

SEYCHELLES

COUNTRY REPORT

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

**JUNE 1999
MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS
AND MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT**

COUNTRY REPORT - SEYCHELLES

PART 1 - Public Sector

Seychelles National Gender Steering committee

In 1993, two years prior to the Beijing World Conference, a national Gender Steering Committee composed of members from the Public Sector and the NGOs was set up in Seychelles - to effectively implement gender strategies outlined in the National Human Resource Development Plan.

The Committee's role was to coordinate activities of the focal points located within the different sectors. The terms of reference included

- Coordinating and preparing a 2-3 year Action Plan based on the strategies of the Human Resource Development Plan
- Coordinating the implementation of the Action programme at national level.
- Assisting and monitoring the establishment of a gender network at sectoral/organisational level.
- Ensuring that appropriate capacity building programmes are implemented to enhance skills in gender
- Sensitising the general public on gender mainstreaming in relation to Human Resource Development.

- Ensuring that relevant gender disaggregated human resource data is collected, up-dated and analysed at enterprise level.

After the 4th World Conference on Women, this Committee also took on board the responsibility for the public sectors implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action.

1. Women and Poverty

This is an area which, up to now, has not been considered as critical in Seychelles. Statistics show that the average Seychellois earns an income which allows him/her to live well above poverty level. It must be pointed out, nonetheless that research regarding the specific economic situation of women has not been undertaken.

Women whose household income is under the subsistence level may be means-tested for welfare assistance.

2. Education and Training of Women

Education

A Gender Strategy and Action Plan was prepared in 1996 by the Ministry of Education. The two-pronged approach consisted of

- a) gender sensitisation and capacity building
- b) mainstreaming gender in education

Since 1977, a policy of free and compulsory education for all as well as equitable distribution of resources have minimised gender gaps in education. Boys and girls in Seychelles are equally represented at all levels of education from creche to Polytechnic. Equality of access is therefore not a problem for Seychelles. Nonetheless in order to provide gender responsive education, the content and methods of education have to be rendered more gender sensitive.

In 1996, the Ministry of Education launched a major sensitization programme with the help of a consultant funded by the CFTC. Workshops were held for curriculum developers, careers guidance teachers, heads of schools, teacher trainers and classroom teachers. Three hundred staff have already been trained and the workshops are continuing this year for Polytechnic staff. The contents of programmes and teaching materials have been screened for gender biases and staff that has been trained is now more aware of hidden messages and stereotyping. For many this was an eye-opener because as we know, gender biases are largely unintentional.

Twenty staff in education were also trained as trainers and can now conduct gender sensitization. A manual for trainers has been compiled.

Most of the Directors and Head of Units in Education followed a course in Gender Planning and Management organized in December 1996. There is growing awareness in the Ministry that the broad goal 'Education for All' must be sharpened and re-interpreted to mean Education for All Boys and Education for All Girls. Recent policy documents recognise the differing

needs of girls and boys. Exam results and education statistics are now more systematically gender disaggregated so that the progress of both genders in education can be monitored and disparities highlighted¹.

Professional Training

The policy for equal opportunity in education applies for local and overseas training. The gap between men and women proceeding on professional overseas training has progressively been reduced. In 1997, 47% of such trainees were women. Since individuals proceeding on overseas training have to be prepared to deal with specific social demands, including separation from the family, the government introduced **Distance Education** in 1997 available at subsidised rates to local students. This facility allows women and men to acquire professional qualifications without having to leave their country and their family.

3. Women and Health

Health care in Seychelles is free at the point of service and is based on the provision of **Primary Health Care** services at district level, and centralized specialist services.

Due to improved health care for women, the infant mortality rate has fallen from an average of 17/1000 live births in the 1980s to 8.1/1000 in 1997. Life expectancy is 73 years for women and total fertility rate has fallen from 3.96 to 2.32 in 1996.

¹ Information about Education provided by Marouk Pardiwalla.

