

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

Overview of trends in achieving gender equality and  
women's advancement

In the Dominican Republic, the last decade and the current one have been characterized by new and increased interest on the part of civil society and the State in promoting gender equality and guaranteeing citizenship for Dominican women.

Because of the importance and scope of the event, the Fourth World Conference on Women, "Action for Equality, Development and Peace", held in Beijing in September 1995, highlighted the debate on the need for the State, through public policies, to adopt a commitment to achieve gender equity and encouraged the creation of initiatives and instruments to guarantee the effectiveness of the promises made at the Conference.

In the Dominican Republic, the policy geared to achieving gender equality is basically the responsibility of the Department for the Advancement of Women (DGPM), as the government agency specializing in gender issues and dealing with public policies on the subject. The Department also acted as focal point for national preparations for the Fourth Conference.

The gender equality policies formulated by DGPM have been implemented through the Platform for Action for the Advancement of Dominican Women, 1995-2001. Together with the Department's Short, Medium and Long-Term Plan of Action (1996), this constitutes the country's fundamental plan of action concerning gender and development.

The Platform for Action for the Advancement of Dominican Women is the result of a broad process of consultation with both public sectors and civil society, involving an in-depth diagnosis of the situation of Dominican women and leading to consensus regarding the identification of the principal problems facing Dominican women and the necessary corrective measures. This document constitutes the commitment assumed by the Dominican Republic at the Fourth World Conference.

The official gender policy embodied in this document is promotion of the full integration of women in development and recognition of their rights to enjoy full citizenship within the context of sustained, equitable and democratic development. The document proclaims the global strategies of concertation, social and community participation, strengthening of institutions and communication.

Emphasis is placed on the empowerment of women through their participation in public life, strengthening of mechanisms for the advancement of women, and modernization and adaptation of the legal system. Efforts are also concentrated on the elimination of poverty through the integration of women into

macroeconomic and social policies, equality of access to employment, strengthening of productive resources, assistance focused on groups of women in extreme poverty and participation of women in the preservation of natural resources and the environment.

The document also deals with education, culture and communication media, with emphasis on raising education standards and improving the treatment of women in textbooks, promotion of cultural diversity and an inclusive social image that does not discriminate against women in the media. Health issues and violence are dealt with through the promotion of total health and the prevention, punishment and elimination of all forms of violence against women.

In general, the thrust of national policy in gender issues reflects the main areas dealt with in the Beijing Platform. In many of the areas mentioned above, there have been significant achievements or breakthroughs in the Dominican Republic.

#### Empowerment of women

Women are playing a larger role in public life. They are widely involved in party politics. The Dominican Republic now has a potential woman candidate for President, which would have been unthinkable a few years ago.

The reorganized Supreme Court of Justice has 15 members, of whom five or 33.3 per cent are women. Throughout the country's entire democratic history, there had only been one woman member of the Supreme Court of Justice.

In 1998, the National Congress approved the Law on Quotas, as an affirmative action measure allocating to women 25 per cent of the political parties' seats in Congress and local government.

#### Strengthening of mechanisms for the advancement of women

During 1998 and 1999, the Department for the Advancement of Women engaged in a broad process of consultation with a view to the formulation of a proposal for the creation of a Ministry for Women. This effort resulted in the submission of a draft bill concerning the Ministry for Women to the National Congress by legislators from all the political parties represented there.

In addition, the Department for the Advancement of Women has conducted a parallel process of institution strengthening in the areas of technology, programmes and administration in order to assist institutions to play their role and prepare for their transformation into a Ministry for Women.

#### Modernization and adaptation of the legal system

In recent years, an important process of review and modernization of the legal system has taken place in the Dominican Republic.

The latest legislative changes to promote the advancement of Dominican women are the following:

1. Law 24-97 on violence, discrimination and desertion of the family classifies and prescribes penalties for violence against women and domestic and intra-family abuse, sexual assaults, procuring and trafficking in women.
2. Law 55-97 amending the Agrarian Reform Act establishes the principle of equality in all benefits, obligations and legal proceedings concerning agrarian issues.
3. Law 14-97 (Code for the Protection of Children and Adolescents) prescribes penalties for desertion of the family and violence and sexual assaults against family members.
4. Law 855 amending the Labour Code, proclaims the equal rights of men and women in labour matters.
5. Law 14-91 (Labour Law for the public sector) guarantees equal conditions for men and women working in the public sector.

Elimination of poverty through integration of women in macroeconomic and social policies

The above-mentioned Law 14-91 deals with equal access to employment.

