

REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

BEIJING PLATFORM OF ACTION 1995

RESPONSE TO UN QUESTIONNAIRE

Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child
Development

PART ONE

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

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report aims at highlighting the achievements of Mauritius in fostering gender equality in line with the guidelines enunciated in the Beijing Platform of Action. It has been prepared on the basis of the questionnaire sent by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women.

1.2. BACKGROUND

Geography

1.2.1 Mauritius is a small Indian Ocean island, covering about 2040 sq. kilometre land area and including some smaller islands, the main one being Rodrigues.

Population

1.2.2 As at 1 July 1999, the population was estimated at 1, 174, 587. There were 587,876 females and 586,711 males. The number of children i.e. population between 0 to 18 years was estimated at 365,286 in 1999.

1.2.3 The crude birth rate was 17.3 in 1994, 18.3 in 1997 and 16.8 in 1998. The total fertility rate went down from 2.04 to 1.97 during the same period. This is a result of an effective family planning programme which was launched in the 1960's and has enabled the country to control population growth. However, this has equally resulted in an ageing population which implies that younger generations would have to bear certain consequences – financial and social as well as family responsibilities.

1.2.4 Based on population projections, summary indicators for the future age structure of the population show that the median age will rise by 9 years to reach 37 years in 2037. The major increase will occur between 1997 and 2017 when the median age will rise by nearly 6 years from 28 to 34 years. There will be one elderly person for every child under 15 years by 2037 compared to one elderly for every 3 children in 1997.

1.2.5 Life expectancy at birth has increased from 65.6 for men in 1980 to 66.4 in 1997 and for women from 73.4 to 74.3 over the same period. The death rate was 7.7 for men in 1990 and 7.8 in 1997. For women, it was 5.5 in 1990 and 5.7 in 1997. The population

projection for years 2010 is estimated at 1,283,000. The population below 15 years of age is expected to decrease from 30% to 23% in 2010.⁴

1.2.6 The average household size is 4.2 for urban areas and 4.6 for rural areas. 55% of the population live in rural areas.

Economy

1.2.7 There has been a gradual shift since the 1970's from a monocrop economy based on sugar to a diversified one, with the setting up of an Export Processing zone in the 1970's, the development of a tourism sector and a financial sector. The industrial sector attracted foreign investments and has been instrumental in creating employment. The per capita GNP grew at an average rate of 5% since 1990 and was estimated at 3,200 US dollars in 1997 while GDP growth rate was 6.0%.

1.2.8 Mauritius has been classified as a country with a relative high human development index and was ranked 61st in 1997. The HDI index evolved from 0.626 in 1980 to 0.831 in 1997. In a National Strategy for Sustainable Development document, it is stated that maintaining success into the future will not be easy, as the deregulation of global markets will place increasing pressure on Mauritian businesses and problems of unemployment, rigidity in the labour market and the ability of the education sector to respond to the technical and management needs have to be addressed in order to ensure the sustainable development of the country.

Culture

1.2.9 The Mauritian population derives ancestral origins from Africa, China, Europe and India. Consequently, Mauritius has a multiplicity of languages, cultures, traditions and religions.

Government

1.2.10 The Government is based on a democratic system with mandatory elections every five years. Mauritius was successively a French and British colony and gained independence in 1968. It became a Republic in 1992, with a President as Head of State and Prime Minister as Head of Government. Representation of minority ethnic groups is ensured by a best loser system. Municipal and village council elections are held at regular intervals to elect town and village councillors.

1.3 MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS – GENDER EQUALITY

1.3.1 The Government of Mauritius is committed to the ideals of equality, respect for human rights and justice as enshrined in the Declaration on Human Rights. The Constitution of Mauritius safeguards the fundamental freedoms and rights. Mauritius acceded to the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in June 1984 and ratified it in 1985. It presented the First and Second Periodic Report and is finalising its Third Periodic Report for submission to the UN. Mauritius is also a signatory to the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action. In 1997,

⁴ CSO Projections

Mauritius signed the Gender and Development Declaration of the SADC Heads of State and the subsequent Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women and Children in 1998

1.3.2. The objective of gender equality has received continued attention, with positive achievements in terms of equality of access to education, employment, political participation and increased participation in the economic sector and protection of human rights. Legal provisions ensure equality of access and opportunity in all sectors. Prior to 1995, legal reforms had already been introduced, with the amendment of Code Napoleon to enable a woman to choose her profession, set up a business, open accounts, borrow without permission of her spouse, to choose matrimonial regime, sharing of parental authority; divorce laws were amended to enable the grant of divorce on grounds of *faute* or *rupture de vie commune*. Income tax legislation was amended to ensure that married women deriving an income make separate returns. The Jury act was amended to enable women to act as jurors.

1.3.3. In 1995, the Constitution was amended to prohibit sex discrimination. Gender equality has been integrated in our national legislation between 1996 to date through -

- The introduction of a **Protection of Human Rights Act in 1998;**
- **Amendments to the Civil Code in 1999** to ensure strict equality in the administration of property and parental rights;
- **Amendments to the Criminal Code in 1998** to make penalties against sexual abuse and family abandonment more severe and to create the offence of sexual harassment;
- **Amendment of the Citizenship act in 1996** to give to the foreign spouse of a Mauritian woman the right to citizenship; and
- The introduction of a **Protection from Domestic Violence Act in 1997.**

1.3.4 Institutional mechanisms have been strengthened for more effective service delivery and support to women. Mauritius has a full fledged ministry for women, which is headed by a cabinet minister. A National Women's Council functions as a coordinating body for women's associations. A Gender Bureau has been established to ensure the implementation of a Gender Management System based on Commonwealth Secretariat's guidelines. A consultative mechanism, known as the National Advisory Committee on the Status of Women comprising NGO's, ministries, UNDP, the private sector and other stakeholders provides critical inputs on gender policy.

1.3.5 A **National Women Entrepreneur Council** has been established by an act of parliament to promote women entrepreneurship.

1.3.6 Economic empowerment has been one of the main thrusts for Government action. In 1998, within its poverty alleviation programme, the Government of Mauritius introduced a **micro credit scheme based on the Grameen model** of Bangla Desh to provide loans to women without collateral for income generating activities. Marketing being a serious impediment for women, a market centre provides free marketing outlet, while a Common Facility Centre offers training for skills development.

1.3.7 In order to support working mothers, an **Early Childhood Development** policy is being implemented for training of child care givers and establishment of child care facilities in deprived areas.

1.3.8 In 1997, the Government of Mauritius introduced the **Protection from Domestic Violence Act** which has enabled thousands of silent women to break their silence and to benefit from legal protection. Structures for the provision of 24 hour service, free legal assistance and psychological counselling have been set up. One study has been conducted on the factors leading to domestic violence and another one on the criminological aspects of domestic violence.

1.3.9 Mauritius offers equality of opportunity and access to education, health, social services and employment and there is no disparity in the enrolment rates of girls and boys. However problems such as sexual exploitation have retained our attention as they affect the girl child mostly. A study of the commercial sexual exploitation of children was conducted in 1997, followed by **IEC** campaigns in high risk areas. **Child watch network** groups have been set up with the help of social workers and community based associations for surveillance and early intervention.

1.3.10 Women's access to information has been improved with new **Women and Family** centres in under served regions and the opening of an **Information Technology Centre** exclusively for women.

1.3.11 A **National Gender Action Plan** which outlines Government's vision for the attainment of gender equality by the year 2005 has been prepared and approved in toto by Government. The plan was formulated after wide consultations with all stakeholders, including women at grassroots level and addresses health, human rights, human resources development and gender equality. As an immediate consequence, an **Engendering of the Budget Initiative** has started, coupled with training and research programmes.

