinforce the training and recruitment of qualified teachers.
- Undertake the sensitisation of parents and community leaders on the importance and value of educating the girl child.
- Translate the free primary education policy into concrete action by abolishing all PTA and other levies.
- Allocate sufficient resources to ensure that schools created have the required materials, infrastructure and human resources so as to defeat the concept of “PTA for development purposes”. This means that, due to lack of infrastructure and human resources, Parent’s Teacher Association have instituted levies on pupils and students in order to ameliorate the situation
- Increase grass root infrastructure and provide basic amenities such as roads, electricity, pipe borne water and others to ensure better working conditions for teachers on assignment to peripheral areas to enable them deliver quality education.
- Increase the number of women social centres for the promotion of women in all provinces of the country.

- Increase special scholarship programs to motivate the girl child to pursue career-oriented education and ensure that girls register and stay in school.
- Make provisions and implement policies for adult literacy to become part of the educational system in order to encourage illiterate women to become literate.
- Give special attention to areas vulnerable to child trafficking and child labour.
- Institute affirmative action in the admission of girls into technical educational institutions.

## **Article 11: Employment**

### **11.1 Overview**

Equality between men and women as regards employment is guaranteed not only by the Constitution but also by the General Civil Service Regulations and the Labour Code. The Labour Code recognizes the right of every citizen to work and states that the state should do everything possible to assist citizens in finding employment and keeping it once it has been obtained.<sup>10</sup>

Labour legislation is not discriminatory per se and offers the same opportunity for employment and the right to equal pay and treatment for the same work. However, the labour force has more men than women even though women form more than half of the population of the country. Women are more prominent in the informal sector where it is more of self-employment such as subsistence farming, petty trading, and domestic work. Their work is not statistically included in the gross domestic product of the country and it does not feature any in the national employment statistics. They do not count for eligibility for retirement and other work related benefits.

### **11.2 Critical Areas of Concern**

- Decree 81-02 of June 29, 1981, however, permits a husband to oppose his wife's employment by invoking the interest of the household and children. This is discriminatory.
- The Cameroonian Labour Code provides for complete freedom in negotiating an employment contract. The worst gender discrimination occurs in hiring, particularly in the private sector. In

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<sup>10</sup> Art 2 of Law n° 92/007 of August 14, 1992

fact, given the complete freedom to negotiate an employment contract, women of equal competence are often victims of discrimination in pay because of their gender.

- The paucity of the number of women found in the formal sector is due to the incapacity of women to compete for formal jobs because women are proportionately less educated.
- More women are becoming poorer and feminisation of poverty is taking a firm root.
- Women are not adequately protected in their jobs. There is no law on sexual harassment in Cameroon. They are therefore subjected to the whims and caprices of male bosses and colleagues. Therefore dismissal may be subjective.
- The social security system is still in its embryonic stage as only 10% of the population benefits from it.
- Women's work is also limited by the fact that childcare services are inadequate. The major responsibility for the welfare of a family is on the woman, a fact which impedes her employability and wellbeing.

### **11.3 Recommendations**

- Government should implement measures to put value on domestic or household work.
- The law on sexual harassment should be enacted and implemented.
- The social security system should be extended to the informal sector.
- More day care centres should be created and equipped to enable mothers to return to income-generating activities.
- More capacity building programs for women should be created to empower them to be able to have equal access to employment opportunities as men.
- Affirmative action in the area of employment in both public and private sectors should be implemented in order to close the gap existing between men and women in the work force and work place.

## **Article 12: Equality in Access to Health Care**

### **12.1 Overview**

In the area of health, the government of Cameroon has taken action to ameliorate health services in the country as stated in the official report.

Legally, there is no discrimination between men and women concerning access to health infrastructure. In the past few years, the state has accorded attention to maternal and adolescent health. Special emphasis has been placed on reproductive health issues, family planning and the fight against HIV/AIDS. Pregnant women are obligatorily vaccinated against tetanus. The government automatically takes care of pregnant women who are infected with the HIV/AIDS virus. Anti retroviral drugs are given free to infected persons. Special attention is paid to infected mothers who receive prenatal and postnatal treatment in order to avoid mother to child transmission.

But access to health services is more feasible in the urban than in the rural areas. Even where health centres are found in rural areas, they are located at long distances, and are equipped only to provide primary health care services.

