

**NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE AFRICAN AND GLOBAL PLATFORM FOR  
ACTION FOR  
THE ADVANCEMENT OF ERITREAN WOMEN**

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ASMARA, ERITREA  
EAST AFRICA**

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ATTI	Asmara Teachers Training Institute
EDHS	Eritrean Demographic and Health Survey
EPLF	Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front
ERREC	Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission
CBE	Commercial Bank of Eritrea
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERA	Commission for Eritrean Refugee Affairs
CHW	Community Health Worker
CMR	Child Mortality Rate
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DAW	Development and Advancement of Women
EC	Eritrean Constitution
ECA/ACF	Economic Commission for Africa/ African Center for Women
ECDF	Eritrean Community Development Fund
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
WHH	Women Headed Households
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSE	Government of the State of Eritrea
HTP	Harmful traditional Practices
IMR	Infant mortality rate
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoTI	Ministry of Trade and Industry
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoLG	Ministry of Local Government
MoLHWF	Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare
MoLWE	Ministry of Land, Water and Environment
NDP	National Democratic Program
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NUEW	National Union of Eritrean Women
PROFEM	Project for Female Education
PFDJ	Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice
RCP	Rural Credit Program
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendants
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Fund for Women
USD	US Dollar

## PREFACE

Like most other African countries, Eritrea was formed in the late 1980s by colonialism. It has been under Italian, British and Ethiopian rule. In May 1991 after thirty years of armed struggle for their right to self-determination, the Eritrean People's for Liberation Front (EPLF) defeated the Ethiopian military forces in the country and established a Provisional Government. The State of Eritrea obtained its de facto independence in 1991 after thirty years of war and its official independence on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1993 after a UN supervised referendum in which over 99.8% of the people voted in favor. Eritrea, which joined the group of Independent Nations in May 1993, is a small country located in the Horn of Africa, 125,000 sqkm. (over 48,000 square miles) in northeast Africa. To the east, Eritrea has over 100 islands and a 670 mile coastline along the Red Sea. It is bordered to the north and west by Sudan, to the south by Ethiopia, and to the southeast by Djibouti.

It consists of four distinct physiographic regions namely, the temperate and cool central highland plateau, hot and humid western lowlands, hot and arid eastern lowlands and the coastal lands, with average elevations of about 2000, 1000, 500 and below 500 meters respectively.

Capital: Asmara (population of about 400,000). The main ports are Massawa and Assab.

### Zones and their Capitals:

Central:	-Asmara
Debub	-Mendefera
Anseba	-Keren
Gash/Barka	-Barentu
Northern Red Sea	-Massawa
Southern Red Sea	-Assab

Population:	3.5 million (50% are females)
Growth rate:	3 percent per annum Labor Force
Ethnic Groups:	Tigrigna, Tigre, Saho, Afar, Baza, Bilen, Hadareb, Nara and Rashaida
Literacy Rate:	20% (10% for women)
Life Expectancy:	47 years
Population per/Dr.:	48000
Population per Nurse:	1750
Infant/Mortality rate:	136 per 1000 births (EDHS, 1995)
GDP per Capita:	US\$ 217 - 234
Religions:	Christians and Moslems with some animists.

The government working languages are Tigrinya, Arabic and English

The Government of Eritrea (GOE) is composed of legislative, executive and judiciary branches. The Legislative body (National Assembly) is the highest legal body in the government. It sets out the internal and external policies of the government. It approves the budget and elects the President of the country. The cabinet that is the executive branch is composed of seventeen ministers chaired by the President (two women ministers). The President is the head of the government. The judicial body operated independently of both the legislative and executive bodies and has a court system extending from the village community to sub-regional, regional and national levels.

Head of State:	President Isaias Afewerki
Political Party:	Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ)
Flag:	Green, red and blue with golden olive wreath
Emblem:	Camel encircled by an olive wreath
Currency:	Nakfa (rate 1 USD = 7.50 Nakfa)

### *The Economy*

Eritrea is basically an agricultural country. 80% rural (50% farmers and 30% pastoralists). Though women account for a large percentage of the agriculture labor force we find out that, their contribution to the GDP is not considered, yet earnings of domestic workers are considered in the estimation of the GDP.

Arable land is 32,000sq.km

Cultivated land is 3840sq.km.

