



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
10 November 2008
English
Original: French

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Pre-session working group

Forty-second session

20 October-7 November 2008

Responses to the list of issues and questions with regard to the consideration of the combined second and third periodic reports

Cameroon*

The paper produced by the pre-session working group on the draft periodic report of Cameroon submitted to the forty-second session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, held in Geneva from 20 October to 7 November 2008, requests additional information on a number of concerns, listed in 28 paragraphs of the paper.

The present document provides responses to each of the points raised. It was prepared by means of a participatory procedure involving the relevant ministries and civil society bodies, including non-governmental organizations and associations which promote and protect the rights of women.

General

1. Process of preparation of the combined report of Cameroon, non-governmental and women's organizations consulted and Government departments and institutions involved in the process

The single report of Cameroon, combining the second and third periodic reports, was prepared by a multisectoral committee consisting of representatives of the following ministries: MINPROFF, MINAS, MINREX, MINADER, MINJUSTICE, MINEDUB, MINEFOP, MINSANTE, MINEPAT, MINFI, MINIMIDT and CNDHL, and of civil society organizations, such as ALVF, ACAFEJ, FESADE and Gender Lenses. This multisectoral committee was established under Decision No. 058/D/MINCOF/SG/DPDF of 8 July 2004. It was responsible for:

* This document is issued without formal editing.

- compiling Cameroon’s periodic reports to the Committee
- monitoring implementation of the Convention in Cameroon
- performing any other related tasks.

In carrying out its functions, it received technical support from an expert from the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa. The preparation of the report proceeded as follows:

- Data were collected and a draft was prepared and approved by the committee referred to above;
- The draft report was discussed and approved during a five-day seminar. Those taking part in the seminar, in addition to the members of the above committee, were representatives of other Government departments (MINSEP, MINPMEESA, MINEE), the WIRA association and other civil society organizations;
- The approved document was reread by a smaller select committee, consisting of representatives of MINPROFF, MINPMEESA and MINAS and of the Gender Lenses association.

2. Measures taken by the Committee to disseminate the initial observations to administrators, officials, politicians and the general public; what remains to be done to guarantee, de jure and de facto, equality between men and women

Sessions to review these observations were held in the course of meetings with the women’s organizations (IWD, AWD and WRWD), and a review of Beijing+5 took place during an annual conference of directors of the national and local offices of the former MINCOF, with the participation of the public and private sectors, United Nations agencies and women’s organizations. The administrative authorities then organized local review meetings in the provinces and departments.

In addition, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family has set up an Internet website on which the Committee’s observations have been posted. The address of the website was publicized through posters and radio and television broadcasts, with a view to encouraging contributions and comments from the public.

Constitutional, legislative and institutional framework and status of the Convention

3. Progress achieved or plans envisaged for incorporating the Convention into domestic law; possibility of referring to the Convention in litigation in national courts

The Government of Cameroon is firmly committed to the ongoing process of improving and updating its legislation in order to guarantee equality and equity between the sexes in every aspect of life.

The Constitution of Cameroon, based on Law No. 96/06 of 18 January 1996, lays down the principle of equality between men and women, stating that: “the human person, without distinction as to race, religion, sex or belief, possesses inalienable and sacred rights ...”

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, like the other international human rights conventions ratified by Cameroon,

is rooted in its Constitution and overrides its laws. The protection of women is laid down in the Constitution, and all the rights enshrined in this fundamental law are guaranteed by the State to all citizens without discrimination on grounds of sex.

Accordingly the Constitution, the fundamental law from which all the laws and regulations derive, may be referred to in litigation in national courts in support of lawsuits claiming discrimination of any kind.

4. Status of the draft law for the prevention and punishment of violence against women; definition of discrimination against women and any sanctions provided

In the negotiating stages on the draft law for the prevention and punishment violence against women, it became clear that the draft law has to be altered so as to place emphasis on punishment as a more rapid means of achieving the aims the Government has set itself in combating both violence and discrimination against women. What was initially a bill for prevention and punishment has therefore become a draft law to punish gender-based violence and discrimination. The text of the law has almost been finalized by the ministries responsible. The process of submitting it to Parliament for adoption has begun.

The Government's definition of violence and discrimination is the same as that of the United Nations.

The Government has gone further: it has prepared and is now carrying out an ambitious national plan for combating disparities between the sexes. This is the national programme for institutionalizing gender, which aims to mainstream gender and the different needs of men and women in the development process and in daily life, including family life. This programme will lead to gender-based budgeting in public services, so as to ensure that public spending is geared to meeting the needs of men and women equitably.

In this context, there are plans for:

- Strengthening the capacity of sectoral and social partners through the use of tools for analysing and incorporating a gender perspective
- Developing gender sensitivity among strategic leaders at sectoral level and among opinion makers and those exercising traditional and religious authority
- Preparing and disseminating educational materials
- Translating into national and local languages, and disseminating, the international legal instruments for the protection of women's rights, as well as recommendations of international conferences on women, in order to improve knowledge of women's rights
- Appointing a gender focal point in each of the relevant ministries and in public and semi-public bodies, as an operational bridge and an early warning system for gender monitoring
- Conducting socio-anthropological studies in order to identify the factors underlying persistent inequality between the sexes, and to assess progress achieved in Cameroon in this area
- Creating an interministerial consultative framework to monitor gender mainstreaming in institutional practice and in sectoral policy.

5. Remedies available to women to complain of gender-based discrimination, including independent mechanisms; further information on the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms and how it addresses women's human rights

At the national level, a woman who considers herself to be a victim of a discriminatory practice or prejudice can present a claim for compensation to the civil courts, which are open to all regardless of sex, under Law No. 2006/015 of 29 December 2006 on the organization of the courts in Cameroon.

She will base her claim on the combined provisions of articles 1382 of the Civil Code, paragraphs 1 and 2 (c) of the Convention, and article 45 of the Constitution. The application will be heard in the Court of First Instance or the Court of Major Jurisdiction, depending on the amount of compensation sought.

These courts, like all the others, are organized to guarantee women a fair hearing. The principle of review by a second court is respected and the Supreme Court, which acts as a constitutional council, is the guarantor of legality for the courts of first and second instance.

The areas in which women suffer most frequent discrimination are employment and inheritance.

As regards employment, a victim of discrimination can ask the Employment Inspectorate to attempt conciliation if she has been wrongfully dismissed or has suffered harm of any other kind as a result of discrimination in the course of her employment. If conciliation fails, she can submit a claim to the civil courts described above.

In matters of inheritance, according to most traditions in Cameroon a woman has no right to inherit from her parents, especially her father, only male children being regarded as heirs. Victims may apply to the courts for enforcement of their rights. Among the case law which illustrates the protection afforded to women by the courts in this area are judgements No. 45 of 22 February 1973 and No. 14/1 of 4 February 1993, in which the Supreme Court upheld the right of a married woman to inherit her father's land, and stated that to prevent daughters from inheriting from their fathers is contrary to the constitutional principle of equality between the sexes.

Once domestic recourses have been exhausted, a male or female petitioner who is still dissatisfied can have his or her case examined before a number of international bodies. Thus, women who are the victims of discrimination can appeal to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, pursuant to the Optional Protocol, which has been ratified by Cameroon.

Furthermore, a woman who suffers discrimination or any violation of her rights enshrined in the Constitution, social law or modern or traditional civil law may also resort to non-jurisdictional mechanisms, notably the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (CNDHL), to assert such rights. Established by Law No. 2004/016 of 22 July 2004, CNDHL is an independent institution providing consultation, monitoring, evaluation, dialogue, coordination, promotion and protection of human rights and freedoms.

In the course of its work of providing effective protection of the fundamental rights of women and combating the various forms of discrimination that they may encounter in Cameroon, the Commission receives a large number of complaints

from women. Most of them essentially concern irresponsible behaviour by husbands or violation of women's right to work.