Family Planning (FP) services are available at every district health center and clients can attend the FP clinic of their choice. There are currently 10,700 women using modern contraceptive methods in the country, they represent 51% of all women aged 15 to 49 and an estimated 66% of those who are sexually active. Since many doctors and nurses have revealed that they are not comfortable about providing contraceptives to girls under 18 because of personal beliefs and/or perceived legal constraints, the Youth Centre can, and does, provide young people with professional counselling, access to condoms and referral to other professionals.

The maternity at the Seychelles Hospital offers a high standard of care to all pregnant women. **Ante-natal care** is given in 6 districts and on the islands of Praslin, La Digue and Silhouette with availability of ultrasound and counselling services to those who want them.

There has been a reduction in the incidence of cervical cancer. The reasons could be that: 1) the services offered for screening are well used, indicating that better women education has made Seychellois women more conscious of their health and 2) the Ministry of Health offers quality screening services to women.

According to international evaluation missions, the Seychelles offers outstanding Primary Health care services to its population and presents

remarkable maternal and infant health indicators with prenatal coverage being almost 100%².

4. Violence Against Women

Revision of Penal code 1996 makes provision for specific kinds of violence, including sexual harassment. It increases the chances of conviction of the aggressor on the basis of evidence obtained from the victim without the need for corroborating evidence. In cases of sexual offences, therefore, corroborating evidence is not insisted upon and an offender can be convicted on the sole evidence of the victim. At the same time, the legalization of rape in marriage has been removed. Penal Code Section 130-153 and recent amendments make it possible to prosecute the husband for rape in marriage.

A proposed Act for the Prevention of Domestic Violence offering protection to women from family violence is currently being considered by the Attorney General's office. The proposed Act offers easier access to restraining and protection orders in cases of violent threats and harassment by the spouse. The Act also offers temporary relief to women victims of spousal violence by allowing the victim an injunction order against the violent spouse unlike the current pattern of the women victim having to flee the matrimonial home with the children whilst the male aggressor enjoys the full comfort of the home.

² Information about Health provided by Peggy Vidot.

The 1995 Evidence Amendment Act also makes provision for abused children or women to give evidence in court either in chambers or via short circuit television, accompanied by friends or relatives who can offer emotional support.

Child protection has been receiving quality attention by government over the last three years. The National Commission for Child Protection (NCCP) chaired by the Minister for Social Affairs and Manpower Development formulates child protection policies and oversees implementation of same. The NCCP has recently approved a series of media programmes on child protection that are currently being put together. Seychelles is, at this very moment, looking at the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and drawing up monitoring mechanisms for its implementation. There is a 24-hour operational help line for children in distress manned by social workers in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Manpower Development.

There have been concerted efforts in public sensitization and education on the issue of domestic violence with the aim of replacing the tolerant and passive reaction to domestic violence with condemnation and determination to break the recurring cycle.

Joint efforts are ongoing with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Manpower Development (Social Affairs and Probation) to sensitise and train officers on the management of domestic violence cases. These efforts need to be intensified with regards to police reaction to incidence of domestic violence

which unfortunately are still often shrugged off as 'normal private family affairs'.

The personal and social education programme of the Ministry of Education has recently incorporated relevant issues in the preventive education of violence against women. Preventive education in domestic violence is also included in the family education package of the Family Centre in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Manpower Development.

The duties and obligations of fatherhood have been highlighted by the Head of State himself in many speeches. This was re-enforced by legal and policy measures. A Maintenance Orders Reciprocal Enforcement Act was promulgated in 1997 and deals with children issues barring judgement on paternity. In 1998, the Government set up a Family Tribunal which deals with legal issues of family problems, especially with regard to maintenance of children and women. Procedures that used to be costly, long and formal, are now dealt with by the Tribunal which meets twice a week.

Seychelles, to date, has a general climate of non-tolerance to violence against women but there is still a lot more to be done, from prevention to management of the issue.