## **12.2 Critical Areas of Concern**

- As far as infrastructure is concerned, there is more health infrastructure in the urban areas than in the rural areas with a heavy concentration in the metropolitan cities of Douala and Yaoundé. Rural women have problems accessing quality health services and medical care.
- As far as maternal health is concerned, the mortality rate as a result of difficult delivery is about 700 per 100000 births.<sup>11</sup>
- There has been an increase in the rate of HIV/AIDS infections in the last few years in spite of human, material and financial resources deployed by the state and the civil society.
- The prevalence of HIV positive status in adults, between 15 and 49 years is 12%. The rate of prevalence is 7% for women as against 5% for men. Among the age group of 20-29 years, the prevalence rate is twice as high for women than men. The World Report on Human Development 2003 places Cameroon in the 30<sup>th</sup> position of 39 African countries in order of high prevalence of women infected with HIV/AIDS pandemic. In the same report, Cameroon takes the 26<sup>th</sup> place of 37 African states in order of high level of children infected by HIV/AIDS.
- In spite of the feminisation of the disease, the availability and use of female condoms have not yet been sufficiently promoted through public awareness campaigns and education. The male condoms continue to be advocated as a major means to prevent

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<sup>11</sup> EDSIII

HIV/AIDS. The 1000 communities earmarked in the plan to fight against HIV/AIDS have not yet been reached due to lack of financial resources.

- In the area addressing the rights of pregnant women infected with HIV/AIDS, adequate special measures have not been taken by the state to ensure proper nutrition during pregnancy and breastfeeding as recommended by CEDAW.
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is still being practised in some parts of the North West, South West and Far North Provinces of the country and the situation is compounded by the fact that there is no law punishing this practise and very little sensitisation is done to eradicate the practice .
- Violence against women (VAW) continues to be perpetuated. The inexistence of medical records on consultation as in the case of HIV/AIDS helps in reducing the visibility of the gravity of the problem. Health personnel are ill informed on support measures to give to victims. 53% of women are subjected to physical violence as from the age of 15. VAW is further compounded by the fact that law enforcement officials are not victim - friendly thus making the issue a taboo and thus reinforcing silence on the part of women who then accept it as a way of life.
- Abortion is illegal and punishable by law. It is only permissible in a limited number of cases<sup>12</sup> (e.g. where the life of the woman is threatened). The resulting effect is that women and girls resort to the crudest methods of abortion with the assistance of untrained personnel, under unhygienic conditions and the use of traditional herbs and other substances. Such abortions sometimes prove fatal.
- The Demographic and Health Survey, conducted in 1991 as part of the global survey on fertility, discloses that the use of modern contraceptive methods among women of childbearing age is low compared to the level of knowledge: 66,4% of the women questioned were familiar with at least one modern contraceptive method, among these women, 60,3% approved of family planning and 51.4% knew of a source of supply; 23.2% of the women showed a desire to use a contraceptive method in the future. The survey showed that 22% of the nonusers had contraceptive needs that were not met. The total demand for contraceptives came to 38% of the women.

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<sup>12</sup> Art 339 (1,2) of the Penal Code

### **12.3 Implementation Status of Concluding Comments**

Concluding Comment no. 60 still needs to be adhered to as abortion is still a penal offence. Awareness campaigns on the risks of HIV/AIDS and other STDs have been carried out but are not sufficient to have the much wanted impact considering the fact that HIV/AIDS is on the rise.

### **12.4 Recommendations**

The state should:

- Increase access to quality health care in the rural areas as well as in the urban areas.
- Increase health infrastructure and medical personnel especially in rural areas.
- Increase public awareness on the availability of female condoms and make them accessible to women.
- Involve more girls and women in activities concerning the fight against HIV/AIDS.
- Provide information facts and nutritive diets during pregnancy and breastfeeding to women infected with HIV/AIDS.
- Institute free consultations to pregnant women.
- Increase sensitisation campaigns on safe sex to women and girls.
- Hasten the adoption and effective enforcement of a law against FGM .
- Strengthen awareness through sensitisation programmes on HIV/AIDS and other STDs.
- Provide adequate allocation of resources to health institutions.
- Give more attention to issues of women's reproductive health and rights.
- Institute proper data and statistics during consultations relating to gender-based violence in order to track its prevalence and develop strategies of combating it.

## **Article 13: Social and Economic Benefits**

### **13.1 Overview**

As stated in the state report, family benefits are modest and inadequate to derive satisfaction and to meet the needs for which the benefits are granted.

Section 74 of the CSRO states that:

- (1) “A married woman may exercise a trade different from that of the husband.”
- (2) “The husband may object to the exercise of such a trade in the interest of the marriage or their children.”

This section of the law does not give the woman the right to freely exercise economic activity as this can depend on the whims and caprices of the husband.