It has been observed that many women are still unaware of their rights or of the recourses available to them to ensure that those rights are respected. In response to that situation, the Commission lays particular stress on activities to promote their fundamental rights and to strive for an improvement in their health and living conditions. Following all of the projects currently being implemented in order to guarantee that women's fundamental rights are actually effective and to combat the various forms of discrimination against them, CNDHL has designed a number of projects with the specific aim of:

- (a) raising awareness through the media and by informal educational discussions in working-class urban districts and surrounding villages, using financial assistance from the United Nations Development Programme;
- (b) networking the NGOs and associations for promotion of women and defence of their fundamental rights;
- (c) increasing parents' awareness about human rights and the need to make better provision for securing girls' right to education, particularly in the case of girls in rural areas;
- (d) introducing human rights education starting with the 2008-2009 school year, in the 80 schools and colleges that have been selected, 50 of them under the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB) and 30 under the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC);
- (e) implementing the National Action Plan on Human Rights;
- (f) promoting female leadership and the fight against poverty.

Compliance of the activities of the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms with the "Paris principles"

By Law No. 2004/016 of 22 July 2004, which provided for the establishment, organization and operation of the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms, the Government of Cameroon aligned the operational structure of the Commission more closely with the "Paris principles", by reinforcing its institutional and financial independence and widening its responsibilities and powers.

However, the composition and the guarantees of independence of the Commission need to be re-examined, in particular because the members of the Commission representing the Government participate fully in the resolutions and deliberations on the same footing as all the other members (article 15 of the Law of 22 July 2004), whereas according to the Paris principles they should act only in an advisory capacity. The draft law to amend this provision has already been submitted to the competent authorities.

Similarly, pursuant to the Paris principles, every national institution promoting and protecting human rights and freedoms must have "an infrastructure which is suited to the smooth conduct of its activities, in particular adequate funding".

In this context, there has been a major step forward: the National Governance Programme makes provision for the construction of the headquarters of the Commission in Yaoundé and the opening of branch offices in the provincial capitals.

At the present time, the branch offices in Douala, Garoua, Bamenda and Buea are operational.

6. National plan of action for the promotion of gender equality, the implementation of the Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals

Following the Beijing Conference, Cameroon drew up and adopted in 1997 a Policy Declaration on the Integration of Women in Development, accompanied by a Multisectoral Plan of Action with seven main thrusts, reflecting the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform. Those are:

- improving women’s living conditions
- improving women’s legal status
- utilizing female human resources in all sectors of development
- ensuring women’s participation in decision-making
- promoting and protecting girls
- combating violence against women
- improving the institutional framework.

In addition, Cameroon is following the regional directives relating to implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, in particular those emanating from the African Economic Community (AEC) and the African Union (AU).

Finally, the Government, through the Senior Institute of Public Management, is training women for leadership in order to enable them to compete on an equal footing with men in public life in general and in elections in particular. This project has been taken over by the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family, and takes the form of coaching for women’s groups, political training for women and technical and logistic support for candidates for elected office.

7. Application of the principle of non-discrimination in accordance with obligations under the Convention; review process covering customary law with a view to repealing provisions that discriminate against women

In order to guarantee that the principle of non-discrimination is fully applicable to all areas of law in accordance with the obligations incurred under the Convention, the Government, through the Ministry of Justice, is planning to review legislative and regulatory texts and eliminate any provisions which are considered discriminatory, such as certain provisions of the Penal Code, for example those relating to penalties for adultery, which vary depending on the sex of the adulterer.

Furthermore, pursuant to the commitment undertaken under article 2 (c) of the Convention, the Government has signed a cooperation agreement with UNIFEM, the objective of which is to make members of the judiciary more aware of the Convention on the one hand, and to track and evaluate actual implementation of the Convention in the jurisdictions on the other. This training is to be carried out in five provinces: Centre, Sud-Ouest, Nord-Ouest, Littoral and Ouest.

As customary law is not codified, the traditional jurisdictions apply unwritten rules that vary according to the region and the customs of the parties to a dispute.

In order to prevent abuses, the judicial institutions, in particular the courts, that oversee customary courts ensure that the customs invoked are not contrary to law and order and the general principles of law. The courts of appeal, when asked to confirm judgements handed down by customary courts, which are presided over by persons who are not members of the judiciary, annul any judgements that are contrary to law and order, and the non-discriminatory rules of the Civil Code are then applied.

It should, however, be recalled that in the current state of jurisprudence, and whatever the issue (civil, social, civil under traditional law or commercial), judges do actually apply the Convention and reaffirm the principle of non-discrimination. In the event of a conflict between discriminatory national legislation and the Convention, the national provisions are considered to be null and void and reference is made to the primacy of international conventions regularly ratified and promulgated, pursuant to article 45 of the Constitution of Cameroon.

Stereotypes

8. Actions taken to overcome stereotypes and prejudices related to responsibilities of women; combating discriminatory societal practices, customs and attitudes

Education:

- Introduction of gender-sensitive teaching which makes allowance for differences in the societal interaction of women and men
- Mainstreaming of gender in curricula used to train teaching staff, vocational guidance personnel and social workers
- The bold decision to set quotas for admission to university-level educational establishments, particularly in the scientific and technological fields, for research and training facilities, in political parties and in the electoral system
- Retention of girls in school and continuing education systems
- Strengthening of literacy programmes for women
- Stepping up efforts to eliminate sexist stereotypes and violence from publications
- Involvement of parents in the education of girls
- Recruitment of female rural activity leaders to offset the lack of centres for the advancement of women in remote villages in order to occupy girls and prevent early marriages
- Reduction of girls' domestic chores.

Health:

- Strengthening of prevention and awareness-raising with a view to preserving women's physical and mental integrity in the area of health, especially reproductive health, in particular through information and education concerning family life
- Elimination of harmful traditional practices, notably female genital mutilation

- Ongoing education in sanitation and responsible management of the environment
- Provision of obstetric services without charge
- Prevention of cervical and breast cancer, which particularly affect women of working age.

Economic sphere:

- Making gender-based budgeting a priority for ministerial departments
- Inventorying and accounting for women's unpaid work, in particular household chores and bringing up children
- Guaranteeing equal access for men and women to the control and management of resources, wealth and property, in particular land, in order for them to participate in development
- Organization of working hours so as to balance working life and family life
- Enhancing equality of men and women as regards employment, hiring and remuneration
- Increased support for women in the informal sector, notably by way of a women's support fund to provide social services
- Regular publication of gender-disaggregated data to better reflect women's advancement
- Recognition of a formal status for women farmers and similar female workers
- Encouraging women to strengthen networks of associations, to bring men into them and to make them a powerful source of proposals
- Mainstreaming gender into the harmonized action plans of associations.

Peace:

Thanks to the very important steps taken by the Head of State, His Excellency Paul Biya, Cameroon understands the link between peace and development. This requires:

- Involvement of women in prevention, management and resolution conflict mechanisms and their enhanced participation in peacekeeping operations
- Inclusion in school and university curricula of education for both girls and boys in citizenship, preparation for marriage, the culture of peace and rights and freedoms
- Equality between women and men as a constant objective, expressed in all statements and speeches.

In view of all of the foregoing, the law needs to be enhanced through:

- Adoption of the draft Code of Persons and the Family
- Finalization of the law on the prevention and suppression of violence against women and of gender-based discrimination
- Continued strengthening of the capacity of government administrations

- Creation of a cross-cutting mechanism for coordinating and evaluating gender-equality policies
- Dissemination of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in local languages
- Review of the free legal assistance available to women victims of violence
- Censoring of advertisements that portray women in a humiliating or discriminatory manner.

