



**Convention on the Elimination
of all Forms of Discrimination
Against Women**

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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 126th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 2 March 1988, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. AKAMATSU

later: Ms. BERNARD

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Initial report of Senegal (continued) (CEDAW/C/5/Add.42 and Amend.1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Ndiaye (Senegal) took a place at the Committee table.
2. Ms. NDIAYE (Senegal), replying to the questions raised earlier in the session, said that her Government would do everything possible to make its next report to the Committee a better one. She hoped that, by the time of the next report, Senegalese women would have more advances and accomplishments to relate.
3. A number of members had complained that the supplement to the report had not been made available in all working languages. The text had in fact been submitted to the Secretariat in New York on 24 November 1987, and she was as sorry as they were that it had not been possible to translate it into all working languages in time for the session. Some members had referred to the initial report as being only "a couple of pages" in length. That was not so: the initial report was 10 pages long in French and 8 pages long in English, and that did not include the supplementary information in document CEDAW/C/5/Add.42/Amend.1.
4. Dealing with general considerations before answering questions on specific articles of the Convention, she said that rural women had always played a decisive role in farming in Senegal, working in the husbands' fields before turning to their own plots, where they grew items for household consumption. They were involved at every stage from sowing to the processing of the crop and its preparation for consumption. Collecting water for the household, and also sometimes for the animals, was also women's responsibility, and in some parts of the country they had to walk great distances in search of water, returning with containers weighing as much as 23 kilograms on their heads. Bringing home firewood was also women's work. Women looked after the livestock, processed the milk, and transported milk and dairy products to often distant markets. They also tanned skins and used them in a variety of craft occupations. Women caught 33 per cent of all the fish landed by non-industrial fishing concerns, and thereafter dealt with all the smoking, drying and pickling necessary to conserve it. They marketed all the fish from inshore fisheries; they also gathered shellfish using motor boats which men helped them to launch and land. Women engaged in fish processing were organized into 17 different co-operatives or women's groups with a working capital of 3,431,000 CFA francs.
5. Medical care had often been scant for lack of facilities and qualified staff, but the 1972 administrative reform, which had completely decentralized control of rural community budgets - allowing rural taxpayers to organize programmes in accordance with their needs - had done much to improve the situation. Rural communities had generally used their investment funds to build rural maternity homes and village pharmacies, and UNICEF had provided support under its maternal

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and child health programme for equipping all the maternity homes and providing the pharmacies with an initial stock of medical supplies. UNICEF had also funded six-month training courses at the rural health centres for village midwives, all of whom had been provided with medical kits. Such services were managed by a committee which established the fees payable (between 25 and 100 CFA francs for using a village pharmacy, 500 to 1,000 francs for a stay in a maternity home); the income thus generated was used to cover capital maintenance, replenish stocks of drugs and other supplies and pay staff, and some funds were held in reserve to cover replacement equipment and other costs. The pharmacists and midwives were paid in part in the form of community labour in their fields. Many maternity homes had been built by women themselves, using the collective income from their various economic activities.

6. The basic treatment of certain ailments was left to women, who still used traditional methods; traditional methods of family planning, which had lost none of their value, were also applied. Women had fallen behind in education, especially in rural areas, for economic, social and cultural reasons and often dropped out of school early because they were needed for domestic and agricultural chores. Their school attendance was also impeded by a fear of contact with imported cultures, the worry that the unaccustomed temptations of a town might lure them into unwholesome activities, their parents' illiteracy and the physical isolation of some villages.

7. Women craftsmen were well organized. They worked in groups or individually, chiefly in dressmaking, traditional and modern embroidery, dyeing, hairdressing, pottery, jewelery-making, printing and binding. They belonged to chambres de métier and held professional working documents. They took part in international and national craft fairs and often organized shows and sales during national women's fortnight.

