

Nigeria
(19th session)

138.The Committee considered the combined second and third periodic reports of Nigeria (CEDAW/C/NGA/2-3) at its 396th and 397th meetings, on 2 July 1998 (see CEDAW/C/SR.396 and 397).

Introduction by the State party

139.In introducing the reports, which covered the period from 1987 to 1994, the representative noted that they demonstrated the progress made since the 1986 initial report and identified the remaining areas of difficulty in the promotion of equality between women and men in Nigeria. She noted that the reports addressed the impact of external factors on national efforts to promote equality between women and men.

140.The representative indicated that there had been an awareness-raising campaign concerning the need to have more women legislators and senators and that women had been elected into local government councils and the state and federal legislatures. However, the Government remained unsatisfied with the small number of women in elective positions.

141.The representative noted that, although education and training promoted equality between men and women, certain cultural and traditional practices and beliefs remained obstacles to women's full enjoyment of rights, including in the context of marriage, inheritance and land ownership.

142.The representative informed the Committee that a National Committee of Women and Children reviewed all laws relating to women and children, in order to bring them into conformity with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The National Commission for Women Decree had established a National Commission for Women in 1989 to coordinate the implementation of programmes to facilitate and enhance the advancement of women in Nigeria. The Commission had been upgraded to the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development. In addition, the state Ministries of Women Affairs and Social Development had been established in the 36 states of the Federation.

143.The representative informed the Committee that the Ministry of Women's Affairs sought to raise awareness among women and men of the need to empower women and to forge a new partnership based on mutual respect for the family. The Ministry of Women's Affairs had emphasized the importance of education and the acquisition of skills for women and girls.

144.The representative described several temporary special measures which had been adopted by the Government, including education committees relating to women, the appointment of women to decision-making positions and poverty alleviation measures to improve the economic status of women. She noted that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had been published in a simplified version by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development.

145.The representative noted that traditional practices had affected rural women more than urban educated women. The 1979 constitution, particularly article 31, addressed certain of these practices, and seminars for women had been organized to discourage these traditional practices. Domestic violence was seldom reported because of fear of reprisal and lack of response from law enforcement officials. Statistics relating to this problem would not be available until women were motivated to report domestic and other forms of violence.

146.The representative described measures to inform Nigerian women of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, including the production of instruction manuals and workbooks on the 12 critical areas of concern.

147.The representative noted that commercial banks frequently denied women credit because of lack of creditworthiness, and the Government had implemented several credit schemes, including the Family Economic Advancement Programme, which operated credit facilities for women and family units for the promotion of family enterprises.

148.The representative informed the Committee that rural women played an essential role in the agricultural sector, but had only been recognized in development plans within the last decade. She described several Government measures to address that situation.

149.The representative concluded by noting that, although significant progress had been achieved, much work still needed to be done in order to eliminate some of the customary, traditional and religious practices which impeded the advancement of women.

Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

150.The Committee commends the Federal Republic of Nigeria for having ratified the Convention in June 1985 without reservations. The Committee also commends the Government on the level of the delegation, led by the Minister for Women's Affairs and Social Development.

Positive aspects

151.The Committee notes with satisfaction that progress had been made in some areas since the previous report. Such progress includes the establishment of a Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Advancement of Women, and an increase in school attendance rates for girls and literacy rates for women. The number of women in decision-making posts had also increased.

152.The Committee commends the Government of Nigeria for improving rural women's access to drinking water and electricity.

Factors and difficulties affecting implementation of the Convention

153.The Committee notes the predominance of cultural stereotypes that are prejudicial to women. The Committee is also disturbed to learn about the continued existence of such practices as polygamy, inhumane rites undergone by widows, female circumcision and similar customs, which present serious dangers to the physical and emotional health of women and violate their fundamental human rights.

154.The coexistence of three legal systems, civil, religious and customary, make it difficult to adopt and enforce laws which genuinely protect women's rights.

Principal subjects of concern and the Committee's recommendations

155.The Committee regrets that the Government did not reply to all the questions raised in connection with the second and third periodic reports. The Committee recommends that Nigeria include answers to these questions in its next periodic report.

156.The Committee is very concerned about religious and customary laws and practices in the family context that violate women's human rights.

157.The Committee recommends that effective measures be taken to change laws and cultural norms which allow such practices as polygamy, one-sided repudiation, unequal subsistence rights and shares, as well as preventing women to travel without the permission of a male relative.

158.Notwithstanding ratification of the Convention without reservations, the Committee is concerned that the Convention is not being implemented within an adequate legal and constitutional framework.

159.The Committee recommends that the Government should fully respect the commitments and obligations arising under the Convention and that it should adopt all necessary measures in this regard.

160.The Committee is concerned by the lack of statistical data in the reports. While there are financial constraints in this context, the use of statistics allows a clearer understanding of progress since the previous report, including in the areas of domestic violence, prostitution, women's labour, including in the informal sector, and women's and children's health.

161.The Committee recommends that the Government should collect statistical information disaggregated by sex in all areas of importance in the lives of women and that such data should be used in future reports.

162.The Committee is concerned about the inadequate representation of women in the judiciary.

163.The Committee recommends that temporary special measures in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention be adopted to increase the participation of women in the judiciary.

164.The Committee is seriously concerned at the various forms of violence against women that exist in Nigeria and the absence of laws, programmes and policies to address this serious problem.

165.The Committee recommends that the Government collect information on this issue and introduce and enforce appropriate laws, programmes and policies to confront all forms of violence against women. It further recommends the establishment of shelters for victims and the introduction of measures to ensure that women are protected from reprisal where they report their victimization. The Committee also recommends the introduction, at all levels of education, of courses on women's and children's rights, as well as public awareness campaigns with regard to these issues.

166.Notwithstanding the Government's efforts in the field of education, the Committee is concerned at the low literacy rate among women and the low attendance rate by girls at secondary institutions.

167.The Committee encourages the Government to increase its efforts through implementation of a specific programme to reduce illiteracy among women, particularly in rural areas, and promote access by girls to secondary education. The Government should ensure that primary education is free.

168.The Committee is concerned that there are no statistics and information on AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. The Committee also notes that polygamy and prostitution were serious risk factors in the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

169.The Committee recommends that statistical data and information be compiled on the incidence of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

170.The Committee is alarmed by the rates of maternal and infant mortality and the lack of medical facilities for women and children.

171.The Committee encourages the Government to increase its efforts to guarantee access to medical services and hospital medical facilities, particularly in the context of women's health needs. The Committee notes that family planning programmes must be available to all, including young women and men, and stresses women's right to receive informed and reliable medical care. The Committee recommends that free access to health services should be a priority for Government. In this regard, it recommends that the Government take account of the recommendations of the United Nations Development Programme with respect to sustainable human development.

172.The Committee notes with concern that rural women had little access to education and to credit facilities.

173.The Committee recommends that the Government strengthen its socio-economic programmes so as to reduce discrimination suffered by rural women.

174.The Committee requests the wide dissemination in Nigeria of the present concluding comments in order to make the people of Nigeria, and particularly Government administrators and politicians aware of the steps that have been taken to ensure de facto equality for women and further steps that are required in that regard. It also requests the Government to continue to disseminate widely, and in particular to women's and human rights organizations, the Convention, the Committee's general recommendations and the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action.