The steps taken to combat stereotypes and prejudices — namely, increasing school enrolment rates among girls, providing scholarships for deserving girls to receive vocational education in some priority education areas (ZEP), raising the percentage of girls pursuing scientific and technical careers, progressively eliminating degrading rites of widowhood through the involvement of clergy and the promotion of women's rights; integrating women into traditionally male occupations (architecture, the military, professional driving, pastoral ministry, territorial leadership) — have succeeded in ensuring the participation of all in the work of national development, as well as equitable access for men and women to the resources necessary for their development and the fulfilment of their potential as links of equal value in the chain of society.

The four women holding territorial leadership positions are carrying out their leadership functions without difficulty and have not been rejected by the population because of their sex.

In the past, agricultural studies were strictly the province of men owing to their demanding nature and to biases against women. Today, it can be affirmed that these discriminatory barriers have been eliminated, although women's access to high-level positions as agricultural engineers remains limited.

As the persistence of stereotypes is linked to attitudes and behaviours, awareness-raising and advocacy, both ongoing functions of the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family (MINPROFF), are being emphasized. Training activities are offered for women jurists, religious dignitaries, opinion leaders and court officers with a view to familiarizing them with the specific rights of women and with the legal instruments that protect those rights. This training seeks to combat sexist stereotypes and discrimination in the legal and prison systems and in other detention facilities. These activities are being supported by various development partners, including CAREF, UNFPA and UNIFEM.

Violence against women

9. Steps taken to develop a comprehensive strategy to combat all forms of violence against women; awareness-raising programmes for various groups and the public at large

In Cameroon, the elimination of violence against women is a component of the overall strategy for promoting the rights of women and girls. The efforts to stop such violence are guided by the policies of the Head of State, who views the abuse of women as a form of incivility incompatible with human dignity and the country's possibilities for achieving democracy, social justice and the advancement of the human and civil rights of all.

Studies have been conducted in collaboration with civil society in order to assess the magnitude of the problem of violence against women, the social and anthropological factors underlying the phenomenon and the measures to be taken to curb it.

Following those studies, a draft law was drawn up. Alongside such legal reforms, awareness-raising, training and advocacy activities are being carried out.

Awareness-raising activities have included: (i) design and dissemination of specific messages; (ii) design and dissemination of posters and picture boxes; (iii) participation in the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence campaign launched by the United Nations; (iv) organization of educational talks; (v) education for a culture of peace and for family and conjugal life; (vi) premarital counselling; (vii) marriage counselling; (viii) radio and television programmes such as *Entre nous les dames* (Just Between Us, Ladies), *Femmes, familles et société* (Women, Families and Society) and *Planète femmes* (Planet Women), as well as publication of the Ministry's magazine *Femmes et Familles Magazine* (Women and Families Magazine) and production of posters, banners, television spots, flyers, leaflets, pennants, T-shirts, caps, bulletin boards, CD-ROMs, etc.

With regard to training, capacity-building sessions on promotion and protection of women's rights have been organized for staff of the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family and other actors.

Advocacy activities targeting networks of women's associations, traditional and religious leaders and female circumcisers are also being carried out.

Lastly, the Government is putting in place facilities to shelter and provide psychosocial assistance to women victims of violence.

10. Information on the scale of violence against women, including domestic violence

The various complaints lodged with social services and public safety agencies reveal that the phenomenon of violence against women exists and that it affects women of all social strata in Cameroon. This violence is perpetrated privately, the family being the primary setting in which it occurs. Some forms of violence concern the victim's intimate life and are therefore not always reported, which makes it difficult to compile statistical information.

MINPROFF provides health, financial, psychosocial and legal assistance in the cases referred to it.

During the period from 2006 to October 2008, the country's decentralized services and specialized technical units recorded 12,680 cases, including:

- 3,680 cases of physical violence against women (beatings)
- 2,500 cases of psychological violence (serious verbal abuse)
- 850 cases of repudiation
- 1,855 cases of non-payment of spousal support
- 25 cases of rape
- 1,950 cases of family abandonment
- 1,829 cases of bigamy.

In addition, about 1,500 cases were reported directly to the Minister's office during the same period.

Health and financial assistance provided by the Ministry includes medical care for the victim and payment of associated costs in the case of indigent victims, or arranging for such payment by MINAS or MINSANTE.

Psychosocial assistance takes the form of listening sessions and counselling aimed at rebuilding the victim's self-esteem, the objective being to restore the dignity that the victim feels she has lost as a result of rape or any other form of abuse. MINPROFF operates a hotline, which enables victims of violence or anyone with information on a case of violence to reach the Ministry's services at any time of the day or night.

Legal assistance is provided in cases in which the victim wishes to press charges.

Civil society organizations also provide the aforementioned services to women victims of violence.

In 2007, INTERPOL-NCB received 30 complaints of sexual exploitation, assault and battery, rape, sodomy, abuse, death threats relating to homosexual activity, bodily harm, neglect of an incapable person and abandonment of the marital home.

Of these cases, 10 were referred for prosecution, 5 are currently being prosecuted and in the remaining 15 cases an official record was established and filed with the Government procurator's office.

The National Security Department has taken several steps to curb violence against women, including the establishment of operational facilities, systematic enforcement of the law and strengthening the capacity of persons engaged in anti-violence activities.

By Decision 00785/DGSN/CAB, issued on 2 December 2005, the Director of the National Security Department established within INTERPOL-NCB a Special Morals Brigade, with the specific mission of eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against all vulnerable population groups, but especially women and children.

Located in the same building as the Criminal Investigation Department in the Elig-Essono district, the Brigade is part of the Extradition and Investigation Service of INTERPOL-NCB in Yaoundé. It is equipped with the following:

- A secure global police communication system for rapid exchange of information worldwide on a 24-hour basis
- A telephone hotline (22 22 18 51) that can be called free of charge during the daytime.

To enhance its effectiveness on the ground, particularly with regard to women, the National Security Department has signed partnership agreements with UNIFEM, ILO, ASSEJA, AWA, WOPA and ACPEE. The aim of these agreements is to develop synergies in order to ensure protection for all women.

For example, a cooperation agreement with three NGOs (AWA, WOPA and ASSEJA) aims to ensure that all acts of violence and discrimination against women

are reported, that trafficking networks are exposed and dismantled and that the police force receives support in caring for and assisting in the reintegration of women victims of violence into society and their families.

This cooperation also seeks to build the capacity of the NGO personnel and facilitate regular exchange of information.

As concerns marital rape, the draft bill on suppression of gender-based violence and discrimination criminalizes the practice.

Trafficking in women and exploitation of prostitution of women

11. Information on the number of girls trafficked for commercial purposes and exploitation

Cameroon is addressing the problem of trafficking of girls in the overall framework of measures to protect the rights of children. Indeed, girls are regarded as children and, as such, benefit from all the actions taken by the State to ensure the full development and secure the future of children.

“The practice of exploitative child labour, wherever it is practised, is a moral outrage and an affront to human dignity”. That statement, made by the ministers of labour of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement in New Delhi in 1995, amply reflects the international community’s condemnation of one of the gravest violations of human rights in the world.

Child labour used to be defined as paid work entailing real dangers for children, but over time, the emphasis has shifted away from the economic aspect.

For example, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, by recognizing in article 32 the right of the child to be protected from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development, marked a decisive step forward in the understanding of the phenomenon. Child labour is thus understood to mean any physical or mental activity which, by its nature or because of the conditions in which it is performed, may harm the physical, mental, emotional or spiritual health or hinder the education and full development of children, defined as persons under 18 years of age.

In the absence of a nationwide quantitative study on the phenomenon of child labour, exploratory research conducted over the past decade on the related phenomena of trafficking and exploitation of children has provided evidence of the existence of this scourge throughout the country. Although it exists and has grown in the past two decades as a result of the loosening of traditional social ties and, especially, the economic crisis, child labour in general and girl child labour in particular cannot be quantified owing to a lack of statistical data.