1.4.1 Situation of Women – progress since 1995

1.4.1 Women constitute a little more than 50% of the total population. The proportion of married women has increased from 40% in 1990 to 43 % in 1997 and widowhood among women had increased from 8.8% to 9.5% during the same period. In view of higher life expectancy among women, there has been an increase in the population of women aged above 60 years. The crude marriage rate was 19 per 1000 persons in 1997 and 18.8 for 1998.

1.4.2 18% of households are female headed. The family structure has undergone changes with a trend towards a nuclear structure. The economic activity of women has given rise to other types of problems as women were not psychologically prepared to long working hours. This has increased tension and stress for women who have to combine family and professional obligations and assume different roles. A recent survey of domestic violence has also indicated that there may be a causal relation between family violence and the transformations in the family structure.

1.4.3 The number of divorces petitioned by women has increased from 279 in 1990 to 1217 in 1998. The modal marrying age group indicates that 34.3 % in the age group 25 to

29 years and 37.7% in the age group 20 to 24 years. The number of divorces increased from 792 in 1996 to 1012 in 1998.

1.4.4 With longer life expectancy among women, there is a larger segment of population above the age of 60. There are now emerging problems of abandonment of elderly parents, loneliness and sickness which affect old people, as the family structure does not always provide support to the elderly. Government is encouraging the construction of homes and day care centres for old people.

Women in Decision making

1.4.5 With the introduction of free secondary education in 1976, more women have found their way into the public service and private sector. As at June 1999, there were 45,027 male and 13,292 female employees in the government service.

1.4.6 22 % of women are in the government service. There have been positive trends in the past five years with the appointment of three women judges, one woman as vice chairperson of the Public Service commission, two women ambassadors, two women ministers and one junior minister. The percentage of women magistrates has increased to 41.9% in 1999.

1.4.7 However the level of participation is still low at many levels. There were 13,100 male professionals, senior officials as compared to 7,750 females. Few women are chairing boards and committees. 86% of all staff at higher decision making level is male with only one woman as permanent secretary. There is a limited number of women acting as chief executives and important private sector organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce hardly have women representatives. Women rarely form part of trade and economic delegations and are not seen in great numbers in trade unions and other leadership roles. Government has taken steps in the recent years to nominate more women as chairpersons of parastatal bodies.

1.4.8 Women are playing an important role in NGO's and some occupy influential positions as chairpersons or members of executive committees of their respective organisations. They also express their views on issues pertaining to women and to other national issues. Women equally express themselves through writings, painting and other forms of art .

1.4.9 In the media, a minority of women work as reporters and professionals. There is no woman appointed as editor in chief.

1.4.10 Women have entered into some sectors such as the Police department with 5 % of all police staff being women. But only one woman has reached the grade of assistant commissioner. In the education sector, the staff is predominantly female but the ratio of teachers to head teachers is 100 to 25 for males and 100 to 16 for women. In the health sector, 81% of all doctors and 76% of all dentists are female. In the private sector, there is only one women in the supervisory grade in the sugar estates out of a bout 5000 female employees.

1.4.11 At the political level, there has been a substantial improvement in the participation of women in the last elections in 1995 with more women presented as candidates. For the first time six women were elected as members of the national assembly. There was an increase from 3.2% in 1991 to 9.7 % in 1995 at the level of parliament. At municipal and village elections, the increase during the same period was from 5.6 % to 8% and 1% to 2.8% respectively. However the percentage of women in parliament declined in 1999 with the resignation of one woman who was replaced by a male candidate, elected at the bye-election. There has been a positive attitude among political parties who have stated their intention to increase the number of female candidates at the next elections.

1.4.12 The low level of participation of women in political life can be attributable to social and cultural attitudes, family responsibilities, the fear of public exposure and political practices which are not gender *friendly*. No political party has defined a policy regarding representation of women.

Health

1.4.13 The health status of women has improved considerably over the past decades. Health services are free and decentralised through 5 regional hospitals, 2 mobile clinics, 3 district hospitals, 2 modern medi clinics, 1 community hospital, 6 specialised hospitals, 119 community health centres, a mobile maternal and child health and family planning clinic and 29 area health centres. In 1996, it was estimated that there was one doctor for every 110 persons. The life expectancy of women has increased from 71 in 1982 to 74.5 in 1997 as compared to 64 and 66 for men. The fertility rate has fallen from 6 in the 1960's to 2.12 in 1997.

1.4.14 However there are some areas of concern. The infant mortality rate has not decreased since 1994 and the rate of still births is relatively high. The number of low birth weight of babies has increased from 9.5% in 1991 to 15% in 1996, indicating a certain degree of malnutrition among women. A survey of nutrition showed that malnutrition decreased from 24 % in 1985 to 16% in 1995 and chronic malnutrition from 21% to 10%, but acute malnutrition remained almost stagnant with a decrease of 2% only. There has also been a decline in the contraceptive prevalence rate from 80% in 1985 to 75% in 1991. A closer study of the issue has become imperative.

1.4.15 Further, 52.7% of all deaths among women were due to heart and cerebrovascular diseases in 1998. The number of deaths due to heart diseases has increased from 29.2% in 1996 to 31% in 1997 and for cerebrovascular diseases, there has been an increase from 15.9% to 16.1%. The Ministry of Health is conducting education and information programmes in the context of its preventive campaign.

1.4.16 There has also been an increase in the number of cases of breast, cervical and uterine cancers over the past few years. The Ministry of Health and Quality of Life has recently launched a programme of screening for cervical cancer in Mauritius and Rodrigues. Private clinics charge high costs for such tests.

1.4.17 There has been some improvement in breast-feeding but the duration of exclusive breast-feeding is still low. Legislation on the International Code of marketing of Breast milk substitutes has been prepared and is being finalised.

1.4.18 Population control and family planning have been very successful in Mauritius as illustrated by the decline in the rate of fertility and reduced number of births. A project for the introduction of reproductive health education in schools is being funded by UNFPA and will be implemented by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. A campaign has been launched since 1998 by the National Children's Council and the Mauritius Family Planning Association to inform young students about unsafe sex and its consequences.

1.4.19 Abortion is illegal in Mauritius but it is considered that there is a high rate of suspected illegal abortions. Many pregnant women, through poverty and lack of information have recourse to back street abortions or use self-induced methods thus, putting their lives in danger. The number of cases of complications following abortions in government hospitals and private clinics in 1996 was 2,719². Abortion remains a highly sensitive and controversial issue but education programmes continue to address the issue of unsafe abortion.

1.4.19 Up to date figures show that between 1997 to June 1999, the number of HIV/AIDS cases were 111 of which 73 were males and 38 females³. There seems to be a greater need for sensitisation of the public and high risk groups to keep the country HIV/Aids free especially that one out of every 3 people in the country is a tourist.

1.4.20 Teenage pregnancy (<19) has remained at a 10% level over the last 10 years.) The issue of the commercial sexual exploitation of children has been taken up by the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development. A study on sexual and commercial exploitation of children in Mauritius was carried out in 1997 and an executive summary was released in November 1998. IEC campaigns have been held in high risk areas and a hot line service is operating. A working group has been set up with NGO's to have their collaboration and involvement in combating this problem.

1.4.21 Sound nutrition habits are not in consonance with modern life styles. The 1998 NCD Survey carried by Ministry of Health and Quality of Life has shown that there has been an increase in Non Communicable Diseases (NCD) and conditions of health such as obesity, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and diabetes. The survey also indicates that diet consumed is not balanced and many pregnant women are anaemic and deliver premature babies and low weight babies. Due to lack of time, women rely on fast foods. Even for children, the trend is for fast foods, pre-packed snacks, more animal foods and less vegetables. The adoption of poor nutritional habits at this early age has an impact on the growth of children contributing to the risk factors for NCD and cardiovascular diseases. According to the report of the survey, there is an increase in the incidence of NCD's even among young adults and youth. The Home Economics Unit of the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child development has recently introduced a new course in 'healthy eating and nutrition' through the Home Economics Resource Centres and will soon start a dietary counselling service.