Natural resources: Agricultural (oilseed, horticulture, livestock etc.)

Marine (fish, salt etc.)

Precious metals : gold, silver metallic and industrial minerals etc.

Main exports: Textiles, Footwear, Leather goods, Salt, Oilseed etc.

Main imports: Machinery, petroleum products, industrial inputs.

## PART I OVERVIEW

The Eritrean National Progress Report on the implementation of the Platform for Action has been prepared in conformity with the guidelines from the UN division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and Economic Commission for Africa, Africa Center for Women (ECA/ACW).

The report tries to assess the national strife undertaken to ensure the implementation of the Platforms for action five years after the Beijing Conference in 1995. It highlights the achievements and constraints encountered in the design and execution of the overall national priorities within which the integration of women in development should rank high.

The design of the country's macro policy, the role of the Eritrean government and the role of the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) to liaise with the government and other non-governmental organizations, in order to ensure complementary rather duplication and to devise strategies to resource mobilization and collaborate in setting up priorities and ensuring that women's concerns are incorporated in the sector's policies have been the major and basis concerns of the government.

The efforts to promote the economic and social status of women relied in particular on the development strategies that stem from the goals and objectives of the International Development Strategy. The basic guide for a continuous process towards the advancement of women and their full integration in the economic, political, social and cultural development has been the formulation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies that intended to provide practical and effective guide for global action on a long-term basis. The adaptation of these strategies to the national realities and development of a national plan with clearly identified priorities has provided a framework for action at all levels which the government has been implementing.

Acknowledging the existing and potential obstacles for the achievement of the objectives of the Decade - equality, development and peace - the government has tried to address major issues that include the legislative changes and enactment, which is the basis for action and acts as a catalyst for societal change; the design of a macro-policy which addresses the basis of inequality, that is, poverty and backwardness of the majority of the population and changes in the power structure which controls society and determines development issues and peace initiatives.

The development of a Constitution in 1997 which favors the right of women and their participation in the political, economic, social and cultural aspects; revised articles of the Civil Code on marriage and family which excludes the traditional practices and ensures equal rights; Penal Code to exclude all discriminatory clauses and add protective measures for women; the Proclamation of Land that entitles women equal ownership are some of the major steps that articulate the need for women's empowerment.

In line with these developments, the government has reserved 30% of the assembly seats for women; with focus on the basic economic, health and education issues, school infrastructure has increased by 56% and the enrollment rate currently is 51% compared to 49% in 1995 (MOE 1998). Similar developments have been achieved in the health sector with immunization coverage increasing from 13% in 1993 to 55% in 1997 (UNICEF 1997). The Eritrean economic activity being dominated by trade activities, which comprises 65% of the total labor force, women's share in this labor force is 26% in trade and 41% in services (MTI 1996).

Taking into consideration the socio-economic and political structures in traditional Eritrea that exclude and discriminate against women, it is evident that a lot remains to be done although some positive measures are already in place.

At international level, the Government of Eritrea has been a signatory to various international conventions. The Convention on the Rights of the Child



which was signed and ratified on 1993, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against women, signed in 1995, the International Covenant on Economic, social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on civil and Political Rights were acceded on 1999 and the African Chanted on Human and People's Rights was signed on January 4, 1999.

Although a lot of progress has been made in most areas of concern to Eritrean women, the existing structures for the advancement of women still needs to be strengthened by allocating adequate resources, promoting greater collaboration among government institutions, NGO's, individuals and sensitizing the institutions and the entire society. Regular surveys to provide reliable data disaggregated by gender in all areas of concern to women should be undertaken.

The revised laws of harmonized cultural and legal issues should be addressed and their effective implementation monitored for the law favors only those who have access to the law owing to the inequalities of women's knowledge of that law.

A monitoring mechanism within the government's institutions should be introduced in order to be able to measure and follow up the indicators of women's development. As members of the high level decision body of the government, a mechanism should be developed and strengthened to clearly state the mandate of the NUEW within the governmental institutions and a network developed to enable the development of practical methodologies for incorporating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating gender perspectives into all aspects of policy making and planning. The existing gaps in all critical areas of concern to women should be bridged.