In order to address the lack of sex-disaggregated data on the exact number of girl victims, the Government is mainstreaming gender in the national data collection system and has established research divisions within the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family, which are currently working to obtain a clearer picture of the situation of girls in this respect. Girls most often work as domestic servants, baby sitters, waitresses or vendors of food or

second-hand clothing, or else are employed in businesses such as bars, clubs, hotels, restaurants and transport companies.

Impact of the measures contained in the national plan against child labour

Supported by an institutional and legal framework with extensive possibilities, Cameroon's policy for combating child labour focuses on four basic components: prevention, detection and punishment of perpetrators or accomplices, care and reinsertion of victims, and enhancing the capacities of the structures and actors involved.

Prevention: this is mainly the responsibility of operational technical units (social centres, social action services) of MINAS and other bodies engaged in combating child labour (MINPROFF, MINTSS, and the National Security Department (DGSN)). The main objective is to make the population aware of the existence of child labour and to mobilize all actors in favour of the necessary behaviour change. Secular traditions, strongly rooted in attitudes and practices, need to be overcome in order to ensure that all children can fully enjoy their rights. Public information campaigns over the media and various communication channels, publicizing of the existing legal framework, the "three strikes and you are out" operation, and since 2000 the celebration of World Day against Child Labour in Cameroon every 12 June, also promote this goal.

Detection/punishment of perpetrators: positive law includes many provisions that punish child labour and related acts. The courts often hear cases classified as the worst forms of child labour and hand down judgements punishing the perpetrators of this violation of the rights of the child, following reports by a third party, by the child or by a social worker, or after detection by labour inspectors in the course of routine visits to employers. Convinced that fear of the police is the beginning of wisdom, Cameroon's legislators have tried to be very severe in this regard. For example, article 5 of Law No. 2005/15 of 29 December 2005 on child trafficking and slavery punishes the perpetrators of child trafficking and slavery by 15 to 20 years' imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 to 10,000,000 CFA francs.

Care/social reinsertion of victims: providing psychosocial care for victims is a major element of their treatment, and is the responsibility of social workers. With the support of national and international donors, the Government has designed and implemented numerous programmes and projects to identify cases.

Capacity-building of structures and actors involved: this is carried out mainly by rehabilitating existing structures, participating in regional and international forums, organizing workshops and providing training for those involved.

Combating child labour is a vast undertaking. Despite the Government's commitment, illustrated by the existence of a substantial legal and institutional framework, the lack of all types of resources together with age-old traditions that do not always distinguish between work that socializes children and work that demeans them are the principal obstacles to achieving the goal of eliminating this problem. Future action will involve:

- A nationwide quantitative study of child labour to determine its exact pattern and the priorities
- Implementation of existing action plans to combat child trafficking and slavery, and sexual exploitation of children for financial gain

- Publicizing of the existing legal framework for punishment of perpetrators and awareness-raising among the community, families and children themselves
- Continued rehabilitation of existing institutions providing support to children, which was started with the assistance of donors (Belgian cooperation agency and UNICEF in the context of the Bépanda Reception and Monitoring Centre
- Implementation of the provisions of the 2001 decree on supervisory institutions for maladjusted children, with establishment of reception care centres, transit centres and hostels in almost all towns and high-risk locations in Cameroon
- Ongoing revitalization of social centres throughout the country, undertaken with the support of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, particularly by providing them with adequate human, material and financial resources
- Ongoing modernization of ENAAS, now the National Institute of Social Work (INTS), started with assistance from France, to make it an appropriate mechanism for the permanent and ongoing training of social workers.

Measures taken and laws enacted or envisaged to suppress all forms of trafficking in women

The legal measures concerning trafficking in women and exploitation of the prostitution of women described in the report are still in force. The provisions punishing such acts are being publicized with a view to deterring perpetrators. In addition to repressive measures, emphasis is placed on prevention and on care for victims of these acts.

With this goal, the following actions are being taken:

- Promotion of education for women and girls and eradication of illiteracy
- Psychosocial and medical care for victims
- Organization of informal educational talks with women’s and girls’ associations, and with parents on the dangers of cybermarriage
- Training for girls at the Centres for the Advancement of Women and the Family in subjects such as hotel services, dressmaking, agropastoral activities, information and communication technology, and beautician studies, with loans from HIPC funds when their training has been completed
- Incorporation of the “education for girls” aspect into the action plan of associations
- Raising the awareness of parents about the consequences of trafficking in women and girls
- Training scholarships
- Training for different occupations
- Financial support for the creation and start-up of income-generating activities
- Establishment of a socio-economic reconversion programme for prostitutes (filles libres) by incorporating them without charge into the Centres for the Advancement of Women and the Family and providing logistic support, as well as organizing internships in municipal agencies.

Governmental rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives for women and girls who wish to leave prostitution

The following services are offered, as applicable, to rehabilitate women and girls wishing to leave prostitution and to facilitate their social reinsertion:

- Organization of individual meetings
- Psychosocial counselling
- Legal assistance and prosecution of procurers
- Placement of girl victims of trafficking in foster homes
- Forming associations of women and girls who are victims of trafficking and upgrading their skills so that they can engage in income-generating activities (raising poultry and pigs, telephone services)
- Financial assistance to provide start-up funds for activities and encouragement by buying their products whenever possible
- Involvement of these girls in activities organized by the Ministry (day-care centres, reception centres, publicizing of the female condom, promotion of the rights of women, etc.)
- Training girl victims of trafficking as peer educators to raise the awareness of other groups of women and girls involved in prostitution
- Raising the awareness of the police and other officials on how to care for them and respect their rights
- Monthly meetings and enrolment in their associations, to which the Government provides funds to help members.

The Ministry works with INTERPOL and partners in the diaspora with acknowledged expertise in combating trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation.

Participation in political and public life and decision-making

12. Involvement of women in politics (as voters): steps taken to increase their political participation

The involvement of women in politics is guaranteed by various laws in force in Cameroon. The figures illustrate the disparities between men and women in elected office and in decision-making bodies. For example, as a result of the 2007 legislative and municipal elections, only 25 of the 180 deputies are women, representing 13.89 per cent of all those elected to the National Assembly; only 38 of the 180 alternates are women.

At the municipal level, 15.5 per cent of municipal councillors are women, while 4 women are territorial leaders; the Vice-President of the National Assembly is a woman and women are members of the National Assembly Bureau.

The initiatives taken to encourage women to become more active in politics include:

- Capacity-building
- Publicizing of legal instruments governing electoral participation

- Familiarization with communication techniques and media, together with confidence-building measures
- Encouraging women to register on electoral lists, to identify gender-related interests and to vote
- Encouraging women to establish political parties, to form coalitions, and to seek positions in the decision-making bodies of political parties
- Financial support for women candidates, whatever their political persuasion
- Training women in politics: coaching, boosting self-confidence, learning the electoral vocabulary, discovering strengths and weaknesses, choosing issues to debate, access to inexpensive day-care centres
- Assistance in juggling political, professional and family life.

13. Special measures to enhance the number of women participating in decision-making bodies at all levels, including in the judiciary

The regulations on human resources management make no distinctions between how public servants are treated; the problems arise in their application in a “phallocratic” context. As at 15 October 2008, the judiciary included 925 judges, of whom 214 were women. In the decision-making bodies, particularly the jurisdictions and central services of the Ministry of Justice, 11 of the 75 courts of first instance and courts of major jurisdiction were headed by women; there were no women government procurators or procurators-general; out of 10 courts of appeal, only one is headed by a woman; of the two inspectors-general of services, one is a woman; one of six inspectors in the General Inspection Office is a woman; both the technical consultants are women; none of the seven directors is a woman, and of 20 deputy directors and equivalent, six are women.

The imbalance in the judiciary is not due to women not yet having reached the required level to occupy such positions, since the number of women eligible to occupy these decision-making positions has increased in recent years. Indeed, seven women judges occupy the highest judicial office compared to 63 men, 45 are fourth grade judges compared to 211 men, and 35 women are third grade judges compared to 191 men.