8. In urban and rural areas alike, women excelled in commercial activities. They outnumbered men in the markets, and organized into groups in order to purchase supplies and arrange credit. Businesswomen dealing in textiles enjoyed great renown, ordering fabric from Europe and Asia and travelling a great deal. Having collateral to offer, they had no difficulty in obtaining credit. Women in business and liberal professions had just held a general meeting to establish their own association, and had decided to make easier access to credit a priority. The African Development Bank and Women's World Banking were encouraging States to establish special lines of credit to fund women's projects.

9. Decree 72/1288 of 12 October 1972 on the ownership of national land, including land in rural areas, had abolished the former custom under which land had been handed down within certain families, promoting instead fairness and equal treatment not only for women but for the entire population. Under the Decree, women could acquire plots of land just as any other member of the community could.

10. On the subject of co-operation by women's organizations with her office, she said that the normal channel was through the National Women's Committee although any women's organization had direct access. The National Committee comprised representatives of women's organizations, ministerial departments, political

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parties, trade unions, and anyone else who could contribute to the cause of women. It met at the invitation of its Chairman, to take a position on any matter that related to the status of women. It had not been able to have a say in the final shaping of the reports now before the Committee, but care would be taken in future to remedy that oversight. Women could always approach the Ministry of Social Development if they wished to influence a decision affecting their status, and other Ministries also paid attention to women's wishes and proposals. The National Women's Committee could approach the Head of State directly at the end of the annual women's fortnight; trade unions could do so on 1 May; and women's associations could submit written pleas at their own request. All such applications were very sympathetically received.

11. The notions of women as "companion" or "complement" to man had no established force, for the Constitution enshrined the principle of equality between the sexes.

12. Under the Family Code, marriage was now a matter of free choice. The consent of the spouses was a basic requirement, protecting women from the forced marriages to which they had once been subjected and giving greater stability to the marriage. Women could agree to marry subject to the husband's payment of a dowry and could dispose freely of that dowry, but dowries were largely symbolic, often amounting to no more than 3,000 CFA francs or roughly \$10. Dowries were sometimes paid in kind, in the form of goods compensating the bride for her former contribution to the wealth of her own family.

13. One member of the Committee had questioned the need for a woman to obtain her husband's consent before taking up a job. What was to be done if a man decided that his wife's choice of job was not in the family interest? In fact, the husband's decision could be overruled by the courts. The intention of the legislature had been to affirm the crucial role of the family in Senegalese society, and the woman occupied a central place within the family unit.

14. On the subject of polygamy, reference had been made to the prize-winning book by Marianna Ba, Une si longue lettre. The rather "intellectual" point of view expressed in that book was not shared by all Senegalese women, some of whom found the book very self-centred. The majority of women in rural areas saw polygamy as having a beneficial effect on their living conditions, as well as some drawbacks. No one disputed that the burden of rural women's work was tremendous, and if a woman had the opportunity to share her burden with other women actually living cordially within the family like true sisters, often conspiring together against the husband, polygamy was a good thing. She personally had been told by rural women that they did not agree with elitist urban women's views voiced in programmes on the "problems" of polygamy they had heard on the radio. Moreover, in certain parts of the country, after a woman had given birth she was supposed to go to live in her parents' house for a period of time to avoid becoming pregnant again too quickly; if the husband did not wish for religious reasons to commit adultery during her absence, he had no choice but to marry again.

15. Modern Senegalese women were campaigning actively against polygamy, but ancestral customs could not be changed overnight; the matter must be approached with a great deal of tact and common sense, because vested interests were at stake.

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16. She had also been asked why she had described the Family Code as "revolutionary" if it still regarded the man as the head of the family. The Senegalese family as traditionally understood had centred around the authority of a head of household, and had comprised the man's wives and unmarried daughters, his sons, his sons' sons and their wives. The old model had survived in some areas, but elsewhere it had changed dramatically. The new families appeared to be radically different, but were in fact identical in their basic functions. Traditional family values had to be safeguarded if they were to ensure the unity and cohesion of the new family unit. Senegalese tradition accorded great prominence to women, assigning them rights and duties as the watchful guardians of the home and the unifying force among the disparate elements of the family.