1.4.22 As Mauritius is moving towards an ageing population, the health needs of the elderly women has to be addressed. A policy paper on The Situation of Old People in the Republic of Mauritius by the Mauritius Family Planning Association was launched in October 1998 which indicated that population aged 60+ as a percentage of total

² Health Statistics (MOH) 1996

³ 'Le Mauricien' Newspaper-8 June 1999

population will more than treble in the following 40 years till 2036. It also indicated that there is a predominance of women among the elderly population. Taking cognizance of the implications of the ageing population on the national pension scheme and the case of old people, the Ministry of Economic Development, Productivity & Regional Development and Ministry of Social Security are in the process of preparing an Action Plan for the ageing population.

Women and economic empowerment

1.4.23 Women and men have equal rights to employment. Women constitute the bulk of the labour force in the EPZ sector (37%) The female activity rate has risen from 34.7 in 1990 to 38.7 in 1997. A sectorwise analysis of female employment for 1997 also indicates a high level of sex segregation of occupation with a comparatively high percentage of women employed as machine operators (23.9%) and in elementary occupations (25.1%). As at 1995, 31% of women were in the labour force, with 41% in the industrial sector. 70% of working women were earning less than Rs 4,000 monthly.

1.4.24 The 1995 Labour Force Survey revealed that the median salary for women was Rs2,300 while for men it was Rs3,500 The Household Budget Survey in 1996/97 shows that the median salary for women to be Rs3,250 compared to Rs5,611 for men, indicating that the average woman was earning only slightly more than half of what her male counterpart was earning in 1996/97 in the labour market.

1.4.25 An example of the glass ceiling seems to operate in the sugar industry. Out of 500 sirdars, there are only 2 women. No women are in managerial posts in sugar estates. Hence in many respects, Mauritius reflects the international experience that the higher the percentage of women in an industry, the lower is the level of wages, for women.²

1.4.26 Unemployment is higher among women with 10.2 % in 1997 as compared to 3.9% for men. The number of women in the labour force increased from 153,100 in 1997 to 159,500 in 1998, whereas for men, the number increased from 322,600 to 328,100.

1.4.27 Recent employee reduction programmes in the EPZ sector have effected women mostly as the majority of employees who lost their employment were women.

1.4.28 Women are almost absent from certain sectors such as construction, transport, financial and business services.

1.4.29 Women face problems of technical assistance for skills development, marketing and managerial capacity as well as social and cultural attitudes. Many women are driven to the informal sector, where they have no safety nets and do not benefit from any of the Government support schemes.

1.4.30 Though there is no poverty line, a Relative Development index developed by the Central Statistical office identified certain areas that are considered to be disadvantaged, based on variables such as access to water, sanitation, educational level etc. There is no research on the situation of women in these regions but there is evidence which might lead to the conclusion that domestic violence, abuse and exploitation may be prevalent in those regions. There is an emerging problem of marginalisation which affect women

² ILO report 1998

greatly as they become more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse and problems depression, stress, tension, malnutrition, lack of attention to children, alcoholism, promiscuity, substance abuse and sexual exploitation. Strategies to support women living in such circumstances are being developed and much emphasis is being given to entrepreneurship development as means to alleviate poverty.

1.4.31 With the programme for the promotion of women entrepreneurship, the number of women entrepreneurs has increased over the past two years. Thus the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development has introduced a Micro Credit Scheme based on the Grameen model of Bangladesh to enable the poorest segments of the population to get access to credit facilities without any collateral and start income generating activities. The scheme favours group solidarity among women (3 to 5 women) and loans do not require any collateral. The maximum amount loaned is Rs 50,000(=US 2000) which bears 8% rate of interest and which is refundable in 5 years.

1.4.32 Since 1998, the scheme has benefitted about 130 women in Mauritius and Rodrigues. Government is funding training schemes for skills development and encouraging entrepreneurship. In the agricultural sector, loans with low interest rates are being provided for farming activities; fertilisers and other inputs are subsidised and a technology development scheme is being implemented. Certain products such as milk, potatoes, onions receive a guaranteed price, to encourage farmers. In the milk-producing sector, there is a predominance of women. The Small and Medium Industries Development Organisation is also training women entrepreneurs while the Agricultural Research and Extension Unit is carrying out training in post harvest technology and adding value to agricultural products. Incentives are also provided for export of products to foreign markets through a freight rebate scheme.

1.4.33 To enable women entrepreneurs to sell their quality products, the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development has put at their disposal, a Market Centre. No fees are charged from women entrepreneurs for the accommodation. Furthermore, a Common Facility Centre provides training, education, services and equipment to women interested to start entrepreneurial activities.

1.4.34 A National Women Entrepreneur Council Act has been enacted and a National Women Entrepreneur Council has been established to act as a forum for women. It is intended to create a network of women entrepreneurs of the region. A Forum of women entrepreneurs of the Indian Ocean islands has been held. A programme of training for primary school drop-outs has been initiated to develop their skills and direct them towards income generating activities.

1.4.35 An Information Technology centre for women has been set up. A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed by the National Women Entrepreneur Council and the National Small Industries of India for the transfer of technology and expertise to benefit women who are engaged in small and micro enterprises. A low cost technology exhibition will be organised. Trade relations will also be developed with women entrepreneurs in COMESA and SADC.

1.5 Are goals of gender equality being pursued as a priority in relation to other public policy

1.5.1 Gender equality goals are being pursued consistently by the Government. Since 1995, several legal reforms have been introduced in the National Assembly, projects have been specifically designed for women such as the micro credit scheme and programmes to combat gender based violence, child prostitution, drug addiction, and to respond to specific health needs of women. Additional funds have been allocated specifically for these projects.

1.5.2 There has been an increased awareness of gender issues in other ministries – Ministry of Health has focussed special attention on women's needs, Ministry of Cooperatives has organised seminars to encourage women to join cooperatives, Ministry of Agriculture has been encouraging women farmers and breeders to learn new techniques for adding value to their agricultural products and Ministry of Finance has allocated additional funds for projects for women and set up a Venture Capital fund for women entrepreneurs.

1.5.3 Labour regulations and conditions of employment have taken into consideration the needs of women in terms of maternity leave, breast feeding, health and welfare. The Export Processing Zone Labour Welfare Fund has set up a number of day care centres for employees of EPZ.

1.6 Country's priorities in terms of critical areas of the Platform of Action

1.6.1 Mauritius identified the following priorities –

- *Integration of gender issues into the mainstream of government and private sector activities;*
- *Development of a holistic approach to the health and welfare of women with special attention to the girl child, women at work, both at home and outside home and elderly women. Reproductive health to be made a priority area with country wide breast and cervical cancer detection programmes;*
- *Enactment of a domestic violence act coupled with national information, education and communication campaign;*
- *Formulation of a policy to encourage girls to take up technical and non-traditional subjects so that they may engage in professions which were hitherto considered as male domains only.*

1.7 Areas where mainstreaming from a gender perspective has been most least successful. In which sectors is a gender approach being applied.

1.7.1 In 1997/98, a Gender Bureau was set up to ensure gender mainstreaming, which has been successful to a certain extent in the implementation of a strategy against gender based violence. In 1997, a Protection from Domestic Violence Act was enacted. Before 1997, all cases were treated as cases of assault under the Criminal Code. The implementation of the Act required a multi agency approach as domestic violence cases involve the Police, Probation, Ministries of Health, Social Security, Housing and NGO's among others. The Commonwealth Secretariat has used Mauritius as a pilot for a Model Framework for an Integrated approach to violence against women and girls.