There are still many prejudices against promoting women to decision-making positions, generally based on their alleged unavailability.

With a view to giving women the same opportunities as men to sit on decision-making bodies so as to build a just society, the Government of Cameroon has institutionalized the gender approach by creating gender focal points in the public, semi-public and private sectors. The mandate of these focal points is primarily to raise the awareness of management concerning actual implementation of the commitments made by the political authority to promote and protect the gender approach in the context of a positive discrimination system.

Nationality

14. Content and status of the bill on the Code of Persons and the Family

The bill on the Code of Persons and the Family is in every way revolutionary, because it extends special protection to children, women and the family. The authorities and civil society were consulted about all its components. It is well on the way to being adopted, since it is in second reading by the Ministry of Justice before being transmitted to the Head of Government for submission to Parliament.

The text provides for a set of specific measures to protect individuals, families and women, designed to regulate aspects which have been ignored or are insufficiently covered, in existing legislation.

Education

15. Measures taken to improve girls' and women's education and results achieved

The Government's awareness that girls are at a disadvantage in comparison with boys at various levels of education has led it to adopt strategies to improve girls' education and narrow the gender gap. For example, the following action has been taken:

(a) Continued implementation of the policy to provide free primary education, especially free textbooks and free tuition, in order to facilitate access to schooling;

(b) Specific encouragement of girls' enrolment, by:

- Sensitizing parents and communities to the need to enrol their children in school
- Implementing a project to back the reform of technical and vocational education (PARETFOP), one of whose aims is to encourage girls to opt for technical subjects in growth sectors
- Granting, with the support of the African Development Fund, of merit scholarships to prize-winning girls from the National Polytechnic School, the National College for Public Works, the Regional College of Agriculture and the National School of Water and Forestry, who are studying subjects such as agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, forestry, tourism, construction, automotive engineering and metallurgy
- Devising and implementing specific programmes to encourage girls' enrolment in the northern part of the country, which are supported by cooperation agencies
- Ending the practice of making some pupils repeat classes at primary level

(c) In areas hostile to girls' enrolment, assignment of female teachers who hail from those areas;

(d) Greater attention to gender-related problems in curricula and in initial and further teacher training;

(e) Increase in the number of schools in priority education areas (construction of 4,000 classrooms every year) and their equipment with bench tables;

(f) Recruitment of some 40,000 primary-schoolteachers by 2011, especially for posts in priority education areas.

The Government's objective is to broaden access to education for all school-age children and to prevent dropping out. Special emphasis is placed on improving the enrolment of girls living in priority education areas (i.e. the Extrême Nord, Nord, Adamaoua, Sud-Ouest and Nord-Ouest provinces, pockets of under-enrolment in large towns and border areas), children of poor or vulnerable families and children of marginal groups such as the pygmies, the M'bororos, the Baka, etc.

Stocktaking of Government action to promote women's basic education

The Government is combating gender disparity at school. A specific policy has been formulated and is being implemented in this area. The measures have borne fruit and considerable progress has been made, as school enrolment indicators for 2005-2007 show.

Table 1
Population aged 6-11 and primary school enrolment by sex and district in the 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 school years

Province	Number of children aged 4/5						School enrolment*					
	2005			2006			2005/2006			2006/2007		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Adamaoua	69 881	70 695	140 575	76 535	70 903	147 438	80 369	59 220	139 589	85 035	62 974	148 009
Centre	237 468	231 395	468 863	280 967	256 722	537 689	263 845	254 259	518 104	279 190	267 251	546 441
Est	74 863	71 961	146 824	79 859	73 733	153 592	78 914	67 956	146 870	86 849	74 069	160 918
Extrême-Nord	264 689	262 113	520 802	270 251	254 796	525 047	288 584	184 296	472 880	302 990	198 366	501 356
Littoral	191 817	192 231	430 048	234 670	210 999	445 669	153 071	148 451	301 522	160 871	155 429	316 300
Nord	121 164	115 074	280 238	147 056	138 502	285 558	155 644	96 403	252 047	172 083	109 776	281 859
Nord-Ouest	177 003	174 261	297 264	149 213	148 884	298 097	185 170	171 290	356 460	189 164	174 766	363 930
Ouest	188 640	191 705	320 345	157 643	166 696	324 339	232 199	217 412	449 611	236 972	21 111	458 083
Sud	54 665	51 450	106 115	56 427	51 120	107 547	54 840	50 455	105 295	59 225	54 705	113 930
Sud-Ouest	117 243	120 663	237 906	126 511	113 252	239 763	109 949	106 808	216 757	116 354	113 177	229 531
Total	1 497 433	1 481 549	2 948 982	1 579 132	1 485 607	3 064 739	1 602 585	1 356 550	2 959 135	1 688 733	1 431 624	3 120 357

Source: Bureau Central du Recensement et des Études de Population (BUCREP)/MINAFER planning unit estimate.

* Data from the 2006 school census.

In 2006/2007, the number of children enrolled rose by 5.4 per cent over the previous year, from 2,959,135 to 3,120,357 pupils. Girls made up 45.88 per cent of all primary school enrolments in 2006/2007, compared with 45.84 per cent in the 2005/2006 school year.

The figures in the above table show that the gender parity index was 0.85 for the whole country in 2003/2004 and 0.90 in 2006/2007.

Table 2
Main indicators of primary school coverage in 2006/2007

Province	Gross enrolment ratios								Net enrolment ratios				Gross admission ratios			
	2003/04			Gender parity index	2006/07			Gender parity index	2006/07			Gender parity index	2006/07			Gender parity index
	Boys	Girls	Total		Boys	Girls	Total		Boys	Girls	Total		Boys	Girls	Total	
Adamaoua	113.83	80.87	97.26	0.71	111.11	88.82	100.39	0.80	83.46	68.93	76.47	0.83	116.92	95.86	106.67	0.82
Centre	114.48	112.24	113.37	0.98	99.37	104.10	101.63	1.05	77.07	81.38	79.13	1.06	84.35	87.22	85.74	1.03
Est	109.62	97.58	103.72	0.89	108.75	100.46	104.77	0.92	81.74	77.46	79.68	0.95	109.33	105.16	107.30	0.96
Extrême-Nord	113.06	70.75	92.01	0.63	112.11	77.85	95.49	0.69	91.36	65.11	78.62	0.71	109.05	79.87	94.72	0.73
Littoral	93.37	89.18	91.27	0.96	68.55	73.66	70.97	1.07	53.76	58.21	55.87	1.08	55.21	57.23	56.18	1.04
Nord	117.28	74.94	96.66	0.64	117.02	79.26	98.70	0.68	80.53	66.23	73.59	0.82	104.26	80.01	92.36	0.77
Nord-Ouest	96.27	90.54	93.43	0.94	126.77	117.38	122.08	0.93	95.62	89.68	92.65	0.94	96.04	87.62	91.79	0.91
Ouest	129.65	119.26	124.41	0.92	150.32	132.64	141.24	0.88	98.36	93.81	96.02	0.95	116.24	100.23	107.92	0.86
Sud	105.49	105.35	105.42	1.00	104.96	107.01	105.94	1.02	80.17	83.51	81.76	1.04	96.47	98.72	97.55	1.02
Sud-Ouest	85.17	79.22	82.15	0.93	91.97	99.93	95.73	1.09	75.22	81.87	78.36	1.09	79.16	85.45	82.16	1.08
Total	108.14	92.05	100.14	0.85	106.94	96.37	101.81	0.90	80.76	75.44	78.18	0.93	93.25	84.09	88.76	0.90

It must, however, be noted that the results are somewhat mixed when it comes to completion of schooling. The situation in the northern provinces calls for additional efforts. This means that parents must still be made aware of the need to send their daughters to school, to encourage them to go to school and, above all, to keep them in school.