5. Women and the Economy

Since 1996 the government has been promoting the idea of self-employment and encouraging men and women to set up their own businesses. Resources have been made available to both men and women in the form of loans. This is managed by the Seychelles Industrial Development Corporation (SIDEK) under the Young Enterprise Scheme. In 1997, SR 13,322,400 (\$2.3 million) was disbursed to women - this represented 41% of approved loan applications.

The Development Bank of Seychelles which funds larger commercial projects, presently has 102 women with active loans. This represent 10% of the bank's clients. The amount disbursed to women is SR 20.5 million. Businesses operated by women belong to the following categories: industry, services, agriculture, tourism and fisheries.

For the Seychelles Credit Union, 55% of the clients are women who borrow as well as save proportionately, more funds than men.

In the public sector, special considerations are given to parents with children below crèche age. In 1996, the government made provision for parents with children very young to apply for flexible working hours and home based work. Many mothers are now also able to work on a part-time basis, which gives them time to look after their small children. There has also been gradual extension of maternity leave by law from six weeks to the current three months.

To enable women to take up full-time employment, facilities such as day care centers are indispensable. Many private individuals have set up businesses in this area. The government has also built 9 daycare centres in 8 different districts during the period 1995-97. The centres are leased for operation with the special condition that they be opened between 0700 hrs and 1730 hrs.

6. Women in Power and Decision-making

Women in Seychelles have from the establishment of our republic, been part of our decision makers. Women presently make up 23% of ministerial appointments and 24% of the National Assembly (Parliament). The number of decision making female employees in the Public and Parastatal sectors has constantly been increasing and figures stood at 31% and 5% respectively in 1997. No formal figures are yet available for the private sector.

It should be noted that the number of female participants attending courses at the Seychelles Institute of Management has always been very high. Women trainees currently represent 65% of all those being trained in various management skills.

7. Human Rights of Women

Seychelles **charter of fundamental human rights and freedoms** is contained in the Constitution of 1993 which applies to all citizens irrespective of gender but with due consideration to the child bearing role of women. Included are the rights to liberty, privacy, property, education, work and shelter. (See the notes at the end of the section for more detail.)

8. Women and the Media

The Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation makes a conscious effort to avoid portraying stereotyped images of women. Staff have been taught to be aware of such pitfalls and to strive to portray women in productive duties, in situations involving technology, as well as in their reproductive role and in domestic situations.

Over the last few years there has been greater coverage in SBC's broadcasts, on TV and radio, of issues that are of concern to women. There have been a number of programmes on topics such as abortion, violence against women (rape, domestic violence), opportunities for women, women's legal rights, etc.

The SBC has also decided to modify its approach to staff recruitment and to find ways to employ more women in the ranks of its technical operators and engineering staff. However, it has not yet found qualified women to fill any of the technical posts. On the other hand, women constitute the majority of

SBC's production and journalistic staff and occupy most of the senior management positions - Programmes Officer (AM Radio), Programmes Manager (FM Radio), Chief Editor (TV News), Marketing Manager, Administration and Personnel Manager.

9. The Girl-child

Rules regarding attending school have been modified. It is now possible for girls to reintegrate the system of education after childbirth. This has occurred specially at Polytechnic level. In some cases, girls were 'rehabilitated' after abortions and were able to continue their studies after circumstance had forced them to interrupt them for a while.

At the Youth Health Centre, counsellors provide education and support for girls in need. A special approach allows a girl to develop from problem child to educator or peer counsellor thus closing the loop.

The girl-child is being given opportunities to express herself and more of them are coming forward to sensitize the community to their needs'.