Assistance geared to women in conditions of extreme poverty is the subject of the Agrarian Reform Act and other activities undertaken in cooperation with DGPM and specifically by other government sectors.

The Dominican Republic also has the "Worthy Community" Plan, geared to combating extreme poverty and giving special attention to women (female heads of household, single mothers, etc.).

In recent years, attention has been focused on health and violence. In pursuance of Law 24-97, pilot plans for specific sectors have been implemented, such as the plan for information on the subject of non-violence.

Among the aspects mentioned, the greatest success has been achieved in:

Participation of women in public life, strengthening of mechanisms for advancement, modernization and adaptation of the legal system and non-violence.

The increasing attention given in official policy since 1995 to gender equality and women's advancement has important repercussions on public attitudes, information media and other social sectors. It should be emphasized that, in government sectors, the efforts made by specific offices such as the Department for the Advancement of Women have an impact on government units which are traditionally lagging furthest behind in this regard. In the Dominican Republic the women's movement and academic circles have played a leading role in bringing gender issues to the forefront of public opinion.

While it cannot be claimed that priority has been given to the objectives of gender equality and women's advancement in other areas of public policy, it

can be said that in recent years these objectives have received significant attention.

World events, particularly in the financial arena, have affected the lives of women and girls in several ways: by exacerbating poverty, encouraging migrations both to urban areas and abroad, limiting access to services and drawing more women into the informal sector of the economy.

In order to respond to this situation, the Dominican Government has adopted various poverty relief measures, to which reference was made in the preceding paragraphs.

It is not possible to identify exactly how much of the national budget is devoted to equality and women's advancement, because the allocations for the various Ministries and private institutions appear as global items. It is possible only to indicate the funds allocated to the Department for the Advancement of Women, which is the national agency responsible for women's issues:

#### Budget allocation

	Dominican currency	US dollars
1995	5 000 000.00	322 580.00
1996	6 511 831.00	420 118.12
1997	10 119 940.00	652 899.35
1998	12 688 895.00	818 638.38

#### International donations

1997	2 728 400.00	176 025.8
1998	3 381 000.00	218 129.03

As can be seen, the budget allocation is very limited, which has restricted the implementation of the Platform in all its aspects.

3 (a). Following the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Dominican Republic has given special attention to the creation, encouragement and strengthening of machinery for women's advancement, both in its official activities and through non-governmental organizations and civil society. In addition to adopting legislative measures, it has adopted national and international arrangements and instruments to guarantee their effectiveness and to eliminate the marginalization and discrimination still affecting women, guarantee true integration of women in development, promote the defence of their economic, social, civil, political and cultural rights and the effective participation of women in the exercise of power and in decision-making.

The first action of this nature was the creation by Executive Decree in 1995 of the National Committee for Monitoring the National Plan of Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, which is chaired by the Director-General for the Advancement of Women and composed, among others, of the heads of the

Technical Secretariat in the Office of the President, the Ministries of Foreign Relations, Education and Culture, Agriculture, Public Health, the Attorney General of the Republic, the National Planning Office, the Archbishop of Santo Domingo, the Executive Secretary of the Evangelical Church, the Coordinator of NGOs for Women's Issues, the Research Centre for Feminine Action, and Women in Development.

The Committee will follow up and monitor the National Plan of Action for Equality, Development and Peace, which embodies the main actions and measures of the Dominican Government to guarantee equality of women and break down the barriers of discrimination by the year 2001, as well as the regional and international commitments assumed by the country in connection with the Conference.

The Dominican Congress is currently studying a draft bill which would elevate the Department for the Advancement of Women to a Ministry. This new status would give it greater influence in policy-making to benefit women and greater scope for participation in State forums where decisions are taken and power exercised.

In the legislative area, action is being taken to amend codes and special laws which discriminate against women and to publicize, through the various media, the changes of benefit to women. Women are being urged to avail themselves of the legal instruments which protect their rights.

In 1995, the Senate of the Republic decided unanimously to appoint the "Honorary Committee of Women Advisers to the Senate", which is composed of women experts on gender issues drawn from the different political parties; women legislators, jurists, representatives of the women's movement, and the Department for the Advancement of Women. This advisory committee to the Senate of the Republic has played an important role in the process of amending and adopting codes, laws and measures aimed at bringing about changes in the economic, political and social situation of Dominican women.

By Law 605 of 21 June 1995, the Dominican Government ratified the "Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence Against Women". This represented a very significant achievement, since our legal framework presented major lacunae in terms of the treatment and management of violence against women.

Ratification of this Convention has proved highly instrumental in amending Dominican laws to respond to the commitments which the Convention entails for the Dominican Republic.

