

A Report on the Measures Taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran Regarding Women's Empowerment

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Regarding Women's empowerment to Achieve the Objectives of the Millennium Development

1. Most important government measures regarding the objectives of the millennium development plan

Due to the policies of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the Women's empowerment in education (the third goal of the millennium development plan), the ratio of girl students in the primary schools, high schools, and university academic programs shows a considerable growth, that is, from 79.2 percent in 1990, to 93.1 percent in 2002. This leap stems from the consistency of the girl students in their high school education and their admission to the higher education.

Moreover the third Economic, Social and Cultural Development plan, lays emphasis on the promotion and expansion of official, professional and technical women education particularly in the deprived and rural areas.

The literacy rate of the 6- year – old and 6- year – plus women population in 2002 was 78.2 percent. Compared to the figures for 1996, the rates shows 5.3 percent of growth and compared to the figures for 1976 it shows 120 percent growth. Of course the literacy rate of men is greater than that of women, but the 5.3 percent growth of the literacy rate at the materialization 1996 to 2002 compared to the figure for the men during the same period, that is, 3.3 percent, underlines the materialization of the goal of development plans aiming at reducing the literacy gap between men and women. Also the ratio of literate women to the literate men aged between 15 and 24 shows a growth of 9.1 percent between 1990 and 2002 (that is, from 78.9 percent in 1990 to 97 percent in 2002)

The share of the waged women employed in non – agricultural sector show a slow growth, that is from 10.5 percent in 1990 to 12 percent in 2002. The growth of this rate continued during the period 1990- 1998 and reached 15.3 percent. Although the said rate declined to 12 percent in 2002, the reason for this decline is the increase in the number of job –seeking educated women. In the four parliaments, the number of women representatives increased from 2 percent in the Third parliament (1988 –1992) to 5 percent in the Sixth parliament (2000-2004). Currently there are 12 women representatives in the parliament. In the local Council elections, 7276 women were elected to the councils, constituting 2.20 percent of the candidates. Currently women constitute 11 percent of the total number of the Local Council members.

Women's empowerment in State policies and planning

The trend of incorporation of women's affairs in the economic, social, cultural and political development plans of the country shows an upward growth from the first development plan after the victory of the Islamic Revolution to date. The article 158 of the Third Development plan was the first initiative for the streamlining of Women's empowerment approaches in the major plans. Among the most important points of the Article 158 of the Third Development plan are: 1 – Identification of the educational and sports needs of women on the basis of Islamic principles and promoting their role in the future development of the country. 2- Promoting their job opportunities. 3 – Facilitating women's access to legal and juridical affairs. 4 – Supporting the formation of women non-governmental organizations with emphasis on support for the women heads of family and women lacking legal protection in the less developed regions or the country. Also attempts have been made to streamline and institutionalize the Women's empowerment approach throughout the Fourth Development plan (2005 – 2009) which is binding on all governmental organizations and with the seriousness of the civil society institutions they are followed seriously. As result the issue of women's affairs was incorporated in the article 17.

According to Article 111 of the Fourth Development plan, the government has to take the following actions to promote the status and strengthen the role of women, expand the opportunities and strengthen their participation in all arenas of the society:

One) prepare, approve and implement the comprehensive plan of Development of women participation including a revision of the rules and regulations, particularly the civil code;

strengthen the women's skills concomitant with the requirements of the society and developments in the field of ICT; identify the opportunities and increase the investment in areas apt for job creation; pay attention to the gender combination or the supply of labor, uplift the living standards of women; and promote public belief in the women's capabilities and merits.

Two) Prepare and submit the bills on consolidation of the institution of family to be approved by the concerned organizations.

Three) Take the necessary measures, including the preparation of preventive measures and legal and juridical provisions, to eliminate any violence against women.

Four) Submit the bill on protection and creation of non – governmental organizations, civil society institutions, and women's organizations to the parliament.

Also other issues related to women envisaged by the same law are:

Paying subsidies to banks to pay low – interest loans to the women heads of household; the duties of the government in ensuring equal access to education, particularly to the girls; qualitative and quantitative promotion of public education; obligating the executive organizations to assign special budget to on-the-job training course for their employees and implement those courses, particularly for the women. Also in order to implement the Women's empowerment policy, the government has stipulated a budget for the development of social and cultural participation of women and every the budget is allocated to the national and provincial organizations to expend it for the said purposes.