1.7.2 A National Action plan was developed and the roles of every organisation has been defined clearly. There is already a referral system operating between the different

organisations and procedures have been established to ensure coordination of actions and intervention at different levels.

1.7.3 Mainstreaming has also been effective in the finance sector to a certain extent. Since 1997, budgetary provisions for the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development has been increasing gradually. In addition, there has been specific allocations for gender sensitive projects such as early childhood development, setting of child care centres, micro credit scheme and to combat child prostitution. An engendering the budget workshop has been held and a gender budget statement is being prepared.

1.7.4 Gender mainstreaming has not been quite successful in improving women's participation in policy and decision making. Despite remarkable achievements in education and health, Mauritius has a relatively low percentage of women in political life and in decision making positions. Political practices are not gender friendly and discourage women's participation.

1.8 Has attention to gender equality and advancement changed since 1995 in government policies, public perception, media and academic institutions

1.8.1 There has been an increasing awareness of gender equality as a human right objective. The Protection from Domestic Violence Act and IEC campaigns on the CEDAW have helped to sensitise the public at large on gender issues and that women's rights are human rights. This is illustrated in the fact that more women have joined the labour force, women enjoy equal access to education, health and social services. Important legal reforms have been brought to ensure gender equality. Nevertheless, there is still deep rooted bias in attitudes perpetuated by media stereotyping and cultural and social practices. Gender stereotyping is also encouraged by the use of certain terms which are gender biased. Gender issues do not generally receive priority in the media.

1.8.2 Academic institutions such as the University and the Mauritius Institute of Education are running courses which include gender. There is no specific gender specialisation course. There is a need to make a more comprehensive analysis of the curriculum to ensure that there is no form of gender stereotyping in school textbooks.

1.8.3 A research conducted by the University of Mauritius in 1999 revealed that across all sectors and all levels of management, women represent 25% of managers. Only 4.7 % of top managers are women in the public and private sectors. Only three factors emerged as major issues – sexual harassment, exclusion from training opportunities and lack of support from female subordinates. Most senior managers felt that child care problems are a non-issue and that policies for parental leave, on site child care facilities, for flexible working hours, for career breaks were not priorities.³

1.9 How has global situation, structural adjustment, financial crisis affected girls and women

³ magazine –woman no 4

1.9.1 Mauritius faces new challenges with the increase of labour costs and loss of preferential trade benefits and with the coming into force of the World Trade Organisation. Future growth will depend on effecting a quantum leap in productivity at all levels as well as moving into high quality niche markets in the garments/textile sector. The possible reduction in the employment opportunities for women the majority of whom are at present employed in this sector - could present a sudden drop in family incomes as many find themselves unemployed. As "jobless growth" becomes a reality, women may be hit harder. Even presently, the unemployment rate for men has increased from 3.1% to 3.7% but from 2.3% to 10.0% for women, between 1990 and 1998. Part time work has already been introduced in 1996 so as to allow flexibility in hours of work, in the private sector (The Labour (Amendment) Act No.6 of 1996) but neither the employers nor the employees are taking advantage of this provision.

1.9.2 Recent closing of EPZ factories and redundancy policies have hit women hardly as a majority of women lost their employment. Unemployment affects women more than men.

1.9.3 The fact that a larger number of women than men are illiterate has also led to a wide gap in terms of access to technology. Women will find themselves lagging far behind as they do not master the new technologies and do not have adequate access to modern equipment and tools of production. They are absent from certain non traditional sectors.

1.9.4 Greater globalisation presents greater opportunities as it holds out possibilities for more flexible work management provided that women become more computer literate. As the EPZ sector upgrades its technology and moves into customised designer clothes, the demand for designers and creative artists will increase. These are areas where women can have an edge over men provided they are trained in modern technology e.g. CAD/CAM, design and other techniques. The tourism sector has also provided more employment opportunities for women, both those with little education as well as those with tertiary education and has enabled more of them to move into managerial positions.

PART TWO

FINANCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL MEASURES

2.1 National budget

2.1.1 Social sector budgets account for around 40% of the total recurrent budget, half of which finances programmes for transfers to the aged and needy. The rest of the social sector budget is for the provision of free welfare services, including health and education.

2.1.2 While the total Budget for Republic of Mauritius has increased by 3.4% from financial year 1998/1999 to 1999/2000, the recurrent Budget for the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development has increased by 12.9% for the same years. Additional specific allocations have been made for the funding of a micro credit scheme, an Early Childhood Development Policy and a campaign against child prostitution. In 1996, the Ministry owned only three buildings which are used as Women and Family Centres. It has been sharing buildings with the Ministry of Social Security or renting private buildings. In 1997, a new, modern Common Facility Centre cum Women and Family Centre was constructed. Government has provided funds for the construction of ten new child care centres, ten new Centres for women, a resource centre and home for children and women in distress. Government also provides grants annually for the running of shelters for victims of domestic violence and child abuse.

2.1.3 Government has put in place some mechanisms to meet such incidental expenditure such as books, examination fees for needy children. In 1996/97 the Ministry of Social Security disbursed Rs101.8 million of which Rs 4.3 millions as examinations fees to some 1,654 students.

2.1.4 The Ministry benefits from international or bilateral assistance. Thus it has received assistance as follows –

- UNIFEM for research and training in the context of the campaign against domestic violence;
- UNFPA for gender training;
- UNDP for gender training and capacity building;
- ECA for technical advice for the setting up of micro credit scheme and gender mainstreaming;
- Commonwealth Secretariat for establishing the gender management system and developing a model framework for an integrated approach to gender based violence;
- EU for the construction of a Common Facility Centre for women entrepreneurs;
- Indian Ocean Commission and Agence de la Francophonie for the organisation of a forum for women entrepreneurs of the Indian Ocean region;
- IFAD for a micro enterprise development project and a Community development project;
- British Council for training and capacity building

2.1.5 Budget monitoring is held on a monthly basis by the Ministry of Finance. In the 1999/2000 budget, the Minister of Finance has re-emphasised that in order to ensure observance of overall limits and targets, central monitoring of the Budget will continue to be carried out by the Public Finance Section of the Ministry of Finance.

2.1.6 An engendering the budget initiative has started with the support of UNDP . A workshop has been held and presently, the budget of four core ministries is being analysed.

3.1 Institutional mechanisms

3.1.1 There is a ministry which is responsible for gender issues but it has additional responsibility for children and family welfare. The ministry is headed by a cabinet minister.

3.1.2 Institutional mechanisms have been strengthened as follows –

- A **Gender Bureau** has been set up within the ministry to ensure gender mainstreaming in all sectors and the implementation of a **gender management system** based on the guidelines of the Commonwealth Secretariat. The main objective of the Gender Bureau is to ensure that gender is integrated into major policies and projects. Its task consists in conducting research, gender analysis, advising on gender policy, and ensuring that gender disaggregated data is collected. Since its setting up, the Gender Bureau has identified the following key issues –
 - *Integrating gender into national budgetary policies and macroeconomic policies;*
 - *Formulation of a long term policy for gender equality*
 - *Defining a gender training strategy by identifying training needs of all key partners and designing and implementing appropriate training programmes; and*
 - *Establishing a computerized data system and ensuring collection of desegregated data in a systematic way.*

In February 2000, with UNDP support a **Sub Regional Workshop on Engendering the Budget** was held in Mauritius. The workshop was attended by participants from Mauritius, Comoros, Seychelles, Madagascar and is being followed up by a sectoral budget analysis of four core ministries - agriculture, social security, health and education - and by the preparation of a Gender budget statement.

- **Gender focal points** have been identified in all the ministries and departments with the responsibility to identify gender issues at the level of their sectoral areas and to ensure that the gender component is taken into account in policy and project formulation.