In addition, ratification of the Convention served as a general frame of reference for the adoption of Law 24-97 of 28 January 1997, which amended the Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Code for the Protection of Children and Adolescents, dealing with violence, discrimination and desertion of family. This Law classifies and prescribes penalties for violence against women and domestic and intra-family abuse; describes and prescribes penalties for sexual assaults; prescribes penalties for procuring and trafficking in women; defines and prescribes penalties for desertion of family and defines and

prescribes penalties for discrimination. Information is given below on some of the amended articles.

In 1998, by Decree No. 423-98, the Dominican Government established the National Commission for the Prevention and Repression of Intra-family Violence with the goal of formulating plans and engaging in activities for the prevention of intra-family violence and for the assistance and rehabilitation of persons affected by it. The Commission is composed of the Attorney-General of the Republic, the Coordinator of the Office of the Commissioner for the Reform and Modernization of Public Health and Social Welfare, representatives of the National Police, of the Attorney-General's Office in the National District, the Department of Community Development, the Department for the Advancement of Women, the Coordinator of NGOs for Women's Issues and two other non-governmental organizations.

The Dominican Government operates programmes in different departments dealing with specific aspects of the situation of women. The principal programmes are:

- (a) Unit on Women, in the National Planning Office, which compiles and analyzes statistical data and offers gender training to different planning offices.
- (b) National Council on Population and the Family, through which the National Family Planning Programme is run.
- (c) Community Development Office, which works at the community level to promote and organize women in carrying out community development projects and actions.
- (d) "Educ-Mujer", in the Ministry of Education and Culture, through which plans are developed to reduce sexism in education.
- (e) Division of Peasant Women and Rural Organization, in the Ministry of Agriculture, which encourages productive projects run by peasant women.
- (f) Consultative Council of the Department for the Advancement of Women, made up of a number of government agencies.

As a means of mainstreaming gender issues in all public and institutional policies, the Dominican Government has a training plan for all the sectors of government which have units or offices for women's issues, as well as for officials, legislators and decision-makers. These actions are part of the programme of institution strengthening of the Department for the Advancement of Women.

The Dominican Government is engaged in a process of reform and modernization of the State, in which the decentralization plan plays a crucial role. As a result, following the Beijing Conference, 10 Provincial Offices for Women's Issues were created:

Provincial Office for Women's Issues of the Province of San Pedro de Macoris, established in 1996.

Provincial Office for Women's Issues of the Province of San Francisco de Macorís, established in 1996.

Provincial Office for Women's Issues of the Province of Santiago, established in 1996.

Provincial Office for Women's Issues of the Province of Sánchez Ramírez, established in 1996.

Provincial Office for Women's Issues of the Province of Puerto Plata, established in 1996.

Provincial Office for Women's Issues of the Province of La Vega, established in 1996.

Provincial Office for Women's Issues of the Province of Espaillat, established in 1996.

Provincial Office for Women's Issues of the Province of María Trinidad Sánchez, established in 1997.

Provincial Office for Women's Issues of the Province of Samaná, established in 1997.

Provincial Office for Women's Issues of the Province of Monte Plata, established in 1998.

Provincial Office for Women's Issues of the Province of Romana, established in 1998.

The National Plan for Gender Equity is implemented through these Offices, which reflect the functions and mandates of the Department for the Advancement of Women and the Beijing agreements.

As was done for the Beijing Conference, national commissions were established to follow up the following summit meetings: United Nations Conference on Environment and Development; World Summit for Social Development; World Summit for Children and World Food Summit.

(b) The National Office for the Follow-Up of Global Conferences was established on 25 March 1991, by Decree No. 122-91, to coordinate the various follow-up efforts to global conferences.

(c) Role of non-governmental organizations:

The non-governmental organizations, through the Coordinator of NGOs for Women's Issues, the Cibao Women's Coordinator, various topical and sectoral networks and in each organization, have drawn up national, regional and local plans based on the agreements in the Beijing Platform for Action, which have been implemented since 1995.

The principal achievements of these organizations include: their contribution to the overhaul of Dominican legislation; follow-up and promotion of legislation adopted for the benefit of women; their contribution to the preparation of the draft bill on the upgrading of the Department for the Advancement of Women; their support for the highlighting of violence as a problem of human rights; the development of educational programmes to publicize the situation of women and gender issues; their contribution to the development, training and empowerment of national leaders in the political arena and their influence on public policies ensuring a gender perspective.

The non-governmental organizations participate in national arrangements for the follow-up of Beijing and in periodic evaluations through their participation in national and topical meetings organized by DGPM.

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