Table 3
Completion rates by province and by sex in 2006/07

<i>Province</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Synthetic parity index</i>
Adamaoua	73.00	46.91	59.88	0.64
Centre	84.34	86.21	85.27	1.02
Est	64.23	50.20	57.36	0.78
Extrême-Nord	58.08	26.70	42.47	0.46
Littoral	76.48	77.44	76.96	1.01
Nord	76.32	34.71	56.05	0.45
Nord-Ouest	94.65	94.06	114.36	0.99
Ouest	85.60	84.29	84.94	0.98
Sud	71.88	68.99	70.48	0.96
Sud-Ouest	97.55	90.27	93.86	0.93
Overall	80.83	69.68	75.28	0.86

Source: MINEDUB planning unit/School census 2006.

While the Government is making efforts to encourage female enrolment, more vigorous awareness-raising is needed in the northern provinces where parity ratios remain low.

16. Statistical data and measures in place to address illiteracy

The Ministry of Youth has drawn up a National Literacy Programme (PNA), which it has been implementing since August 2005. This programme is part of the fight against poverty and gives the Ministry an important tool in that regard, supplemented by more incisive strategies, because it specifically targets more vulnerable groups (women, girls, pygmies, street children).

In Cameroon, 5 million persons are illiterate, of whom 65 per cent (about 3,250,000) are women. The following measures have been taken:

- From 2005 to 2008, the PNA received substantial funding of more than 1.8 billion CFA francs for its pilot phase, which will end in 2008 (HIPC funds) (phase II: from 2009 to 2012)
- 2,375 functional literacy centres (CAFs) were opened in 350 communes (about 45 centres per administrative department). These centres are the responsibility of a departmental-level supervisor
- 3,003 communal literacy teachers, 14 per cent of whom are women, were trained to facilitate and monitor functional literacy activities

- 120,000 persons were taught literacy, of whom 60 per cent were women
- Three types of teaching aids were developed and produced.

Furthermore, literacy units have been established in the Centres for the Advancement of Women and the Family, to combat female illiteracy, under the Ministry of Youth.

Multifunctional Centres for the Promotion of Youth have also been set up throughout Cameroon, under the Ministry of Youth. At these centres, functional literacy workshops are open to the general public and to women in particular. There are currently 55 in operation.

Health

17. **Legislation on abortion and increased access by women to contraception; sex education in school curricula and awareness-raising campaigns to prevent teenage pregnancy**

There has been no change in the national legislation on abortion; the information contained in Cameroon's initial report remains valid.

Abortion continues to be a subject of discussion among all social strata in Cameroon. It should be noted that, in our society, motherhood is extremely sacred. The desire to have children is linked to the desire for renewal and continuity of one's race, family line, or sociological group. Children thus serve as a sort of bridge between generations past and present, while representing future prospects for communities. Traditional African philosophy recognizes the permanent bond that links societies and families to their ancestors, as illustrated by the tremendous pride which all Africans in our country take in their genealogical roots.

According to these age-old and shared socio-cultural convictions, our ancestors remain by our side, even though we cannot physically see them, and their life and work are perpetuated through their children, who indeed inherit their names, defend them and boast about them so that their names can go down in their communities' history. Therefore, any abortion performed for non-medical or non-therapeutic reasons, i.e. other than to save the life of the mother or child, impedes the expression of this vital social dynamic.

One aspect which tends to be overlooked is worth noting: the tremendous joy that the possibility of having a child brings to women, as well as to men and families. Think for a moment of the anguish felt by the many couples who do not have children; think of the thousands of women and men who, in spite of their comfortable material existence, desperately want a child, even if it means adopting just one child. Think of the prospect of growing old alone, and even of being alone on one's deathbed.

Those who undergo abortions expose themselves to a number of risks, including death. Everyone knows of at least one woman or girl who died following a voluntary termination of pregnancy and related complications, including intestinal aspiration, haemorrhaging, infections, and retention of foetal membranes. There are also after-effects such as sterility, ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage, perforation or ablation of the uterus, permanent sterility ... and distress.

Abortion is made out to be a matter of conscience or conviction, without mentioning that it is murder. It is portrayed as a freedom without mentioning that the mother exercises this freedom to the detriment of the child's. Abortion is elevated to the rank of a right and dignity.

Modifications in individual and collective human behaviour — influenced by modernity, economic constraints, and social changes arising from the introduction of new ideologies and scientific and technical progress — must not lead to an erosion in basic values, to cultural and ethical nihilism, or to a decline of the principles which were the basis for the harmonious existence of the earliest societies for which we are nostalgic today. Does not legalizing abortion mean depriving children of their right to life and giving mothers the right to dispose of that right as they see fit?

We agree that women face real problems. In that regard, it should be noted that our country's Parliament is concerned and is supporting the Government's actions to identify suitable solutions. However, all these issues definitely extend beyond the limited scope of private and even family life. Indeed, issues relating to birth, population and the family have major moral, social and political aspects.

The current repositioning of family planning is designed to strengthen it so as to enhance the availability and accessibility of modern methods of contraception. Abortion should not be confused with contraception.

Girls are one of the main target groups of family planning. Considerable efforts are being made to educate young people and adolescents and raise their awareness of sexuality and family life. In that context, family life education is now part of school curricula: 15 schools have been participating in this experiment since 2001.

HIV/AIDS education in primary, middle and secondary schools covers a number of aspects relating to safer sex, including:

- social life education
- marriage education
- reproductive health and basic information on sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV and AIDS
- attitudes and skills needed to promote precautionary behaviour (and avoid risky behaviour)
- improved availability of contraception
- sex education in school curricula.

Pregnant girls have the right to stay in school. Indeed, their exclusion from public schools is forbidden. They return to school immediately after their maternity leave. This is particularly easy in a country in which a sense of African solidarity and the sense of shared family responsibility are very much alive. Girls who wish to continue their schooling can do so with complete peace of mind, entrusting their infants to their mothers or grandmothers, in short to their family. The reasonably priced day nurseries and day-care centres that have been set up will help to resolve the logistical issues faced by families.

18. Clarification on the practice of “breast ironing”

In Cameroon, “breast ironing” does exist, but on a small scale. It does not entail the use of an iron to flatten breasts. Rather, in some cases, objects like stones or spatulas are heated and massaged or placed on girls’ developing breasts in order to prevent early puberty which would attract the lustful gaze of men and create a risk of early and unwanted pregnancy. The phenomenon was brought to light through a study conducted by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) in 2006 and by two anthropologists in 2007. MINPROFF plans to conduct a study to assess the scope of the phenomenon and put in place adequate strategies to address it. For the time being, campaigns to raise awareness of the effects of such practices on the health of teenage girls are being conducted throughout the country. The aim of these campaigns is to discourage the practice in the areas where it exists.

19. The role of female genital mutilation (FGM) in the draft law for the punishment of gender-based violence

The Government of Cameroon confirms that FGM is a primary focus of the draft law for the punishment of gender-based violence and discrimination.

As to the measures taken to eradicate this practice, MINPROFF has launched a public awareness-raising strategy, also extended to circumcisers, on the serious consequences of FGM for the health of women and girls. The activities involve distributing information, making presentations to the general public on the instruments used, giving personal accounts, posting related images, conducting studies on the phenomenon, and providing socio-professional retraining of circumcisers by granting microcredit to develop income-generating activities.

The regions most affected by this phenomenon are mostly in the northern part and in Sud-Ouest province. Those areas were visited to raise the awareness of administrative, traditional and religious authorities about this ancestral cultural practice. The idea was to change mindsets, spare girls, and retrain circumcisers in other trades. A partnership was established with women’s rights associations in order to expand the education and awareness-raising campaigns against this degrading treatment. Public meetings were held to affirm the authorities’ opposition to this form of mutilation.