17. The so-called Inter-African Committee on traditional practices affecting the health of women and children had been formed by a westernized group of African intellectual women with little recent experience of African realities. Their views conflicted with those held by Africans in pursuit of the same goals who were more familiar with the areas where such practices were current. The Senegalese authorities were aware of the damage done by such practices and were committed to the campaign against them, but they also realized that eradicating them would be a slow task. The African States were taking steps against violence and injury to children, through a combination of information and educational activities, seeking to engender new attitudes on the part of the population involved. In any event, female circumcision affected only a tiny minority of the population in Senegal and was tending to disappear over time. The attention devoted to the issue in some quarters was disproportionate. She had no further information on the Inter-African Committee.

18. She admitted that the various materials presented to the Committee lacked data on the application of the Labour Code. She had taken note of the various comments made and hoped that the next report would prove more satisfactory.

19. Senegal would soon be embarking on its next population census, which would enable the national statistics to be updated. If it was not too late, the census forms might perhaps be expanded to include questions on women. Meanwhile, she could assure the Committee that women occupied a number of very senior posts in the Government, foreign service and business world of Senegal.

20. The expression "equal pay for equal work" in article 105 of the Labour Code was to be understood in the most straightforward sense: if a woman performed exactly the same work as a man for the same company, she must be paid exactly the same as he was. Sometimes, however, the actual situation was rather different.

21. As part of the development process, it was the responsibility of a sub-committee on women's integration within the National Planning Commission to study the programmes for each ministerial department in order to ensure that they gave due prominence, both strategically and financially, to female inputs. The Senegalese Plan of Action for women provided a perfect example of women's participation in economic planning. In the formulation of plans for grass-roots development, rural extension workers and officials of local groups promoting the status of women were consulted at every stage.

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22. The Rural Women's Organization managed development projects focusing on easing the burden of women's work which received support from the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Capital Development Fund, UNICEF, the International Labour Office, non-governmental organizations and friendly countries. Such projects enabled women to earn the money to buy basic equipment or fund development in another sector altogether. Each rural district or arrondissement had its own team of specialists in agriculture, stock-raising, co-operation, forestry, water, health care and rural development activities.

23. The technical training centres for girls provided a traditional education, supplemented by technical training in a subject area selected by the girl individually or in association with other girls in the course. Those subjects included dressmaking, catering and hairdressing. The training included instruction in marketing, management and the economic viability of business undertakings, and a period of practical apprenticeship to familiarize them with their future careers.

24. Talks given by the Association of Women Teachers and employees of the Ministry for the Status of Women had helped to reduce the high dropout rate among girls. That the rate remained high was largely due to the difficult economic circumstances which some girls' parents faced, but the introduction of the new school system under which the economically less well off received financial assistance had improved matters noticeably. It was thought that, over the long term, the economic impediments to a higher level of education among women would be abolished.

25. The Senegalese Government and legislature had taken a number of measures to create a society in which men and women were truly equal. An effort had been made to preserve the prestige of national traditions while at the same time modernizing society. The task had not always been easy, for modern legal concepts and a number of customary traditions were often in conflict.

26. One member of the Committee had asked why the Ministry for the Status of Women had been abolished. That Ministry had not been abolished at all. The change in its title and functions had been intended as a means of lending more support to the decentralized institutions catering for women at the grass-roots level.

27. Turning to questions asked under specific articles of the Convention, she confirmed that women who had suffered sexual discrimination could seek redress before the courts; the National Council for Women would help them to do so. The Association of Women Lawyers would help such women to find counsel even if they were short of funds.