## **PART II INTRODUCTION**

The Eritrean people have sacrificed three decades of struggle for independence which has laid a firm ground for social justice with equality as an essential principle of development and peace. The Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) emphasized the need for a strong consciousness characterized by the support of the oppressed, intolerance of the oppression and respect of human rights and equality.

The participation of more than 30% of women in the struggle had major contribution in the social, economic, political and psychological reforms within the traditional society. A gender responsive program was developed in the National Democratic Program of the EPLF in 1977, which included the basic factors of social change - the legislative, political and economic spheres.

One major initiative within the overall program of social, economic and political reform both among its forces and the population in the liberated areas was the promotion of gender equality as an absolutely integral element of change and liberation. The initiatives promulgated and implemented by the EPLF continue to inform and mould all areas of government-directed proposed and actual reform on gender issues.

One of the unique features of the Eritrean revolution was that, "the EPLF generally took a gradualist approach that relied heavily on persuasion rather than trying to promote gender equality by administrative fiat". With the independence of the country since 1991, there is often that clear continuity of objective and approach. The attempt to build on the "practices and modes of the indigenous groups where women have strong roles rather than importing abstract concepts from the outside" still applies (World Bank 1996:11). The current programs and policies oriented towards women's development stem from this solid basis.

The National Union of Eritrean Women participated in the Copenhagen World Conference in 1980 and the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace as non-governmental organization since the country was not independent from the colonial rule. The conference which contributed

to the process of eliminating obstacles to the improvement of the status of women at national, regional and international levels; the Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of women during 1986-2000 set in the Nairobi World Conference which presented measures to overcome obstacles to the Decade's goals and objectives for the advancement of women was recognized and appreciated by the NUEW which played a big role in the effective implementation of the already stated programs and policies.

In 1995, the Union participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China. The Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration which gave the world a new comprehensive plan of action to enhance social, economic and political empowerment of women has been the ground for the development of a national plan with clearly indicated priorities.

The commitment and collaborative efforts of all actors in the development of the plan of action including the government ministries - Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Education, Local Government, Social and Human Welfare - and NGOs organizations such as the National Union of Eritrean Youth (NUEY), the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers, Parenthood Association and Family Planning, and other groups and associations concerned with women and development backed by the strong political will and commitment of the government have made the design of the action plan and its implementation modalities.

However, despite the commitments and determinations undertaken by the Government for concrete actions to eliminate all ills against women, today taking into consideration the economic status of the developing countries, the strategic objectives set forth at the Beijing Declaration seem to be ambitious and unrealistic. Issues like providing universal access to basic education and ensuring completion of primary education by at least 80% of primary school-age children; close the gap in primary and secondary school education by the year 2005 seem far from practice in 1999. The excuses may vary country-wise but the current situation reflects that some mechanisms remain to be explored in order to monitor the effective implementation of what could be

achieved under the present economic circumstances of the respective countries.

The priorities of the Strategic Objectives and Actions of the Eritrean Government within the five year period (1995 - 2000) have been the development of Institutional Mechanism for the Advancement of Women, Women and Health, Education and training for women, Women and the economy, Women in armed conflict and Human Rights of Women.

### **PART III STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS**

#### ***1. MECHANISMS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN IN ERITREA.***

The Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) has recognized and given the opportunity to the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) to play the role of a national machinery to promote gender mainstreaming. The NUEW which

was established in 1979 as a non-governmental organization (NGO) with the mandate to mobilize women to fight for Eritrea's Independence and Women's Equality, has continued its commitment after independence for the later objective. Currently, NUEW has over 200,000 members and has branches at the regional, sub-regional and community level.

NUEW has a clearly defined mission, objectives and strategies with which to fight the identified major hindrances for the empowerment of women that have been consolidated in the course of its twenty years of experience.

The GSE, having a strong commitment towards the advancement and promotion of women in Eritrea and knowing the history of NUEW, was confident enough to delegate it for such a mandate. The NUEW's mission is to promote gender equality and the development of women as an integral part of the political, economic, social and cultural sphere. NUEW acts largely as a focal point to ensure the full range of development policies and programs in all sectors by lobbying and incorporating strategies to include women in the equitable share of the benefits of the development. Advocacy, sensitization and gender awareness for women and society at large is another major strategy of NUEW.

The Union's historical background and its high level experience in political mobilization and sophistication has enabled it to influence policy making and has demonstrated its capability of co-ordinating the gender mainstreaming process.