Women’s accounts of excision are horrifying. This perverse form of male domination has serious health consequences for girls, such as recurring infection, haemorrhaging — in some cases, serious haemorrhaging — pain during sexual intercourse, incontinence, sterility, death of the mother or baby during childbirth.

This practice has been handed down from generation to generation. It has negative consequences and runs counter to the well-being, dignity, and development of girls, and affects the physical integrity of the human body, leaving indelible physical and emotional scars.

Following the recent awareness-raising campaign carried out in Extrême-Nord province, specifically in Kousseri, female circumcisers voluntarily and publicly turned over their working instruments (knives) to the Minister for the Promotion of Women and the Family, as a sign of their abandonment of the practice and their endorsement of the authorities’ advocacy against it (see photo, attached). It is hoped that this is the beginning of the end of excision in Cameroon. For its part, the

Government is committed to ensuring the retraining of these circumcisers by providing support for their income-generating activities.

Early marriage predisposes girls to early pregnancy, with numerous health consequences, such as dystocia, prolonged labour and obstetric fistulae.

Early marriage robs them of a stage in their development, causing emotional imbalance and manifesting itself in post-traumatic disorders, mental and psychosomatic illnesses and frigidity, thus affecting the very harmony of families.

20. Efforts to combat AIDS, as recommended by the Committee

The strategies of the National AIDS Control Committee for combating HIV/AIDS involve the following:

- Improvement of HIV prevention among young people and families through house calls by peer educators
- Prevention of new infections among women through counselling, voluntary testing and promotion of male and female condoms
- Prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission (PMTCT)
- Universal and equitable access to treatment and care. This strategy has expanded through the free provision of ARV, but fees are still payable for biological monitoring and treatment of opportunistic infections
- Strengthening of campaigns targeting truck drivers and men in uniform.

It is true that some people living with HIV are stigmatized and discriminated against; women suffer more in this regard because they are accused of prostitution. They also bear the burden of home care for people living with AIDS. A girl may abandon her education in order to take care of a sick relative.

There has been a real decline in negative attitudes towards people affected by the disease. This is due to awareness-raising campaigns and efforts to explain how the disease is transmitted, but also to the spirit of solidarity and African hospitality which the influence of the modern world has not managed to dispel.

In the light of the feminization of HIV, a sectoral strategy has been drawn up and implemented for women and families. It covers the promotion of voluntary HIV testing and of the use of male and female condoms, the reduction of high-risk behaviour, prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission, capacity-building for the various actors and partners, gender mainstreaming, stepped-up campaigns targeting single women, widows, prostitutes and poor families, the strengthening of harmony and cohesion within families, gender awareness efforts aimed at AIDS control partners, and the development of activities to protect the rights and dignity of women.

The Government includes schoolgirls in awareness-raising efforts by organizing activities targeting them, such as “AIDS-free holidays” and “Useful holidays”. As part of these activities, peer educators are trained in all towns, and modules are developed for girls on holiday to protect them against risky behaviour during their holiday. They are also given life and citizenship training courses.

Employment, rural women, access to property and poverty

21. Women's labour force participation in the public and private employment sectors, information on the informal sector, types of legal, social or other services and protection available to women

There are many women at Cameroonian universities. Before enrolling in the first year, all prospective students take an orientation test to help them choose their area of study in accordance with their career aspirations.

Most women who graduate from the various universities with a bachelor's or master's degree apply for admission to one of the training colleges. Women are not barred from any profession. They work in all areas and occupy positions in both the public and the private sectors. Rates of pay are the same for men and women with the same qualifications.

The Civil Service Regulations for civil servants and the Labour Code, as well as particular instruments governing State employees, recognize women's right to family benefits, provided that the husband is not receiving them in cases where the woman is married to another public employee. In addition, working women receive 14 weeks of paid maternity leave. The law in force also prohibits dismissal on grounds of pregnancy.

Women are present at all levels of the workforce. However, there are fewer of them in decision-making positions, while at the operational level they are in the majority.

22. Position of women in the legal and medical professions; measures to encourage girls to enter those fields

More and more women are choosing the liberal professions of lawyer, bailiff and notary. Currently 600 lawyers out of 1,370 called to the bar in Cameroon are women, 96 of the 405 bailiffs are women, and 49 of the 85 notaries are women (in other words, the majority). Many women who take the entrance examination for the National School of Administration and Judicial Studies choose the profession of clerk of the court, which is ranked lower in the civil service than that of member of the judiciary. There are currently 153 women among the 580 clerks of the court.

No measures have been taken to encourage women to enter the legal professions. Instead, the Government encourages women to enter scientific fields, including medicine. As part of its policy of assistance to students, the Government provided university grants in 2007 to the top 250 female science students. Many elites also organize ceremonies to reward excellence and encourage girls.

23. Measures to encourage rural women to participate in recreational activities

Recreational facilities suited to the rural environment are part of life in rural communities.

Moreover, the Rural Development Sector Strategy provides for the development of community telecentres and other facilities for the development of sport and recreation. The Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family fosters women's interest in recreation by encouraging them to include leisure activities in the action plans of their associations and by organizing showings of educational films, social and legal clinics, matches and competitions such as "Miss Rural Woman". There are also social and cultural centres for recreational activities,

in which rural women participate actively. Community leaders take responsibility for these activities in rural areas.

24. Women's access to forms of financial credit

Measures are planned to facilitate women's access to bank loans and mortgages, such as the establishment of banks specifically for women and the introduction of new types of guarantee and loan rates that are more accessible to women.

A recent survey conducted by the National Institute of Statistics shows that, over the past two years, 12 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 have obtained investment credit. Analysis by area indicates that the proportion of women receiving credit is highest in Sud-Ouest province, where it stands at 19 per cent, followed by Ouest province (16 per cent), Littoral province (14 per cent), Est province (14 per cent) and the city of Douala (14 per cent). The lowest proportions are in Nord province (4 per cent), Extrême-Nord province (7 per cent), Adamaoua province (9 per cent) and Sud province (9 per cent). More women access credit in urban areas (13 per cent) than in rural areas (10 per cent). Moreover, uneducated women make the least use of credit (7 per cent). The situation is practically the same for those in the poorest quintile of households (7 per cent).

According to statistical data, the rural population in 2007 was estimated at 7,486,608 inhabitants, made up of 3,795,082 women and 3,961,526 men (Cameroon regional socio-economic studies — national outline — Ministry of Economic Affairs, Programming and Regional Development/Project PNUD-OPS CMR/98/005/01/99). In other words, women outnumber men in rural areas.*

As part of the development of the agro-food industry, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has set up mechanisms to give priority support to women, such as the National Roots and Tubers Development Programme (PNDRT), the National Agricultural Extension and Research Programme (PNVRA), the Development Programme for the Maize, Plantain and Cacao Sectors, and the National Lowlands Development Programme, providing support primarily for women farmers. In addition, gender is mainstreamed in some of these programmes, such as the National Agricultural Extension and Research Programme and the National Roots and Tubers Development Programme. There are also "study fields", where interested women and girls can experiment and learn. The "Miss Land" competition is supported under the National Roots and Tubers Development Programme; the winner is not only provided with a study field but also sponsors a root or tuber.

In the absence of statistics, it is difficult to evaluate the direct support provided by MINADER to joint initiative groups, and more specifically to joint initiative groups that are solely or predominantly made up of women.

The action plan for the programmes mentioned above includes a capacity-building component aimed at rural women, which is based on the following elements:

- Efforts to inform rural women about setting up agricultural production associations so that they can enjoy the benefits offered by these programmes
- Modern agricultural techniques

* *Translator's note:* Figures as supplied in the original French text.

- Farm management
- Marketing of agricultural products
- Processing of agricultural products
- Income distribution
- Health and hygiene
- Endemic diseases
- The concept of gender.

MINADER provides support to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in rural areas in their ongoing struggle against poverty and quest for well-being.