28. She had been asked why women needed their husbands' consent to enter into a labour contract. Any Senegalese woman was free to do a job completely different from that of her husband. If, however, the husband judged that the job was inconsistent with the interests of the family, he could object to her taking it. The husband's objections could be overruled by the court if the court found them unjustified. The consent provision was acknowledged to be discriminatory, and Senegalese women had already requested a change in the law.

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29. Abortion was lawful only when the life of the mother was in danger, and must be performed by a doctor.
30. Political parties were forbidden to identify themselves with a particular sex, but could make efforts to promote women's rights. All the parties had women's programmes and women members.
31. In traditional families, tasks were distributed among the family members. Formerly, girls had been educated at home until they were married, as had boys until they joined a male clan at 7 years of age. Children of both sexes were currently being educated in schools. The Constitution laid down men's and women's responsibilities for educating and raising children. Men were increasingly sharing in housework. Schools were educating children about the importance of shared household responsibilities. She expressed the hope that both men and women would change their traditional attitudes in that regard, as growing numbers of women were working outside the home.
32. Property provisions in traditional law had been detrimental to women. However, the principle of equality in divorce and inheritance had been laid down in the Family Code.
33. Some religious groups with the status of non-governmental organizations were endeavouring to improve the standard of living in rural areas. Such activities did not challenge the principle of the separation of church and State.
34. Physical and sexual violence against women was unlawful and was punished severely.
35. Concerning article 7, illiterate women could vote and hold elective office.
36. The matter of family well-being was of paramount importance to the Government. It was deemed to be an information and communication problem rather than a health issue. Women were given information, inter alia, on birth spacing, so as to increase family stability. The entire community must be made aware of religious practices which were detrimental to women.
37. Concerning article 11, women were employed chiefly in education, health services and the food industry. They could not be employed between midnight and 5 a.m. and could not engage in dangerous work or work which might jeopardize their morals or health. They could pursue military careers.
38. The National Federation of Groups Promoting the Status of Women had been established in 1987. Further information would be provided regarding its structure and objectives.
39. Concerning article 14, pension funds had not been provided by law for rural women. Health services were available to them in their communities. If their husbands were wage-earners, they were entitled to benefits under the Labour Code.

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40. Spouses were entitled to choose their marriage settlement. Property acquired by either spouse before marriage and personal property acquired through succession during marriage were not subject to division upon the dissolution of the union. While the husband might be entrusted with the administration of his wife's property, he was not required by law to do so. If a husband administered the property of his wife without her opposition, he was assumed to have a mandate to do so. Husbands or wives who interfered in the administration of their spouse's property despite the spouse's opposition were liable for the costs of such interference.

41. Engagement was not a requirement for marriage and did not oblige the partners to marry. Divorce could be granted on the basis of mutual consent or by legal decision at the request of either party. Repudiation had to be witnessed by two people in order for it to be grounds for divorce.

42. Ms. CARON said that Senegal should justify the ongoing practice of female circumcision which was a particularly cruel form of torture practised without the consent of its young victims. Such practices could be eliminated only through government intervention. It must be assumed that Senegal did not have the political will to outlaw and punish such offences and to restore women's dignity.

43. Ms. NDIAYE (Senegal) said that scores of studies had explained female circumcision in terms of culture and religion. However, it was a practice which could not be justified. Medical personnel were being informed that excision was unlawful, and some had ceased to perform it. Considerable persuasion and information were necessary to change old traditions.

44. Ms. PILATAXI DE ARENAS said that the Committee had been impressed by the seriousness with which Senegalese women were confronting social problems. Women everywhere should work on behalf of women's dignity.

45. The Chairperson said that the Committee had concluded its consideration of the initial report of Senegal.

46. Ms. Ndiaye withdrew.

47. Ms. Bernard resumed the Chair.

Initial report of Nigeria (continued) (CEDAW/C/5/Add.49 and Amend.1)

48. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Okobi (Nigeria) took a place at the Committee table.

49. Ms. OKOBI (Nigeria), replying to questions raised during their general comments by the members of the Committee at the 123rd meeting (CEDAW/C/SR.123), apologized for the repetitions in the supplementary report, which were due to the short period available for its preparation.