- A **National Advisory Committee on the Status of Women**, chaired by the Minister and including media, civil society, private sector, NGO's, academics, UNDP and professionals, ministries and departments acts as a national consultative mechanism and provides policy inputs and directions to the Gender Bureau.
- A **National Women Entrepreneur Council** was set up in 1999 by an Act of Parliament as a platform for women entrepreneurs and to identify strategies for entrepreneurship development. The Council has invited women entrepreneurs and associations of entrepreneurs to affiliate to it and will proceed with an assessment of technology needs. One of its first activities will be the compilation of a directory of women entrepreneurs, the organisation of a low cost technology for women entrepreneurs and fostering participation in trade fairs.

3.1.3 A National Women's Council ensures linkages with women's associations. The aims and objectives of the council are to -

- Establish and maintain effective communication with women and organisations of women;
- Ensure coordination of activities of groups of women and organisations
- Assist in the implementation and evaluation of government policies as they relate to the needs of women;
- Identify projects that will promote the integration of women in development

It is conducting adult literacy and computer literacy courses and runs a family counselling service which comprises a multi disciplinary team of liaison officers, psychologists and legal advisers.

But it is not effective enough as an organisation which is expected to voice the opinions of women. The structure of the Council is being reviewed so as to make it more effective and ensure greater representativeness of grassroots women.

3.1.4 The assistance of the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNDP and ECA has been obtained for capacity building. But the process of ensuring gender mainstreaming has been slow on account of the lack of professionals in the field of gender policy and analysis, the low level of gender sensitiveness among key stake holders in all the sectors and inadequate financial resources. Building capacity for gender mainstreaming is therefore seriously hindered by the lack of specialised skills in the field. There is also the problem of low priority accorded to gender by policy makers and the media as well as the private sector.

Role of NGO's in planning and shaping follow up activities

3.1.5 NGO's are grouped under the MACOSS, which is an umbrella body for NGO's. The National Women's Council is a coordinating body for specialised NGO's dealing with women's issues and grassroots women's associations. These associations are represented in the Council through five representatives of regional committees.

3.1.6 NGO's are actively engaged in a number of activities such as providing shelter facilities for domestic violence victims, family planning, education and training, adult literacy, skills development, rehabilitation of drug addicts, supporting women with alcohol problem, counselling and support to the disabled, promoting values and cultural enrichment etc..

3.1.7 They are consulted for all major policies and decisions. For the preparation of the National Gender Action Plan, NGO's were invited to submit their views; consultations were held before the draft was finalised.

3.1.8 A National Advisory Committee on the Status of Women has also been set up as a consultative mechanism to provide policy inputs to the Gender Bureau and thus participate in gender analysis and planning.

PART THREE

Implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action

A. Innovative policies programmes, projects and good practices

13.4 Gender Based Violence

3.4.1 Gender based violence is said to be one of the most pervasive aspects of violations of human rights. The majority of victims, silent sufferers are women for whom bearing the burden of violence often becomes a way of life. Apart from being a human rights issue, domestic violence has heavy economic and social costs in terms of productivity, health charges, implications for children and social stability.

3.4.2 At the Fourth World Conference on women in Beijing in 1995, Mauritius identified gender based violence as one of the critical priority areas. As a follow up of Beijing, in May 1997, the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development presented the Protection from Domestic Violence Act. The law became partly operational in 1997 and was fully proclaimed on 8 March 1998.

3.4.3 Its primary aim is the protection of victims and their children, while trying to rehabilitate family harmony, wherever this is possible. The Act applies to *wives*, that is, persons who live or have lived together under the same roof, whether they are legally married or not and provides for the issue of -

- Protection Orders, which restrict the abuser from further violence and orders him to be of good conduct.
- Occupancy Orders, which grant exclusive right to the victim to live in the residence which may belong to the victim or the abuser or both;
- Tenancy Orders, which give the victim the exclusive right to occupy a rented house and if the house is rented by the abuser, he would have to pay the rent.

3.4.4 A breach of any of these orders is a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment and a fine.

3.4.5 For the implementation of the act, the following structures have been established -

- a Domestic Violence Intervention Unit – which has been decentralised in six regions – and provides 24 hour service through a hot line system.
- A pool of psychologists who give counselling to victims.
- A legal unit within the ministry of women, to provide free legal assistance to victims – as the legal aid system was found to involve too long procedures.
- A shelter to provide temporary refuge to victims.

3.4.6 A Survey of Domestic Violence cases was carried out to determine the factors that led to violence. The findings revealed that 96 % of victims are women, a majority of victims were not working and had low level of education, 56% of cases were due to alcoholism and 20 % were cases of sexual abuse. In 85% of cases, the victims suffered violence almost daily, implying that violence had been tacitly accepted as a norm.

3.4.7 Since the enactment of the law, extensive sensitisation campaigns and a national Domestic Violence Awareness week is organised every year to sensitise members of the public on the issue.

3.4.8 Training programmes have been conducted by international experts to enable our staff as well as the staff of police, probation and other organisations, including NGO'S to acquire the specific skills needed to deal with victims of domestic violence.

3.4.9. A referral system has been established with the departments concerned - police, hospitals, social security, and probation, whereby all cases of domestic violence are reported to the ministry.

3.4.10 A Family Counselling Service provides counselling to families, individual members who have difficulties.

3.4.12 In 1998, with the collaboration of the Commonwealth Secretariat, a Model Framework for an Integrated Approach to Gender Based Violence was piloted in Mauritius. A National action plan was prepared which aimed at creating the necessary mechanisms for an inter agency collaboration in dealing with cases of domestic violence.

3.4.13 Consequently, a Criminological Research on Domestic Violence funded by the UNIFEM Trust Fund to Combat Violence against Women has been carried out early this year. The findings of the research study will help us to improve our methodologies for data collection and to develop a coordinated approach to domestic violence.

3.4.14 Our experience in the implementing a strategy against domestic violence has been positive to a certain extent –

- Women have broken their silence and are now more willing to report domestic violence.
- Women are more aware of their rights, and are more conscious that they have legal protection.
- Ministries and organisations involved in domestic violence prevention and intervention are working closely with my ministry and now recognise that gender based violence is a problem.

3.4.15 The inter agency actions in the field of intervention against domestic violence has enabled gender mainstreaming to take place in terms of identifying gender based violence as a specific human rights problem, an economic and social issue, and of applying specific procedures to cases of domestic violence.

3.3 Economic empowerment and poverty alleviation

3.3.1 A strategy for the economic empowerment of women is being implemented by the Government through incentives to develop women entrepreneurship. The strategy includes the following -

- setting up of a **Women Entrepreneurship Unit** at the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development to provide guidance and advice to prospective women entrepreneurs and to conduct training;
- **Training of Women in Women and Family Centres** through skills development programmes;
- **Rewards for the most outstanding women entrepreneur** selected after a national competition every year;
- setting up of a **Market Centre** for women entrepreneurs by the ministry to provide a free marketing outlet to women producers. The venue and facilities are provided free of charge and a rotation schedule has been established to provide as many women as possible the chance to use the centre;
- setting up of a **common facility centre** to allow women share equipment for production of goods and to provide training opportunities;
- a **micro credit scheme for women based on Grameen philosophy** has been established to provide loans without collateral to women. This programme is being implemented with the collaboration of the Development Bank of Mauritius which administers the loans. One important action by the bank has been the waiving of the banking condition that spouses should sign before loans are disbursed. A technical committee monitors the scheme and selection of projects is done by a small working group. An information campaign is conducted in various regions to make women aware of the project and its benefits. Women beneficiaries have to follow a training course on the management of projects, accounting etc., before they start their projects. 125 women have already benefitted from the scheme.
- A **National Women Entrepreneur Council** has been established to act as a forum for women entrepreneurs and to identify strategies for the promotion of women entrepreneurship.
- A **Francophone Forum of Women entrepreneurs of the Indian Ocean islands** was organised in 1999 to create a network of women entrepreneurs in the Indian ocean region and to promote trade relations.
- A **Programme of Training for Primary school Drop Outs** has been initiated to develop their skills and direct them towards income generating activities. A Venture capital fund has been established in the last budget to help women entrepreneurs.