Notes:

1. This report was prepared by the Seychelles Institute of Management
2. Civil and human rights of women in Seychelles also include the following:

- Women can own property in their own right. Women are also encouraged to put names of both partners/spouses in title deed for lands and houses when they are married or co-habiting. Under the law, a surviving spouse's (male or female) claims take precedence over other heirs, and children inherit equal shares irrespective of their sex.
- Women who have had children from common-law husbands may claim alimony for the children at one-fifth of the man's salary per child. For defaulters there is the possibility of automatic deduction of alimony from their pay by their employers.
- A married woman can claim alimony from an offending husband by applying for a "non-cohabitation order" from a magistrate's court.
- In cases of divorce, the law favours giving custody of very young children to their mother.
- In the enforcement of the Judgment Act of 1971, which deals with breaches of contract, negligence etc, imprisonment terms are not applicable to women offenders. They are not subject to civil imprisonment because of their role as mothers and nurturers.
- Pregnant women are exempted from night duty from the 5th month until the time when their babies are 6 months old.
- A Seychellois woman can pass on her nationality to her children born in Seychelles even if her husband is a foreigner.

³ Information about the Girl-Child provided by Rosemarie Elizabeth.

PART 2 - Non-Governmental Sector

THE SEYCHELLES NGO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DAKAR AND BEIJING PLATFORMS OF ACTION.

For some time now there has been a trend of governments slowly moving from being sole providers of needed services to being enablers of the provision of such services. Moves in these directions are resulting not just in changes of NGO/government relations, but in new configurations of roles and responsibilities among all the main sectors and actors in society: the public sector, the private sector, NGOs and the individual citizen. As these new configurations and the social and economic policies on which they are based evolve, it is important to recognise, preserve and strengthen the distinctive contributions NGOs can make.

The Liaison Unit for Non-Governmental Organisations (LUNGOS), like the international Community, has made a commitment to people-centred services based on people-centred development.

Women, Poverty, Insufficient Food Security and Lack of Economic Empowerment.

The international community's commitment to empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is also a commitment of LUNGOS. Seeing the need to further empower Seychellois women LUNGOS brought together 13 NGOs and

formed the **Seychelles Women's Commission**. This body is to work towards getting women empowered to take on stronger roles and play an active part in the decision-making process of the country. Their Mission Statement reflects this;

“Provide a forum to give women a voice and a platform, to ensure that due weight is given to women's informed opinions when formulating policies pertaining to women and women issues.”

The Seychelles Women's Commission is fully committed to the Women's Platform of Action. They are presently organising a National Women's Consultation for 300 women from all walks of life to discuss the Platform of Action, define strategies and priorities for action in order to draft a Seychelles Women's Platform for Action.

LUNGOS set up the **Seychelles Women's Economic Empowerment Scheme (SWEES)** to encourage the financial independence of unskilled, unemployed women. This has resulted in a Community Based Project to be submitted for funding to set up small agricultural projects for women on Praslin and La Digue. We are also submitting projects, for funds, to extend the research to Mahé.

The SWEES programmes will be looking into specific projects to bring about food security through conservation and preservation of fruits, root crop, vegetable and fish. This project on food security will be open to both

men and women, preferably set up as a family income -generating activity. These projects are to reach the unskilled, unemployed women who have spent too many years on social benefits to provide them with a better standard of living.

Since its creation Alliance of Solidarity For the Family has put great emphasis on programmes to alleviate Poverty through the following activities;

- organisation of training workshops on budgeting and book keeping
- facilitation of loan transactions between individual members of the Association and financial institutions
- education of families on the advantages of home based revenue generating activities and cottage industries to help them towards economic self-sufficiency.

ASFF encourages its female members to take challenging opportunities for growth, knowledge, varied skills and improvement of status. ASFF organises activities to celebrate events as well as create awareness to sensitize people on national and international days such as: International Women's Day, Family Day, Mothers/Fathers Day, Population Day.

Members are encouraged to participate in parenting seminars which are organised with the assistance of UNFPA.

The Nurses Association empower the nurses in order to compete for various positions in the nursing field and this adds to their empowerment as women in general, in the world of work.