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50. The Constitution was the paramount law of the land and any administrative directive that conflicted with it was null and void. Anyone who suffered discrimination as a result of such a directive could institute court action under section 49 of the Constitution, citing the law breached and the article of the Convention infringed. Administrative directives had no legal force.

51. The National Committee on Women and Development had been upgraded to category C among government boards and parastate bodies, entitling its members to remuneration on a par with similar government bodies. Adequate funding had been earmarked for the Committee in the 1988 annual budget. She could not say whether the Government intended to appoint a Minister for Women's Affairs, but she did know that there were plans to create a Directorate or perhaps a National Commission on Women's Affairs, the difference being that the latter would be a parastate body attached to a Ministry and therefore more autonomous, while the former would be within the Ministry proper.

52. As to the disparities in the taxation of men and women, women had launched a very strong campaign to be given the same tax reliefs as men. As a result of sustained pressure and specific litigation, tax policy was being reviewed and the situation was gradually improving. It was now possible for a woman head of family, or a married, divorced or single woman, to obtain tax relief on any documented expenditures she incurred for the children in her custody. Complaints regarding any discriminatory bureaucratic practices in taxation or any other area could be brought to the appropriate Minister and transmitted to the President or Vice-President until the practice was eliminated. In that regard, the Attorney-General had revised the practice precluding women from standing bail for an accused person.

53. The political rights of women were guaranteed by section 37 of the Constitution and, since 1970, women had participated fully in politics. Even under the current military régime, women had participated actively, as both voters and candidates, in the latest local government elections.

54. Regarding private sector or religious support for the advancement of women, the private sector often contributed to programmes instituted under various articles of the Convention, and religious teaching often helped make women aware of their position in society.

55. The most recent statistics indicated that the enrolment of girls in schools had risen to 80 per cent of that of boys.

56. As to sexual harassment in the work-place, it was difficult to assess, since women did not readily report it. However, disciplinary or legal action was taken against offenders if it was reported. Regarding leave allowance, she was pleased to state that, since the report had been submitted, men and women had been given the same leave allowance. The position on paternity leave had regrettably remained the same, the attitude of Nigerian men being different from that of men of European descent. That situation might yet change, however, especially in the current situation as more men were laid off work and women were becoming breadwinners. Even so, there was sufficient domestic help available to take care of the children.

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57. As to statistics on the number of women holding posts in the Government, there was at least one woman Commissioner in each of the 21 states, and more than one in some. The Government had not consulted the population as to its views on the advancement of women, but women's groups in Nigeria discussed women's issues persistently in the media, and men had come to realize that women were a necessary factor in genuine national development. The Government itself was not simply hoping that tradition would lose its grip: through its statements, actions and campaigns mobilizing women for progress, it had enlightened the population about the negative aspects of some traditional practices. That was a slow process, however.

58. The relationship between the Women's Bureau and the National Council of Women's Societies and other non-governmental women's organizations was both cordial and co-operative. The Women's Bureau subsidized the non-governmental organizations and assisted them administratively as well, even though they were autonomous. The non-governmental organizations formed pressure groups and they did influence government policy. Recently, for instance, two national newspapers that had been in the habit of publishing semi-nude pictures of women had succumbed to pressure from women's groups and discontinued that practice.

59. Replying to the questions raised specifically with regard to article 2 of the Convention, she said that the Government had disseminated information on the advancement of women by circulating its report to CEDAW to the 21 states and to non-governmental organizations. The supplementary report would be similarly distributed.

60. Regarding discriminatory customs and practices, female circumcision was widespread in the south but was on the decline as people came to realize the health risks involved. Early marriage was practised in some parts of the country, but it too was decreasing. The official age of marriage was 16 to 17 years for girls and 16 for boys. She was pleased to state that, since the report had been submitted, the Ministry responsible for women's affairs had set up a high-level Committee to look into some social problems such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy, widowhood and prostitution. The Committee had made recommendations that would form part of the Government's forthcoming social development policy. Rural women and disabled women were at a particular disadvantage in exercising their rights under the Convention, because they were unaware of such rights and were unable to press for them.