- An **Early Childhood Development** policy for children between 0 to 3 years has been approved. In addition to improving child care, the policy aims at providing support to working mothers and relieve them from stress and tension while they are at work.

3.5 The Girl child

3.5.1 In order to promote the rights of the girl child, sensitisation campaigns on the rights of the child are being conducted as a regular activity. It has been noted that more cases of abuse are now being reported thus making it possible to help child victims.

3.5.2 A **Study on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children** was carried out in 1998 and an action plan has been approved by government. The main highlights of the study were that –

- *there exists a young adolescent prostitution but no prostitution of children in the pre-puberty age*
- *the entry into prostitution centers around 13 years of age*
- *there exists a high correlation between the incidence of sexual abuse or attempts at abuses by closely related individuals mostly step fathers, and prostitution among young adolescents;*
- *a few unfavourable conditions prevailing in the social environment of the young in pre- adolescent years lead them to escape from their social surrounding divorce or separation of parents, poverty, dis-equilibrium in the family, alcoholism and failure in education;*
- *there exists well structured network of prostitution which attracts young adolescents leading a stray life after leaving the family home. Such networks take complete charge of such young adolescent; and*
- *clients of young prostitutes consists of all categories of people.*

3.5.3 For the implementation of the action plan, a working group comprising a number of NGO's and the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development has initiated actions with the support of UNICEF as follows –

- A national rally was organised with the support of NGO's in one of the regions which was reported to have prevailing child prostitution. About 5000 people participated in the rally which was followed by messages from religious leaders and social workers from the region;
- A door to door counselling was carried out over a period of two months on eight Sundays by the ministry's staff and volunteers from the region of Port Louis reaching out to about 1000 families;
- A sensitisation campaign has been conducted for young people to make them aware of the dangers of unsafe sex and of commercial sexual exploitation; talks have been conducted by the National Children's Council for young students;
- IEC materials have been produced in the form of posters, stickers and pamphlets and have been widely distributed.
- Child watch network groups have been set up in two regions as informal groups comprising social workers, officials, volunteers, NGO's. The main objective of the group is to ensure surveillance and early detection of children who are at risk.

- A Reproductive health education programme funded by UNFPA will be conducted in schools. The manuals are being prepared.
- A hot line has been set up specifically for cases of sexual commercial exploitation of children. It is serviced by the National Children's Council;
- Cases which are reported are provided free legal assistance by the legal unit, psychological counselling ;
- Victims are provided shelter as well as support for rehabilitation.

3.5.4 In 1998, the legal provisions concerning the commercial sexual exploitation of children in the Criminal Code were also amended to make penalties more severe. A person who sells, lends, hires or distributes to a minor or exposes or allows to be exposed to the view of a minor any obscene matter commits an offence liable to imprisonment not less than 3 months and not exceeding 2 years and a fine of Rs 25,000. The possibility of a conditional discharge or a probation order has been removed.

3.5.5 The law concerning persons who deal with brothel keeping was amended and the fine increased from Rs 3000 and imprisonment not exceeding one year to Rs 100,000 and imprisonment not exceeding five years. A person who permits a minor to use such premises, used as a brothel is liable on conviction to be sentenced to a minimum of two years imprisonment.

3.6 Safe , trafficking and abduction

3.6.1 In 1998, the Criminal Code (Supplementary) amendment act was amended to provide that - A person who despite being warned harbours a minor whom he knows to be absent from his domicile without permission will be liable to a fine not exceeding Rs 10,000 or imprisonment not exceeding 5 years .

3.6.2 The National Adoption Council Act was amended to provide that adoption of a Mauritian child by a non citizen would only be approved after considering all other possibilities of adoption in the country. This amendment aims at preventing the adoption of children by unscrupulous persons who deal with trafficking.

3.6.3 Mauritius adhered to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of Child Abduction in 1 October 1993 and proposes to introduce a Convention of the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction Bill. In line with Article 6 of the Convention, the Bill proposes the setting up of a Central authority to discharge the duties which are imposed by the Convention. The main function of the central authority is to discover the whereabouts of a child who has been wrongfully retained, prevent further harm to the child or prejudice to interested parties, secure the voluntary return of the child and bring about amicable solution to the issues.

3.6.4 The proposed Bill provides that –

- *The Central Authority should be the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development;*
- *It may request the assistance of the Police, Probation to obtain information on the whereabouts and the social background of the child ;*
- *The Ministry as the Central Authority may apply through a motion to the court to obtain the return of the child and to secure the effective exercise of the rights of access to the child;*

- *Any individual may apply by way of motion to the court with a view to obtaining the return of a child and for the purpose of securing effective exercise of the right of access to the child;*
- *The court may issue interim instructions pending the conclusion of a case to secure the welfare and protection of a child;*
- *If an individual makes a plea to the court, the court may declare that the removal of a child from or his retention outside Mauritius is wrong.*

3.6.5 The **Child Development Unit** was set up in 1995 to implement the Child Protection Act. In 1996, the services were decentralised in six regions covering the island on a geographical basis in order to make them more accessible. Hot lines services were established for the provision of 24 hour service. Each centre has transport attached to it. A working arrangement has been established with the Police in Rodrigues for the implementation of the Child Protection Act and dealing with cases of child abuse.

3.6.6 A **Child Protection Coordinating committee** has been set up with the participation of ministries and departments concerned and NGO's. A **National Framework for the assessment of children in need** and their families will be developed. A **child protection protocol** has been prepared and a pilot interagency unit for child protection will soon be launched in one region. It will be tried for a period of one year and be evaluated to assess its effectiveness. A **National Child Protection Register** will be set up to register children who are likely to suffer harm or having suffered significant harm. **Area child protection committees** will be created.

3.6.7 The **National Children's Council** which has been operational since 1990 has been conducting sensitisation, information and education programmes. The NCC groups NGO's, ministries and department which deal with children. A task force comprising NGO's was set up to review the Council and to make recommendations. The main recommendations of the review are inter alia that

- *the composition of the NCC should be extended to include community based associations ;*
- *The NCC should have more autonomy and independence to function as an institution defending the interests of the child;*
- *Children's participation in the Council should be ensured through the children's clubs and the creation of a National Children's Club;*
- *The NCC should act as an Ombudsman for children – as an independent watchdog and see to it that children who come into conflict with the law are afforded all the guarantees of a fair trial.*

3.7 **Women and Political Empowerment**

3.7.1 A **Seminar on Women and Political empowerment** was held in March 2000 with the participation of elected councillors and trade unionists to identify constraints which hinder women's participation in politics. Leader ship courses will be organised. Women's access to information has been increased with the setting up of new **Women and Family Centres** and an **Information Technology centre** for women.

3.7.2 The **National Gender Action plan** has also proposed, inter alia that

- 30% seats be reserved for women in political parties;

- The National Women's Council be reviewed so that it becomes more representative and provides greater opportunities to women to express their views and opinions;
- The school curriculum be reviewed to encourage more leadership and assertiveness among female students;
- Increase the participation of women in boards, committees and commissions;
- Bering legal reforms to prohibit the use of language which encourages gender stereotyping

3.7.3 A study on the women in political and decision making will be conducted.

Women and education

3.8.1 Education is free and accessible to all at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Primary education is compulsory and the enrolment rate is around 95% for girls. At secondary level, it decreases to about 52% according to 1997 figures. Girls generally perform better at examinations. The pass rate for girls was 74% for girls at Higher School Examinations as compared to 71% for boys in 1997 and at Certificate for Primary Education examinations, it was 69% for girls as compared to 61% for boys. An action plan for Education was prepared in 1997, focussing on glaring defects of the system of education. Government is presently expanding the education system and a nine year schooling will be introduced. More secondary schools have been opened in various regions thus increasing access to secondary schools and thus reducing drop outs.