Furthermore, some members of the Central Committee of NUEW, are also members of the national parliament and are in high governmental posts which helps to consolidate the role of NUEW in the GSE. However, the human and finance resource of NUEW still needs to be strengthened with qualified expertise and solid financial source.

The GSE National Action Plan coincides with the Beijing Platform for Action and inter-sectoral collaboration with the various government ministries and

other civil societies is another aspect which the NUEW has been working. Based on the stated plan of action, the NUEW prioritizes and coordinates the action plan with the concerned ministries.

Besides NUEW has also set up its own objectives and programs whereby it implements the plans of action through its country-wide network which include:-

- eliminate all forms of discrimination against women
- create an environment conducive to the effective and meaningful participation of women in all sectors of national development
- enhance the quality of life for women as well as for the community at large
- sensitize and enhance gender awareness to women and the society at large
- eradicate illiteracy among women
- provide skills training and build the institutional capacity of the NUEW
- ensure and increase women's participation in decision-making and political leadership
- improve women's health and fight against harmful traditional practices
- strive to have a productive, creative work force of women
- conduct research on women's status
- promote women's legal rights
- ensure and protect the number and quality of girl child in education to the level of their counter-parts in collaboration with the concerned ministries and civil societies.

## ***2. WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION MAKING***

### **2.1 Political participation of women and empowerment**

In traditional Eritrean society, women neither had the right to vote, nor be elected in the village council of elders. They could neither attend nor negotiate their cases at the village council of elders, nor could they attend and negotiate their cases at the village assembly. Women could only present their cases to the council through their male relatives. These exclusionist and discriminatory practices continued during the colonial era, and were reflected, for example, in the fact that women were not allowed to vote during the brief semi-parliamentary rule of the Eritrean-Ethiopian federation in the 1950s.

Moreover, Article 20 the Eritrean Constitution of 1952 reads as follows: "The electorate shall consist of those persons possessing Eritrean citizenship who: (a) are of male sex, ...." Was reinforcing these male dominated attitudes in the traditional Eritrean society (MOJ).

Women's active participation in the socio-political realm only began during the liberation struggle. More than 30% women were actually involved in combat and other support roles and contributed to the program of political mobilization and social reform through the EPLF, and as a result the public was exposed to strong, heroic, politically conscious and powerful women who made significant contributions to the liberation of the country. This drive toward social transformation was an effort by the EPLF to recast the nation into unified and egalitarian society.

The rights of women were incorporated into the National Democratic Program (NDP) at the first congress of the EPLF and updated in 1987. Specific objectives included:

- ◆ Promulgate marriage and family laws that safeguard the rights of women.
- ◆ Protect the rights of women to two months maternity leave with full pay.
- ◆ Protect the rights of mothers and children and provide delivery, nursery and kindergarten services.

"Mother-child health care services will be improved and expanded".

So, there are clearly positive guidelines, a supportive policy environment and strong political will and commitment for creating gender equality. Some of the major achievements include:

- ◆ The convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), signed in September 5, 1995.
- ◆ The ratification of the new Constitution, which emphasized that, "any act that violates the human rights of women or limits or otherwise thwarts their role and participation is prohibited".
- ◆ Land tenure system based on equality, proclaimed.
- ◆ A legal minimum age for marriage set at 18 years.
- ◆ Citizenship rights given to all Eritrean children without distinction (previously this right was given to a child born of an Eritrea father, but not to one born only of an Eritrean mother).
- ◆ 30% of seats reserved for women at the national and regional assemblies.
- ◆ High priority given to service delivery where women are the primary beneficiaries, be it in health, education or provision of water.
- ◆ Gender awareness/sensitization and Civic education. The GSE, NUEW, NUEY and other local NGO's have adopted deliberate measures in conducting civic education and gender awareness programs with the aim to eliminate negative socio-cultural practices and attitudes towards women. Further effort is needed for relevant dissemination of gender information nation-wide.

## 2.2 The Constitution

In February 1994, the National Assembly elected a fifty member Constitutional Commission. Out of these, 20 were women. The Constitutional Commission was committed to addressing gender issues throughout the entire process of drafting a constitution. Based on democratic principles with in-built participatory mechanisms, the constitution was drafted and later on was ratified by the National Assembly on May 23, 1997.