61. Statistics were not available on the categories of women who entered into the different types of marriage recognized in Nigeria, although each type had widespread adherents. Registration of monogamous marriages under the Marriage Act was required, as was registration of customary marriages in some parts of the country. Other marriages were not registered unless the parties so wished.

62. Regarding women's own awareness, many women knew about their rights but were slow to take legal action when discriminated against, either because of fears of adverse publicity or because of the cost of litigation. Campaigns to make women aware of their rights in such areas as family planning, health and education were being mounted by government agencies.

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63. With regard to article 4 of the Convention, the steps taken to ensure women equal access to employment opportunities were not temporary, for once such rights had been granted they could not be withdrawn. Concerning article 5, she explained that domestic violence was frowned upon, but was accepted by some women as inevitable. Section 39 of the Constitution condemned it. Cruelty was also grounds for divorce, and women could sue for divorce. Incidents of rape, when reported, were handled by the police.

64. Concerning article 6, ethics was taught in schools but there was no educational programme to rehabilitate prostitutes; if there were one, prostitutes might not take advantage of it for fear of identification.

65. With regard to article 7, there were programmes to educate women about their political rights, and women's organizations had organized seminars and workshops to help women to register, vote and run as candidates, in preparation for the restoration of civilian rule in 1992. There was a woman on the National Electoral Committee who was responsible for the problems of women in that regard. There were many women in the Government: the exact number would be given in the next report.

66. There was political will on the part of the Government, and it had set up programmes to educate society about the role of women. The themes of the International Women's Day celebration in 1988, for instance, were to be the role of Nigerian women in nation-building and the need for women's self-reliance, acceptance and integration. In addition, the National Council of Women's Societies had recently called on the federal Government to include women in the Armed Forces Ruling Council. Women were now joining the military, so that their position in the ranks would improve in the future. Furthermore, many women were being included at a policy-making level in parastate bodies and government boards. It was therefore safe to say that there was genuine participation of women in political life.

67. In connection with article 9, she explained that Nigerian law did not recognize dual citizenship. Nigerian men conferred their citizenship on their wives - although an alien woman married to a Nigerian was not obliged to renounce her own citizenship - but Nigerian women could not give their nationality to their husbands. Steps were being taken to enable women to confer citizenship on their alien husbands; however, the Ministry in question now reserved the right to grant residence permits and eventual naturalization to alien men, upon application by their Nigerian wives.

68. Regarding article 10 and the question of education, the figures given in the report had changed radically and in some states there were now more girls than boys in primary and secondary schools. The popularity of law studies among women was probably attributable to the wide range of job opportunities and self-employment available in the legal profession. The number of women law lecturers had increased since the report, although many women preferred to practise law rather than to teach it. There was a national Women's Education Programme that aimed to spur interest in women's education, especially in technical areas, and its goals could be summed up as education first and marriage later. Statistics on illiteracy, which was particularly high in rural areas, would be given in the next report.

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69. Concerning article 11 and employment, women were agitating against protective legislation which was in effect discriminatory, especially as regards night work. That would be discussed in the next report. There were no special facilities for self-employed women and they were not protected by labour laws. It was considered a burden to employ younger women in the private sector, because of maternity leave and the child-care needs and health problems of child-bearing women; the private sector therefore preferred to hire mature, older women. In any case, most job opportunities were in the public sector. The data on women's career development in the amended report (CEDAW/C/5/Add.49/Amend.1, p. 8) were representative of the whole country and gave the results of a survey by the Centre for Management Development.