Atelye Pour Aprana Nouvo Artizana runs a paper recycling project. Young school drop-outs and unemployed youth are trained to recycle paper into useful products with the hope that in 6 to 7 years there will be a noticeable reduction in the import of paper products.

CARITAS, another NGO, has set up two sewing centres for young school leavers especially girls with low educational grades.

All NGOs working on Programmes of a Socio-Economic nature are presently meeting as a Commission to draft a Mission Statement and Objectives. Collectively they will look into the economic activities of men and women alike and provide technical assistance where necessary. They are to seek membership with the NGO bureau of SADC.

Inadequate Access of Women to Education, Training, Science and Technology.

Education in Seychelles is compulsory for both girls and boys, and our culture has it that girls are not discriminated as regards to education. The Ministry of Education makes no discrimination between the sexes.

We have very few NGOs operating in this field, namely, the **Seychelles Headteacher's Association** and the **Early Childhood Development Association**.

Women's Vital Role in Culture, the Family and Socialization.

ASFF aims to establish greater equality and equity between men and women by promoting their equal partnership in the family and community life by formulating objectives and strategies to sensitise the population on family related issues. The Association is about to launch a Community-based Parenting Education Programme for families in several district.

NGOs working for and with families are to be grouped into the Health and Social Welfare Commission.

The Seychelles Women's Commissions together with a few of our female members of the National Assembly have discussed the issue of violence against women especially family-based violence.

This year a committee initiated by LUNGOS was set up. The Government responded positively in that many sectors nominated a representative to the Committee. Together the Committee looked into ways of raising awareness and how to sensitize the public on the issue of Violence Against Women. On the 28th of November 1998, there were meetings aimed at preventing this form of behaviour that is destroying the fabric of the family unit. The Recommendations of the community debates were used as one of the papers

for a Workshop held on the 5th December 1998 to find the solutions to Violence Against Women. The end result was a guiding document for the Attorneys General's Office to draft a Bill on Violence Against Women. An Exhibition was held on Mahe, Praslin, and La Digue to raise awareness on Violence Against Women. The Police, MISD, Probation Division, NCC, SAWOP, SHDC, SWARS, to name but a few put up exhibits.

LUNGOS funded by UNIFEM and with the assistance of the Ministry of Education is launching a poster Competition on Violence against Women. This will help sensitize and get the views of school children on the whole issue of family-based violence.

ASFF will this year (May 1999) launch their 'Hot Line' to assist those affected by Family Based Violence. Training in counselling is being organised for the purpose.

Improvement of Women's Health, Reproductive Health including Family Planning and Integrated Population Programmes.

The Nurses Association supports the Primary Health Care approach in that nurses have taken active leadership roles in very comprehensive programmes that take care of all ages; from birth to the terminally ill, the elderly, and the dying.

As Seychelles has a matrifocal Society the nurses in their every day role encourage men to participate actively in community life, but specifically in

the roles as fathers. ASFF takes it further into the family. As of this year programmes for male responsibility and participation will be developed by ASFF with assistance from IPPF. The Association in collaboration with IPPF is embarking on Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme as well as family Planning Service.

ASFF has established a Youth Committee which is to look into setting up programmes on youth sexuality and reproductive health, as of 1999, through community-based approaches.

H.I.V and AIDS Support Organisation (HASO) offers physical, psychological and emotional support to people suffering from H.I.V and AIDS and their friends and relatives.

The **Soroptimist Club** is preparing information leaflets on contraceptive methods and sexually transmitted diseases, in Creole and English, in collaboration with Seychelles Association of Women Professionals (SAWOP), UNFPA and the Ministry of Health. They have also assisted with travel and accommodation for a highly experienced Consultant in family planning and reproductive health, whose services were funded by the Seychelles government and UNFPA to run refresher /update courses in family planning and basic psychosexual counselling for doctors and nurses who provide family planning services.

The Soroptimist Club also have provided a colposcope, as a joint project with the SAWOP, to the Victoria Hospital. This instrument is an invaluable

tool in the prevention, early detection and treatment of cancer of the uterine cervix.