Even though women are free to undertake sporting activities, such activities are more prevalent in the urban areas than in the rural areas. In the rural areas, sporting opportunities for women are negligible due to patriarchal attitudes about gender roles and responsibilities which limit the women to house work and farming activities. These duties go on round the clock thus leaving no time for women to have time for leisure and enjoy sporting activities.

On the infrastructural level, adequate infrastructure for sports has not been made available especially in rural areas.

### **13.2 Critical Areas of Concern**

At the economic level, the banks and micro-finance establishments accord loans to everyone irrespective of sex, but a lot of emphasis is laid on landed property as collateral, an asset which women do not easily have access to due to customs and traditions. Joint property belonging to husband and wife are often registered in the name of the husband. Therefore, most women have enormous difficulties in acquiring credit because of lack of collateral. They therefore resort to informal means of borrowing in minute credit houses which can afford very little sums thus reducing the capacity of women to do large-scale economic activities.

- The state has put in place special sports centres for the benefit of all irrespective of gender. However, only few women take part in sports at championship levels. There is a national feminine football team. This team however needs the same level of support and encouragement the male “Indomitable Lions” receive from the state.

### **13.3 Recommendations**

- To facilitate women’s access to credit.

- Abolish the discriminatory provision which infringes on the economic rights of women in section 74 of the CSRO.

## **Article 14: Rural Women**

### **14.1 Overview**

The majority of women in Cameroon live in rural areas. As the state report rightly puts it, rural women play an important role in the development of rural areas especially in the arena of food security. They face numerous problems including lack of access to basic social amenities. Government's proposals to implement programmes and projects for the benefit of these rural areas are laudable. However, some of these projects face difficulties during implementation.

Although measures have been taken to enhance the welfare and improve the living standards of rural women, more needs to be done to attain desired results.

### **14.2 Critical Areas of Concern**

#### **14.2.1: Rural Women in Decision Making**

The political/traditional set-up in rural area gives women very little access to decision making. Village traditional councils, institutions responsible for decision making at the level of villages are a preserve of men. Traditional chiefs/rulers in Cameroon are essentially men. It is widely believed and accepted in rural areas that women are to be seen and not heard. This has tended to cultivate the spirit of passivity in many women. However some villages with educated traditional leaders tend to encourage women's political leadership potentials and render support to female candidates in the electoral process. Rural women do exercise their right to vote but they are sometimes manipulated. Economic empowerment, education, and sensitization will go a long way in increasing rural women's ability to participate in the political process of the country.

#### **14.2.2: Health**

Although the State took measures in its Health Strategy of 2001<sup>13</sup> to promote the health condition of rural women, more needs to be done to

translate the strategy into concrete action. In the area of health infrastructure much has been done because many rural communities have health centres. However, access to health by the rural woman, has been rendered very difficult by the limited access to necessary technical equipment and necessary medication. The limited number of ambulances, scanning devices and breast cancer specialists, programs on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS has jeopardised government action to the detriment of the rural woman. Medical doctors are found mostly in district hospitals<sup>14</sup> and consequently not close enough to the rural woman. There is also the absence of health financial aid and social security programs for rural women. Such facilities are made more available to civil servants and workers in the formal sector.

### **14.2.3 Access to Education**

Government has taken measures to promote equality and equity in education. Government primary schools exist in many villages. Generally, the laws do not discriminate with regards to access to education. In the general education sector, the gap between boys and girls is not visible. It is in the professional and technical sectors that a gap is enormous between boys and girls. The main reasons for this disparity include poverty, early and forced marriages, child labour, teenage pregnancies, persistence of socio-cultural practices, and the lack of counselling and career orientation programs, etc. Another problem in the educational sector is the acute lack of infrastructure and social amenities. The burden of building classrooms in the rural areas and the employment of teachers more have on occasions fallen on the rural poor parents through the payment of Parent Teacher Association (PTA) levies.

Adult literacy centres have been opened by the Ministry of Youth Affairs in some of the villages. These programmes lack effectiveness because of poor logistics and the lack of trained personnel in the area of adult education.

### **14.2.4 Access to Agricultural Technology, Credits and Loans**

Access to agricultural technology is almost non-existent or at best rudimentary. Basic equipment is sometimes distributed by philanthropic organisations.

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<sup>14</sup> District hospitals are found in divisional headquarters

There are few extension workers in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) who works in rural areas without some essentials (e.g. means of transportation). They are however expected to cover extensive areas in the rural regions.

The government through the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family and the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training through some programmes (e.g. the PIAASI programme) have been encouraging women to be organised in groups in order to mobilise financial resources and have access to credit. Grants to groups have also been made available in the public Investment Budgets of MINPROFF and MINADER for women in rural areas.