70. There was no profession in Nigeria in which women were not to be found: there were women pilots, scientists, engineers, doctors, geologists, and so on. There were no statistics to show wage differentials in the private sector. The principle of equal pay for equal work, however, was accepted; in 1975, the Udoji Commission on Job Evaluation had used that yardstick. No public office was closed to women and their statutory working hours were the same as for men, although because of family responsibilities women might not wish to work overtime. The retirement age - 55 years - was the same for men and women, although men and women could be retired by the Government or the private sector after 35 years' service as a way of dealing with unemployment. There were women in the trade unions and there was a women's wing in the Nigerian Labour Congress. There was no discrimination in employment.

71. With regard to article 12, abortion was not legal in Nigeria but was permitted on the recommendation of a doctor if the mother's life was in danger. An attempt to legalize abortion had been resisted by the churches, and women had mounted a campaign against it.

72. Statistics for 1985 indicated that average female life expectancy was between 54 and 60 years, but statistics for men were not available. There were about as many women as men in the population, but more women lived in rural areas while more men lived in urban areas. Nigeria had just formulated a national population policy which it hoped would effectively curb a threatened population explosion.

73. Concerning article 13, rural women did not receive pensions as such but were adequately taken care of by their children and other relatives. In addition, rural women had evolved their own mutual support system: monthly contributions were paid into a community chest, from which loans could be taken out in time of need. Moreover, on the death of a husband, cash contributions were traditionally made to the widow and funeral expenses were paid by the community.

74. Traditional practices stood in the way of women's access to credit. In some parts of the country, women owned land, but elsewhere women worked on land belonging to their husbands or families. The Ministry of Agriculture had taken up the question of women's farming, and progress was being made in allocating farmland to women under the new land-use decree which had placed land under government control. Modern farming techniques were being taught to women in rural areas and

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women were forming co-operatives that enabled them to obtain credit in their own right. The First Lady had launched a National Programme of Better Life for Rural Women, and similar programmes had been undertaken by the wives of state Governors.

75. Women excelled in the cultural life of the nation, particularly as singers, dancers and actresses. A popular national television programme was directed and produced by a woman.

76. With regard to article 15 and the question of legal equality, women had full civil capacity to engage in commerce. Most Nigerian women, in fact, were traders and contributed to the economy. The Government did not discriminate against women in allocating land, and women could buy land anywhere in the country. With regard to civil and legal rights, the Constitution and customary law complemented one another and the latter varied from state to state. Many women lived under customary law, since most of them lived in rural areas. Statistics on the matter would be provided in the next report.

77. With regard to article 16 and the multiplicity of Nigerian marriage patterns - civil, religious and customary - theoretically, each type of marriage was distinct, but there were abuses, as when a Nigerian man entered into a monogamous civil marriage under the Marriage Act but illegally took another wife. Nigerian women had not sued for bigamy, and since men were the culprits, there had not been any serious enforcement of the law. On the other hand, polygamy was permissible under both Islamic and customary law. In abuses of the kind mentioned, some women might sue for divorce, but others accepted the situation. Family planning services were available to women in rural areas, and family planning policy formed part of national population policy.

78. It was understandable that people who were not Nigerian or African might be shocked at the attitude towards marital status described in both reports and at deep-rooted traditional customs. Unmarried people were indeed still considered incomplete and irresponsible, although the situation was changing under the pressure of external and economic factors. A woman's adultery constituted grounds for divorce, while a man's did not, because it was claimed that men were polygamous by nature and could not help themselves, while women as mothers and wives were expected to be more disciplined and their bodies were considered more sacred. Early marriage for girls was considered desirable in order to avoid pregnancy out of wedlock. Unmarried women were frowned upon because it was assumed that they were incapable of finding a husband because of some moral or character defect. Such misconceptions were gradually dying, however, especially now that women could have a profession and support themselves with or without a man. The situation was definitely changing.