Other issues stipulated in the major plans of the country to institutionalize Women's empowerment approach in the major plans of the country are: establishment and promotion of the women's issues at a higher level of decision – making, creation of committees on women's affairs in all province within the framework of the decentralization policy, and participation and presence of women in the local councils and high decision- making and planning centers.

In 1991 , on a presidential decree, the Office of women's Affairs was set up in the president's Office. In 1997 it was changed into the Center for women's participation. After its upgrading, the Article 158 of the third 1) Development plan delineated the duties of the center and every year its budget has been allocated regularly. With the election of the new government, the Center for women's participation was changed to the Center for women and Family Affairs. The main reason for the change of the name and mission of the center was to pay more attention to the institution of family and consolidate its pillar as well as to strengthen the role of women within the framework of the family.

Among other cases in this regard is establishment of institutionalized mechanisms in all state organizations which include: the Social, Cultural Council of women (Affiliated to the High Council of Cultural Revolution); Women's and Youth Special Committee (Affiliated to the State Expediency Council); Women Fraction (in the parliament); Women and Youth Working Groups (High Council of planning and Development of the provinces); Offices of Women's Affairs at the state Departments (most of the executive organizations); the Office for the protection of Women and Children Rights (Judiciary); Commission on the Support of Children and Women's Rights (Center for Strategic Studies, affiliated to the Judiciary); and other offices affiliated to the ministries.

Two years after the approval and implementation of the Article 158 of the Third Development plan, in order to remove the executive bottlenecks in the way of implementation of the said article, a new clause was incorporated into the budget law (no B, clause 7) to develop cultural and social participation women. The clause came into effect in 2003.

Meanwhile in the Chapter 4 of the Fourth Development plan, Note "A" permits the allocation of the budget envisaged by program No. 30203 of 101024 to be allocated to the organizations that discharge the duties mentioned in the Article 111 of the Fourth Development plan, through the Center for participation of Women after acquiring the agreement of the State Management and planning Organization. The budget related to the program No. 30203 of other organizations should be expended with the coordination of the Center for the participation of women.

Basically Women's empowerment began in the country with the Third Development plan and has been going on till date. The incorporation of the country can be an encouraging departure for

women to achieve their real, deserving status congruent with their human dignity and prestige.

Main human rights related Human rights of Women:

- Gender mainstreaming in the national development planning system: This program has led to a remarkable change in raising the issues of women in the country's budget system for developing women's social and cultural participation. The growth rate of 360% of credits for women's affairs results from the above – mentioned policy in the Iranian government's budgeting system.
- Encouraging and contributing to the quantitative and qualitative expansion of active NGOs in women's affairs which have accounted for the increase of these organizations as many as eight times.
- Promotion of the National Machinery for the Advancement of women has been done to provide more efficient condition. Furthermore, the membership of the Director of the Center for Women and Family in the Cabinet and Specialized Commissions of High Councils of Decision-making have made it possible to raise the issues of women at high levels of decision- making.
- Establishing committees on women's affairs in all provinces. At the present time, 540 positions of decision- making at regional and local levels have been assigned to women.
- Increasing the number of women's cooperatives (a 253% increase from 1997 to 2002) and cultural empowerment of women through increasing the number of women's cooperatives
- Appointment of two women in the Cabinet one woman as deputy to the President and another as the Head of the Environment Protection Department
- Increase in literacy rate of women, which has reached 74.66% at the end of 2002
- Setting up the National Committee on the Elimination of Violence against Women and formulating the National Plan of Action for preventing, combating and eliminating violence against women
- Establishment of special women police centers (WPCs) comprising of female personnel in police stations and large cities. These centers can play a valuable role in combating violence against women
- Increasing in the number of female students entering universities to 63%
- Due to the importance of mother's role in the upbringing of children, especially in the early years of birth, a bill has been approved by the Expediency Council to extend the mother's custody of children, regardless of the child's sex, up to the age of 7.