Women's Relationship and Link Organisations to Environment and Natural Resources.

Sustainable development in a small island state depends on healthy ecosystems and the benefits they provide. Should development go unchecked, natural resources depleted, and the population allowed to grow rapidly, we, as an island nation, will face a future of poverty with gross environmental degradation.

LUNGOS, aware of such dangers, has initiated the setting up of an Environment Commission.

The SWEES Committee in its efforts to set up women (of a low-income bracket) into viable cottage industries take into consideration the possible depletion of natural resources, especially where endemic plants is concerned (hat and bag industry)

The Political Empowerment of women

The SPPF Women's League, a political body of women, carry out a series of empowerment programmes for women at grassroot level, these programmes include educating women of their rights and empowering them to take up responsibility at a local and national level. Of this empowered

group two are Ministers and a number are Members of the National Assembly (Parliament).

Women's Legal and Human Rights and Women with Special needs

To date there is no NGO operating in the legal field. The Chairperson of LUNGOS is by profession a lawyer and so gives legal advice to all member NGOs.

As regards women's legal rights the Seychelles Women's Commission will be seeking the assistance of the female members of the National Assembly.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Manpower Development in collaboration with LUNGOS launched a 2 days workshop to review and further discuss the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Women with Special needs

The Disabled: The National Council for the Disabled (NCD) is the Policy making body pertaining to disability issues in Seychelles. Affiliated to it is the Seychelles Disabled People's Organisation a body regrouping persons with disabilities from the age of 18 onwards. The Parents Association of the Disabled (PODAS) carried out a number of educational and training activities for parents. The majority of members are mothers.

The Aged: The Inter Generation Association of Senior Citizens , recently set up, looks into the welfare of our Senior Citizens, women and men.

ASFF shows its commitment through its participation in Human Rights issues which is integrated into Educational Programmes and Activities such as: Women's Rights as being Human Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child, IPPF Charter on Human Rights

Women, Information, Communication and the Arts

The Seychelles Press Association (SPA) and the Association for Visual Arts have both men and women as members but our Creole Culture being what it is does not necessitate special programmes for women. They participate on an equal basis.

The Girl Child

In Seychelles NGOs play a very small role as regards the Girl Child since this is not considered to be a critical issue as is the case on mainland Africa. The girl child has equal opportunities to education, health, nutrition, and later on in life, to employment and political activity.

The organisation Les Li Viv (Let Her/Him Live) not only raises awareness but also picks up the pieces. They serve as a safety net preventing young girls from having abortions and assisting them with counselling, care and employment.

APANA as well as Caritas provide training and empowers the young girls for self-reliance.

An NGO Children and Youth Committee is being considered to deal with all issues pertaining to this vulnerable and important group.

Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

National Level

The NGO body in Seychelles that is to deal with all issues pertaining to women especially the implementation of the Platform of Action, is the Seychelles Women's Commission under the aegis of Liaison Unit of Non-Governmental Organisation (LUNGOS).

Sub-Regional Level

The Reseau Island groups together the NGO Coalitions of Comores, Madagascar, Mauritius, Reunion and Seychelles. Together these NGO bodies discuss issues of common interest. They could, on a sub-regional level take on the Platform of Action. The Secretariat for Reseau Islands is LUNGOS

NOTES:

1. *The NGO report was prepared by LUNGOS*

2. *Abbreviations Used*

ASFF - Alliance of Solidarity for the Family

NARS - Nurses Association of Seychelles

SWEES - Seychelles Women Economic Empowerment Scheme

HASO - H.I.V. and AIDS Support Organisation of the Seychelles

NCC - National Council for Children

SAWOP - Seychelles Association of Women Professionals

SWARS - Social Workers Association of the Republic of Seychelles

APANA - Atelye Pour Aprann Nouvo Artizana

MISD - Management Information System Division

SHDC - Seychelles Housing Development Corporation