79. No statistics were available on the number of marriages before the age of 16 or the number of teenage pregnancies, but they would be supplied in the next report. Regarding the definition of polygamy, polygamy existed when a man married more than one wife. Under Islamic law, the position of each wife was clear, the first wife being recognized as the head and each successive wife ranking in descending order. Upon the death of the husband, property was shared according to

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the number of male children a woman had, but the first wife was definitely taken care of - to different degrees in different areas. A situation other than "pure polygamy" arose when a man who was married under the Marriage Act illegally took another wife, thereby committing bigamy. The husband bore full responsibility for his wives in all respects, and polygamy was consequently more of a rich man's game. As to the drastic reduction of the bride price, the latter had traditionally been viewed as an indication of a man's ability to provide for his wife, but some parents now felt that the husband should pay for the investment they had made in their daughter's education. Women's groups were protesting about the high dowry, but that tradition was supported by both men and women since failure to pay the dowry made it seem that the girl was not respectable and the family did not support the marriage.

80. The grounds for divorce under systems other than customary law were childlessness, cruelty, incompatibility and misbehaviour. The Government had established a pilot law project for women and a legal aid centre for both men and women, and many women were taking advantage of both programmes. As far as she knew, there were no plans to establish a family court. Most marriage disputes were settled by family elders, or by the customary courts when the family failed to do so.

81. Programmes initiated by the Government to integrate women in development included: volunteer leadership training courses for women in rural areas, where civics, child-care, home-management and income-generation were taught; courses for women in rural areas and urban slums, teaching income-generating skills for self-reliance using local materials in order to supplement the family income; training courses for day-care-centre personnel; and public awareness programmes to mobilize society for social and economic recovery and raise the consciousness of Nigerians in general, with emphasis on programmes for women.

82. Ms. CARON said that she could only reiterate the urgency of having the Government take all possible steps to deal with female circumcision. It could not simply wait for the custom to disappear, but must severely penalize it. The Government must also do something about the discrimination in citizenship rights. Regarding family law, she asked whether there were any plans to unify the marriage laws and eliminate their discriminatory provisions. Certain marriage customs could not go on indefinitely. It was not clear to her whether it was forbidden for a girl who had barely reached puberty to marry.

83. Ms. FORDE said that she was looking forward to seeing information in the next report concerning the Government's review of the bigamy laws. Women would perhaps take action and ensure that the review had positive results.

84. Ms. LAIOU-ANTONIOU asked how women's organizations were fighting against polygamy and female circumcision.

85. Ms. OKOBI (Nigeria) said that women were doing so by writing directly to government officials and holding press conferences. Regarding female circumcision, a committee headed by a doctor had been established to educate the public about the

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health risks involved. The practice was dying out, since there was no scientific basis to the belief that women would be more controlled if they were circumcised.

86. The question of bigamy posed a dilemma. Women's organizations were fighting bigamy, but some women supported it since they felt it was better to be a second wife than not to be married at all. It should be remembered that, since the civil war, women had outnumbered men in Nigeria and single women were not respected in Nigeria. Women would eventually come to see the adverse effects of polygamy - the rivalry and the scramble for property when the man died.

87. The CHAIRPERSON said that a similar situation existed even in the Western world, although it was not labelled polygamy, for many women felt that half a loaf was better than none. It was a universal problem.

88. Ms. SAYOGYO said she would like more information on the Government's strategy to achieve food self-sufficiency and how it had succeeded. Also, she would like to know how the Government's irrigation scheme would affect land rights, which she understood were handed down matrilineally. If women, who were now working on their husbands' lands, acquired their own land as well, that could cause a conflict in their lives.

89. Ms. OKOBI (Nigeria) said that it was Ghana that had a matrilineal system, whereas Nigeria had a patrilineal system of land ownership. In many parts of the country women worked on their husbands' land but could not own their own. When the Government took over land, however, it distributed it to women or women's co-operatives according to the recommendations of extension workers.

90. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Committee had concluded its consideration of the report of Nigeria.

91. Ms. Okobi withdrew.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.