#### **14.2.5 Condition of the Rural Woman**

The standard of living of the rural woman has remained very rudimentary. It is characterised by poor housing, absence of portable water, poor electricity, and poor seasonal farm to market roads. Social security is non-existent.

Liberalisation of the economy has led to very low prices for agricultural products due to weak negotiating power.

The significant role played by rural women is not evaluated financially and is undervalued. Rural women continue to work for long hours both in the farm and at home. Their products are usually sold for less than their work because of lack of adequate road infrastructure. Storage facilities for perishable foodstuffs are almost non-existent. Rural women have little access to agricultural credit, thus limiting their economic empowerment, leading to the vicious cycle of poverty.

Social and health infrastructure is either non-existent in some villages or lack basic amenities. The rights of rural women are ignored due to the patriarchal nature of the society as well as customs and traditions. Rural women do not form part of the decision-making processes. NGOs have continued to play a very important role in lending support to rural communities in areas of income generation, capacity building and acquisition of skills, micro-credit ventures, cooperatives and common initiative activities. In spite of all these efforts, the rural woman undergoes a lot of hardship due to the following:

- Lack of social amenities

- Lack of technical innovations for the transformation of agricultural produce.
- Poor working conditions. Most of the farm work is done manually, leading to low production.
- Health and safety measures hardly exist; hence these women are exposed to health hazards.
- The weight of customs and traditions on the woman limit her capacity to be highly productive.
- Lack of adequate budgetary allocations to cater for the rural woman.

### **14.3 Implementation status of Concluding Comments**

The Concluding Comment no. 62 urged the government to pay attention to the needs of rural women and ensure that they benefit from policies and programmes adopted in all areas. It is our estimation that though government has done something, more needs to be done. Rural women are not yet able to participate on an equal basis with their counterparts in urban areas and even more so with men.

### **14.4 Recommendations**

- Recruit more trained health personnel and equip health institutions with basic equipment and drugs especially in rural areas.
- Improve on reproductive health programmes and HIV/AIDS programmes for rural women.
- Recruit more agricultural extension workers and facilitate their movement.
- Introduce social security programmes to include women in the informal sectors and the rural women.
- Gear gender budget initiatives towards the needs of the rural woman.
- Involve women leaders in the formulation and implementation of policies at local level.
- Develop farm to market roads in order to enable the rural woman generate more income from her agricultural products.
- Enable the rural woman to have more access to land.
- Provide basic infrastructure and other amenities in the rural areas in order to ameliorate their living standards.
- Provide more micro-credit schemes to women at low interest rates.
- Encourage the establishment of common initiative ventures, cooperatives and local savings and loan schemes.

- Educate on the sustainable management of the ecosystem.
- Educate on the essence of considering health and safety measures when carrying out their activities.
- Support /assist NGOs that are working in rural areas in the area or women's empowerment.

## **Article 15: Equality before the Law in Civil Matters**

### **15.1 Overview**

The Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon and other legal instruments such as the Labour Code and the Criminal Procedure Code guarantee equality between men and women before the law. In reality, equality is not easy to obtain because in certain areas access to justice is expensive. Litigation costs such as investigation reports, summons and other forms of commencing court actions is a huge obstacle to the poor in general and women in particular. In spite of the existence of the law on legal aid, its effective implementation is hindered by difficulties such as:

- Documents that need to be produced are expensive.
- Complexity in obtaining some of the documents.
- Ignorance of the existence of this law by women.

### **15.2 Critical Areas of Concern**

Discriminatory laws are still prevalent. For instance, Section 361 of the Penal Code on adultery provides different standards of proof for the man and woman. The family residence of a husband and wife is decided by the husband because he is the family head.<sup>15</sup>

### **15.3 Recommendations**

- Review all discriminatory laws.
- Make legal aid accessible to women by revising the law on legal aid.
- Review the proposed family code as regards the notion of family head which is the exclusive reserve of men.
- Institute affirmative action in the judiciary to enable more women gain integration in all legal positions.

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<sup>15</sup> Article 216 of the Civil Code

## **Article 16: Equality in Marriage and Family Law**

### **16.1 Overview**

The state report is very clear on this issue - nothing has changed from the initial report. Reference has however been made to the two draft bills namely, the Family Code and the Law against Gender Based Violence. While waiting for these draft bills to become laws, inequality still flourishes in marriage, as acknowledged in the initial and subsequent reports.

Cameroon is a patriarchal society in which customs and traditions are deeply rooted and are promoted in spite of existing modern laws protecting women's rights. In marriage, the woman is subordinate to the man. The payment of bride price by the man makes the woman a "bought property" of the man in spite of the law which provides that bride price is not a requirement for marriage.