3.8.2 An Institute of Technology has been set up to open new avenues for technology education and admission to secondary schools will be regionalised in order to ensure greater equity and reduce competitive pressure on children.

3.8.3 A programme for school leavers is being run by the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development. Social assistance is provided to needy families for educational expenditures. Thus for the year 1996/97 Rs 101.8 m were disbursed for educational support to poor families.

3.8.4 Public expenditure on schools has been rising and constituted 17.4% of all government expenditure in 1997 as compared to 14.2 % in 1990.

3.8.5 Government also provides scholarships equally to boys and girls and financial assistance to needy students for the purchase of books and payment of examination fees. Special support measures have been put into place for schools which have registered low performance consistently and are serving children from deprived regions.

4. OBSTACLES

4.1 The process of ensuring gender mainstreaming has been slow on account of the lack of professionals in the field of gender policy and analysis, the low level of gender awareness among key stakeholders in all the sectors, limited training facilities in gender issues. One important impediment to gender mainstreaming is the lack of gender sensitiveness among policy and decision-makers. Increasing gender awareness among the highest-level decision-makers and policy makers is one of the challenges that should be seriously addressed.

4.2 The under-representation of women in Technical and Vocation Education and Training (TVET) is of particular concern. Traditional perceptions of appropriate roles for men and women in the work place should be challenged. TVE must respond with gender-inclusive learning programmes, both in content and delivery, and competent and gender-sensitive faculty.

4.3 As far as the implementation of the strategy against domestic violence is concerned, we have noted a number of problem areas such as the lack of skills and competence to deal with gender based violence and the absence of a specialised court personnel. Intervention in domestic violence cases is very costly as it requires 24 hour service and may be difficult to sustain in situations of budgetary restrictions. Other ministries are reluctant to invest in specialised structures to address domestic violence. Data collection is not harmonised. Housing and employment are constraining factors for women victims.

4.4 Resources are limited and increases in the budgetary allocation are inadequate to enable the full implementation of projects at the required pace.

5. Commitments to further action and initiatives

5.1 In 1999, Government approved a National Gender Action Plan, which defines a vision for gender equality. The long term objective is the attainment of greater equality and equity between men and women while preserving family welfare. The plan views the needs of women, in the wider social and economic environment, while also considering the multicultural context of Mauritian society.

5.2 It has been formulated after wide consultations with different stakeholders. The NGAP is a pragmatic document intended to make a difference to the socio-economic environment of men, women and children and hence to society as a whole.

5.3 An implementation plan has been worked out which ensures the collaboration of all stakeholders. Monitoring mechanisms are being set up in order to work in a systematic way and regular evaluation can be made.

5.4 An action plan for the girl child has been approved by Government and is being implemented.

5.5 A National Youth policy has been developed which has taken into account gender issues.

5.6 The integration of a gender analysis into the budgetary processes of various ministries /departments /organisations will be done as part of the gender mainstreaming process in Mauritius.

5.7 A pilot project involving the integration of a gender analysis into the budgetary processes of four line ministries for year 2000/2001 with planned expansion for the next and subsequent years.

6. Rodrigues

6.1 Women play a very important role in the economic development of Rodrigues. They are responsible for much of the subsistence farming and commercial agricultural sector. Access to water has been a constraint to the development of Rodrigues. In the mid 1980's, the island went through a period of severe drought resulting in disruption of the traditional agricultural farming – maize, onions chillies, vegetables and livestock breeding. This has led to a slowing down of agricultural activity.

6.2 Much has been done in the recent years to improve the social infrastructure, in particular to provide water and sanitation. According to UNICEF/WHO/MOH study conducted in 1995, 75% of the population had tap water. Government has introduced various measures to revive the economic development. This has included programmes to provide incentives for agricultural activities, credit facilities for small and medium industries. Tourism has been encouraged with improved communications between Rodrigues and the mainland.

6.3 However, problems of unemployment among men and women and environmental degradation due to erosion and over grazing and over fishing affect the development of the island. The female labour force participation rate is lower than in Mauritius. In 1997, only 10% of the female population were employed.

6.4 The social infrastructure has been developed to serve the population of about 35,000 people. The enrolment ratios at the primary and secondary level are lower than in Mauritius and the percentage of dropouts among girls is still high. In 1997, there were 328 girls in Form I and 235 in Form V and only 71 in Form VI. The level of adolescent pregnancy is also a matter of concern. In 1997, there were 63 live births for girls under 18 and the number of marriages of girls below 18 years was 15.

6.5 Women have little negotiating power within the family. This often leads to misallocation of the family income. Many women also find themselves as heads of households with meagre financial resources. A survey undertaken in 1996 indicated that 60% of single- female headed households had less than Rs 1000 per month.

6.6 In order to support women, the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development has introduced the micro credit scheme in Rodrigues. It has enabled several women to benefit from loans without collateral and to engage in profitable income generating activities. A Family Counselling service has been set up in the island to provide psychological and legal support to families and individuals that have difficulties. A Home Economics training programme is being established to encourage women and girls to learn about healthy eating and nutrition. Trainers have been trained on sensitisation programmes on the rights of the child. Children's clubs will soon be set up in Rodrigues. The Domestic Violence awareness campaign has also been extended to the island of Rodrigues.

6.7 The National Gender Action Plan has proposed a number of programmes and measures which will be implemented during the next five years.

PART THREE

BEIJING PLATFORM OF ACTION - PROGRESS QUESTIONNAIRE

<i>Critical areas of concern</i>	<i>Examples of successful policies, programmes and projects to implement critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform of Action</i>	<i>Examples of obstacles/lessons learned</i>	<i>Committed to further sub-theme initiatives</i>
<p><u>Women and Poverty and the Economy</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A micro credit scheme for women based on Grameen model was launched in 1998. It provides loans to women from poorer segments of society without requiring any collateral for the setting up of micro enterprises • A Market Centre for Women entrepreneurs has been set up in 1998 to support women for the marketing of their products. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women suffer from lack of access to technology • The relatively lower level of literacy among women is a serious handicap for their increased participation • Women from the poorest regions need are difficult to reach. Traditional approaches cannot be used with these women. New approaches have to be devised to reach out to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A study of women in the informal sector will be conducted in order to better target policies • Projects to increase access to technology are being worked out • A study on the effect of social exclusion on women will be carried out to determine the policies and projects which will be helpful to them • Training in self help programmes will be conducted • Day care centres will be set