Of more than 1,250 microfinance institutions included in the Ministry's register of cooperative societies and joint initiative groups, 163, or more than 10 per cent, are cooperative savings and credit associations solely or predominantly for women that are spread around the country.

During the 2007 fiscal year, 130 million CFA francs were made available by MINADER to microfinance institutions countrywide, and community mutual growth funds distributed 753 million CFA francs to farmers and rural inhabitants of both sexes.

With regard to participation in public life, the Head of State has personally urged rural women to stand for elected office. Thus, there are some women serving in the National Assembly and in municipal executives. As for social life, Cameroon has many women's associations and forums for exchanges, strengthening of sisterhood, mutual assistance and resource mobilization through tontines as an alternative to bank credit, to which many women do not have access.

25. Women's access to land

With regard to land, Cameroonian law is not discriminatory. The difficulties which women experience in gaining access to land are a result of customary practices. However, where there is a conflict between the law and custom, the law prevails. In order to facilitate women's access to land ownership, emphasis is placed on information, education, awareness-raising and advocacy activities targeting customary leaders and heads of household. Women therefore have access to land title in Cameroon.

The awareness-raising campaigns and visits conducted by the leadership of the Ministry of Property and Land Affairs are aimed at publicizing existing procedures with regard to land. In that connection, a document entitled "100 user questions" and a monthly newsletter entitled "Land Info" have been produced and distributed.

A recent survey by the National Institute of Statistics, conducted with the support of UNICEF, shows that some women are the sole owners of houses, with or without title, although the number remains low in comparison with the proportion of men with that status. The proportion of women who own property or land is higher among those who are heads of household. The proportion of women who own a house with or without title is higher among those who have been married or have cohabited with a partner compared with those who are currently married or cohabiting and those who have never been married. Insecurity of ownership or

possession of houses or land without title is common for certain groups of women, such as those in Est province (12 and 13 per cent), Centre province (11 and 13 per cent), and widows and divorced women (13 and 14 per cent).

Gender disparities with regard to land are linked to cultures and practices. The image of girls as future wives and of women as non-stakeholders continues to affect land distribution. In the context of the family, it is held that giving land to a girl means losing the land, because she has to go elsewhere to start a family. In households, it is feared that, if a girl inherits land, the community may lose it in the event of a divorce.

The Government is engaging in social education to promote a reconsideration of the image of girls and women in society.

Refugee women

26. Situation of refugee women, in particular with regard to violence and access to work, education and health

Urban refugees in Cameroon are scattered among the local population in the cities of Yaoundé, Douala and Garoua, with the highest numbers being found in the two main cities. Of the refugee population, 46 per cent are women, 54 per cent are men, 16 per cent are children under the age of 17, and 2 per cent are persons over the age of 60.

Refugee women from friendly countries are particularly drawn to Cameroon as it is a welcoming, peaceful and hospitable land. Some engage in income-generating activities. All go about their business freely and calmly. The Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family encourages them to take part in activities such as those organized on the occasion of Days devoted to women, girls and the family. They are thus able to appreciate the peace they find in Cameroon and to exchange views with Cameroonian women about social and family conditions, the possibilities of joining together to find solutions to their specific problems as women, and their experiences.

Refugees benefit from special support in the areas of health, education and income generation. All refugees receive free health care, irrespective of gender.

Education grants are provided, irrespective of gender, for refugee children enrolled in primary, secondary and higher education and in occupational training centres.

As for income generation, a microcredit programme to promote income-generating activities is in place for refugees (both women and men). Their Cameroonian sisters have placed at their disposal free of charge vast expanses of land for cultivation; refugee women have also been brought into stock-raising projects.

Capacity-building measures are taken to reduce the vulnerability of refugee women to violence. Those who are victims of violence receive psychological and social support and are guided towards judicial structures.

Marriage and family relations

27. Age of marriage for girls and measures to eliminate early marriages

The provisions of the draft legislation enacting the Personal and Family Code set the age of marriage for girls at 18. As regards early and forced marriages, campaigns are mounted to make parents aware of the need to send girls to school, and educational chats are organized with girls to encourage them to report any such cases to the relevant services. Other measures to combat early and forced marriages include a mentoring structure for girls in the Centres for the Advancement of Girls and Women.

Forced marriages are punished by the Penal Code, as are early marriages under the draft legislation on the punishment of gender-based violence and discrimination.

Polygamy is not prohibited by the laws in force and varies in extent according to region and religion. Nowadays, levirate marriage is on the decline owing to a number of factors, including:

- consciousness-raising among women
- prevalence of HIV/AIDS
- involvement of ministers of religion in the conduct of widowhood rites
- poverty
- new awareness of men in the chieftaincies.

The way in which the problem of the choice of family home is resolved has changed in Cameroon. While it is true that the choice rests with the man, women are entitled by law to oppose that choice if it is detrimental to the life or interests of the family or the woman herself.

In addition to the draft legislation enacting the Personal and Family Code, which will extend this right to the two spouses, changes are already in evidence on the ground, thanks in particular to the contribution of members of the judiciary who treat husbands and wives on an equal footing.

This is the response of the Government of Cameroon to the issues and questions raised by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women with regard to the periodic report on implementation in the Republic of Cameroon of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Acronyms

ACAFEJ	Association Camerounaise des Femmes Juristes
ACPEE	Association Camerounaise pour le Plein Epanouissement de l'Enfant
AEC	African Economic Community
ALVF	Association de Lutte contre les Violences faites aux Femmes
ARV	Antiretroviral drugs
ASSEJA	Association Enfants, Femmes et Avenir
AWA	African Women's Association
AWD	African Women's Day
BCC	Behaviour change communication
CAREF	Project on Building the Poverty-Reduction Capacity of Women's Networks in the Republic of Cameroon
CNDHL	National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms
CNLS	National Aids Control Committee
CFFF	Centre for the Advancement of Women and the Family
DGSN	National Security Department
EIG	Economic interest group
ENAAS	École Nationale des Assistants des Affaires Sociales
EOC	Emergency obstetric care
EVF	Family life education
FGM	Female genital mutilation
FESADE	Women-Health-Development
GER	Gross enrolment ratio
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IGA	Income-generating activities
ILO	International Labour Organization
INTERPOL-NCB	INTERPOL — National Central Bureau
IWD	International Women's Day
JIG	Joint initiative group
MFI	microfinance institution
MINADER	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MINAS	Ministry of Social Affairs

MINCOF	Ministry of the Status of Women
MINEDUB	Ministry of Basic Education
MINEE	Ministry of Energy and Water Resources
MINEFOP	Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training
MINEPAT	Ministry of Economic Affairs, Planning and Regional Development
MINESEC	Ministry of Secondary Education
MINESUP	Ministry of Higher Education
MINFI	Ministry of Finance
MINIMIDT	Ministry of Industry, Mines and Technological Development
MINJUSTICE	Ministry of Justice
MINPMEESA	Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts
MINPROFF	Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family
MINREX	Ministry of External Relations
MINSANTE	Ministry of Health
MINSEP	Ministry of Sport and Physical Education
MINTSS	Ministry of Labour and Social Security
NGO	non-governmental organization
PLHA	people living with HIV/AIDS
PMTCT	prevention of mother-to-child transmission
PNA	National Literacy Programme
PNDRT	National Roots and Tubers Development Programme
PNVBF	National Lowlands Development Programme
PNVRA	National Agricultural Extension and Research Programme
RH	Reproductive health
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
WIRA	Women in Research and Action
WOPA	Women's Promotion and Assistance Association
WRWD	World Rural Women's Day
ZEP	priority education area

Circumciser showing a knife used for female circumcision



Formal handing over to the Minister of the knife used for female circumcision

The Minister holding the knife presented to her



Partnership agreement between the circumcisers and the authorities



Group photo of the Minister with the circumcisers