Polygamy as a legal form of marriage grants the man the right to marry as many wives as he wishes and keep them under his control and authority. There is therefore no equality between men and women in marriage.

### **16.2 Critical Areas of Concern**

Inequality between men and women is further seen in the following;

- Section 52 (1) of the CSRO provides that the minimum age of marriage for a girl is 15 and for a boy 18 years.
- Polygamy is the exclusive preserve of men. Article 49 of the CSRO.
- A child born out of wedlock can be recognised by the father without the consent or knowledge of his wife a fact which encourages adultery by men.
- The notion of the husband being the head of the family under section 213 and 214 of the civil code.
- Higher duty of fidelity for a married woman as compared to that of a married man.

All the above issues have not yet been addressed in the draft bills on either Gender Based Violence or the Family Code. These as well as existing customary practices that discriminate against women reinforce inequality in marriage. Women's work at home is not evaluated. Stereotypes ideas about women flourish. Women are considered as the house managers and their tasks are taken for granted. Law enforcement

officers do not treat domestic violence with the seriousness it deserves as it is treated as a private matter. This has led to women shying away from reporting such violence which is sometimes fatal.

### **16.3 Recommendations**

- Enactment of the proposed bills on Gender Based Violence and Family Code into law.
- The above-mentioned laws that perpetuate discrimination against women should be repealed.
- Train law enforcement officials to be women - friendly when dealing with issues on violence against women.
- Vexatious and harmful traditional practices should be abolished.

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Violence against women is a form of violence that is very prevalent but lacks recognition as a social problem due to the fact that it is sometimes invariably accepted as a way of life. Violence takes various forms but the most pervasive is violence against women in the private sphere that is domestic violence. Domestic violence in the form of physical assault is very rampant and is compounded by societal acceptance as either a form of correction by the husband and other family members, or as a sign of love in certain cultures. It is a serious violation of women's human rights because adequate actions to prevent violations have not been taken nor where violations occur, the State has not adopted proper measures (e.g. a specific law on violence against women) that provide remedies to the victims of domestic violence. Law enforcement officers and medical personnel are not adequately trained to deal with the issue. It is either regarded as a private domestic matter or victims are discouraged from bringing their partners and other culprits before the law. This is the more reason why the draft law on Gender Based Violence needs to be urgently promulgated into law.

Statistics show that 53% of women are subjected to one form of violence or another as from the age of 15. In 36% of the cases it is the husband who is the perpetrator of violence. Amongst women who are assaulted, 55% are those living in marital unions while 19% are single women.

Physical violence is a common phenomenon in Cameroon. 40% of women living in urban areas are subjected to it while those living in rural areas constitute 37%. Violence against women knows no distinction of

class or status. Studies revealed that educated women suffer more violence (45 %) than uneducated women (36 %).

64 % of employed women suffer physical violence. Furthermore, domestic violence is common amongst the childless (77 %), while 53 % of those with five or more children are victims of such violence.

Most female victims of violence do not seek for medical assistance. Only 10 % of those who suffer from physical and sexual violence do seek medical care while 50 % rely on their families for support. (EDS111, 2004).

From the above it is evident that a specific law on violence against women is highly necessary and imperative. It is therefore important for the draft law on Gender Based Violence to be enacted as a matter of urgency.

## **CONCLUSION**

We acknowledge the attempts and advancements made by the State in putting into place some legal instruments and policies for the promotion and protection of women's rights. The difficulties and challenges recognised and stated in the state report cannot be under estimated. Cognisance has been taken of the State's proposals to increase their effectiveness in promoting women's rights through grassroots awareness and advocacy, legislative reforms, reduction of poverty and HIV/AIDS transmission, strengthening of institutional mechanisms, and lastly the strengthening of partnerships with development partners and civil society.

It is necessary to highlight and conclude that in addition to the measures indicated in the state report the elimination of discrimination and the respect of women's human rights will be more effective through the following:

The formulation of programs and actions geared towards,

- The elimination of patriarchal foundations and established stereotyped roles ;
- The elimination of societal attitudes hindering de jure and de facto equality of women;
- The improvement of access to information in general, and to gender issues in particular;

- The creation of monitoring indicators to evaluate the progress of the status of the woman;
- The mainstreaming of gender in all laws, policies and programs;
- The repeal of all discriminatory laws;
- The enforcement of mechanisms for the implementation of national and international instruments that ensure gender equality; and
- The enactment of the law on the Family Code and the Law on Gender Based Violence.

## **REFERENCE.**

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