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Common Facility Centre has been set up to provide training to women • Skills development programmes are being run for women who want to become entrepreneurs • Forum of women entrepreneurs of Indian Ocean islands held in 1999 • Sales exhibition of products by women entrepreneurs from India held • An Early Childhood Development programme has been approved for the creation of day care facilities to support working women • An Information Technology Centre has been set up for women • A Memorandum of understanding has been signed with the National 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate support schemes for the care of their children hinders their involvement in micro credit programmes 	<p>up in deprived areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ECD policy to be implemented and quality day care structures for children will be set up to help working women • A low cost technology exhibition will be organised • A network and trade relationships will be established between women in the COMESA and SADC.
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<p>Education and Training of women</p>	<p>Small Industries Corporation of India for the transfer of technology and expertise. A low cost technology exhibition for small and micro enterprises will be organised.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Action plan for education prepared • Reforms in education, including the construction of additional secondary schools being carried out to expand educational access • An Early Childhood Development programme has been adopted for the creation of quality day care centres for children between 0 to 3 years • IEC programmes conducted for women in Women and Family centres • Computer literacy and adult literacy classes being conducted in Women and Family Centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively lower percentage of women in science and technical streams • Higher drop outs among girls • Inability of working women to join classes in women and family centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review curriculum to remove all gender bias • Review streaming system to encourage more girls to take science and technical subjects • Introduce human rights education in schools • Study job market as part of career guidance • Introduce distance education programmes for women's education
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<p>Women and health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reforms brought in public health care system • Health services are free and have been decentralised to become more accessible • Education and information programmes conducted on preventive measures • Free papsmear tests conducted • Talks given in Women and Family centres • Programmes on substance abuse and alcoholism conducted for women • Maternal and child health as well as family planning facilities available in decentralised centres • Education programmes on AIDS carried out regularly • Campaign on unsafe sex conducted with collaboration of MFPA • Programmes on nutrition and healthy living conducted by Home Economics Unit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low birth weight rate has remained stagnant • Inadequate involvement of male in the education programmes • Lack of resources • Screening of cancer programmes out of reach of poor women and education programmes do not reach to a large percentage of women • Cultural and religious barriers have prevented an objective debate on abortion • Lack of open discussions on Aids and sexually transmitted diseases • Lack of mental health professionals • Absence of programmes on menopausal problems • Reluctance of health services to introduce specialised structures for women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study to be conducted on nutritional factors affecting birth weight • Study the implications of unsafe sex and abortion • Implement a Reproductive health education programme • Conduct programmes on menopause • Sensitisation programmes on diabetes and cardio vascular diseases • Study the impact of stress and depression among women
<p>Violence against women</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Protection from Domestic Violence Act was enacted in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of specialised skills in various departments to deal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An evaluation of the implementation of the

	<p>1997. It provides for protection, occupation and tenancy orders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 hour service is being provided by a Domestic Violence Intervention Unit which offers decentralised services in six regions • Sensitisation campaigns and training programmes have been conducted • A Domestic Violence awareness week is held every year and greater awareness has been created for the problem • A legal unit has been set up to provide legal assistance to victims • A pool of psychologists has been set up to give psychological support • A new shelter set up to provide temporary refuge to victims • Training for police, probation, NGO's etc. held • A sociological study of domestic violence carried out and the findings 	<p>with the problem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of data on the issue • Poor response of Police department • Lack of financial resources • Poor response of departments for the establishment of specialised units • Inability to address male perpetrators 	<p>legislation will be carried out and the law will be reviewed in the light of feed back obtained from judiciary, police etc..</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminological study of domestic violence will be completed and findings will be used to improve data collection system • An integrated approach will be adopted to ensure interagency cooperation and more friendly services • Training of counselling staff • A Trust fund for shelters will be set up • A programme of training to develop skills to deal with male perpetrators will be conducted • Public awareness campaign will continue together with legal literacy classes
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	<p>disseminated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A criminological study conducted and findings will be used to improve mechanisms for data collection and to address male perpetrators • Legal literacy classes conducted in factories, places of work to sensitise women on their legal rights 		
Women and armed conflict	Not applicable in Mauritius		
Women in power and decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seminar on women and political empowerment organised to identify constraints and encourage greater participation • Leadership training programmes are being organised • Creation of Women's associations has been encouraged and associations receive a nominal annual grant from Government • Women and Family Centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of leadership programmes • Inadequate assertiveness programmes in schools • Relatively lower rate of literacy among women • Political culture and practices which are not conducive to women's participation • Strong resistance to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership programmes to be conducted for women at all levels • Consider electoral reform for the reservation of 30% of seats for women • Review the school curriculum to encourage leadership skills and assertiveness among women • Establish an emerging leaders programme to identify

	<p>have been set up to make information more accessible to women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An I.T. Centre for Women has been set up. • Talks and IEC programmes conducted regularly to make women aware of their rights 	<p>reforms for greater participation of women</p>	<p>potential leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a study on women and political life with special reference to cultural, economic and social factors impeding women's participation • Bring legal reforms to prohibit use of language which encourage gender stereotyping
<p>Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Bureau for Gender Equality has been established within the Ministry of Women • Gender focal points have been identified and a network has been set up • A National Advisory Committee on the Status of Women has been set up with representatives from unions, government and private sector, academia, media etc.. • The Ministry of Women operates through a network of Women and Family centres located in different regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of gender awareness at all levels • Lack of specialised gender skills to implement gender management • Inadequate funds • Low level of research capacity • Inadequate interest for gender programmes at the level of heads of ministries and departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give legal status to the National Advisory Committee • Training programmes for gender focal points and decision makers • Develop a Gender training strategy • Review the National Women's Council to give it more autonomy • Capacity building within the ministry • Build capacity for collection of desegregated data

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A National Women's Council is in operation since 1985. Women's associations are affiliated to the council. The number of associations has doubled over the past two years • A National Women Entrepreneur Council has been set up to support women entrepreneurs • Statistics unit attached to Ministry to collect data 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop gender awareness manuals
Human rights of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitution was amended in 1995 to prohibit sexual discrimination • A Protection from Domestic Violence Act was enacted in 1997 • The Criminal Code was amended in 1998 to make sexual harassment a criminal offence and to punish family abandonment as well as failure to pay alimony • The Civil Code was amended in 1999 to remove all discriminatory clauses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness of legal rights among women • Long judicial process and procedures • Inadequate respect of privacy of victims of abuse and violence • Lack of human rights education programmes • Inadequate gender awareness among police staff and judicial personnel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review remaining discriminatory laws • Organise regular legal literacy classes • Introduce human rights education at school • Review system of legal aid to reduce waiting time • Review the Protection from Domestic Violence Act to improve procedures and mechanisms • Set up Family Court system • Gender training programmes for judicial staff to be conducted

	<p>and to establish strict equality in property and parental rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of Human rights Act enacted 		
Women and the media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop on women and the media organised • Gender awareness programmes carried out • Media representative included in the National Advisory Committee on the Status of Women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor response from media • Low priority given to gender issues in media • Inadequate training for media personnel on gender issues • Lack of regulatory framework for media • Absence of a code of ethics for the media on gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise gender awareness course for media personnel • Organise workshop on self regulating code of ethics for media • Introduce legislative provisions to prevent exploitation of images of women in the press and internet • Support initiatives of women's associations to publish newsletters at community level
Women and the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IEC programmes conducted for women • Community projects for cleaning held • Training programme on use and recycling of waste materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of financial resources ▪ Poor response from women's associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase education programmes • Initiate projects for the community

<p><u>The girl child</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A seminar on the girl child conducted and an action plan has been developed • A study on commercial sexual exploitation of children carried out and an action plan prepared • A campaign against child prostitution conducted • A hot line established to inform about cases of child prostitution • Child Watch network groups set up for surveillance and early detection of cases of children at risk • Free legal assistance provided to children victims of abuse, including sexual abuse • Penal code amended to provide for more severe punishments against child abuse and exploitation, sexual abuse and paedophilia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court system is not child friendly • Lack of financial resources • Poor response from Police in view of lack of training in dealing with children • Lack of cooperation of institutions • Lack of skilled and specialised staff • Lack of objective and dispassionate debate on issues such as prostitution • Exploitation of images of girl victims in the press 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove stereotyping in text books • Extend child watch network to other regions • Conduct a study on child abuse • Introduce sex/family life education in schools • Continue campaign against child prostitution • Review existing laws to reinforce legal provisions against child prostitution • Improve school environment to make it more supportive to girls • Increase extra curricular activities for girls • Develop career guidance materials
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