- ◆ Struggle to eradicate prostitution.
- ◆ Respect the rights of women not to engage in work harmful to their health.

The EPLF also promulgated new laws and policies promoting the advancement of women in many areas, by securing women's rights to:

- ◆ Ownership of land (including divorcees, widows and unmarried).
- ◆ Equal pay for equal work.
- ◆ Equal rights in the family.
- ◆ Access to health care in rural and remote areas.
- ◆ Access to education for children and adults.

The historical development of the liberation front, which adopted policies towards social transformation especially in the areas of gender equality, greatly influenced the governmental policy on women. National policies and objectives, including the Human Resources Development and Population section - in the Macro Policy Document, and in the Constitution, thus articulate a clear and strong gender equity perspective. It clearly states:

" All efforts will continue to be undertaken to sensitize and enhance the awareness of the society on the decisive role of women for the socio-economic, political and cultural transformation of the country".

"The equal rights of women will be upheld and all laws that detract from the right will be changed".

"Participation of women in education, economic activities and employment will be expanded".

"Appropriate labor saving technologies will be introduced to reduce the drudgery of women in the household and in other activities".

This constitution is the supreme law of the land. Thus any legislation that contradicts with the Eritrean constitution is null and void (Article 2 EC).

The Constitution applies to both genders with no discrimination (Article 5). Article 7 prohibits "any act that violates the human right of women or limits or otherwise thwarts their role and participation". Women are entitled to participate in all political, economic, social and cultural aspects.

Each and every article of the Eritrean Constitution reflects the spirit of equality and protects the fundamental rights of human beings with no discrimination on the bases of race, ethnic origin, disability, age, political view, or social or economic status or any other ground.

### 2.3 Women in Political Leadership.

After the referendum in May of 1993, in which 99.8% voted for independence, Eritrea celebrated its first official independence as a nation. The State of Eritrea at present is made up of the Executive Body (i.e. Council of Ministers), the Legislative Body (i.e. the National Parliament - Hagerawi Baito), and the Judiciary. In the Council of Ministers, out of the 17 Ministers, two are women: the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Labor and Human Welfare.

The National Parliament consists of 150 members out of these, 33 are women. More than 50% voters in the regional and national elections were women. Women's participation in the position of authority and responsibility is shown in the following.

Table 2.1 Gender Breakdown in the Higher Governmental Posts

No.	Government Post	1992			1998		
		No. of women	Total	% of Women	No. of Women	Total	% of Women
1.	National Parliament	22	105	20.9%	33	150	22%
2.	Ministers	2	13	13.3%	2	17	11.8%

3.	Director General	1	4	20.0%	2	41	4.87
4.	Directors	1	0	0%	9	115	7.82
5.	Provincial* Governors	0	10	0%	0	6	0%
6.	Sub- <sup>a</sup> *	2	51	3%	3	53	5.7%
7.	Dep. " "	1	47	2%	4	49	8.2%
8.	District Administrator**	8	109	6.8%	3	13	23.0%
9.	Dep. " "	-	-	-	8	7	85.7%
10.	Ambassadors				2	18	11.1%
	Counselors				1	13	8%
	Councils				6	1	10.7%
	Secretaries First				0	19	0%
	* Second				1	31	3.12%
* Third				2	23	8.0%	
11.	Judges				14	89	16%

#### 2.4 The Zoba Assembly

The Zoba Assembly in Eritrea, represents the population across the six Zobas of the country. Women's participation in these Zobas councils has increased from 20% in 1996 to 30% in 1998. See Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 - The Participation of Women in the Zoba Assembly

ZOBA	MAEKEL	DEBUB	ANSEBA	G/BARKA	D.K.BAHRI	S.K.BAHRI	TOTAL
TOTAL No.	74	79	67	74	37	68	399
MALE	46	56	48	52	27	48	277
FEMALE	28	23	19	22	10	20	122
% FEMALE	37%	30%	28%	29.7%	27%	29.5%	30.57%
QUOTA	22	22	19	21	10	20	114
FREE ELECTION	6	1	-	1	-	-	8

Source: Report of MLG, 1998.

- N.B
1. The women in the Quota System are elected by both sexes in their respective community. The competition is among women only.
  2. In the Free election they compete with men.

It is however noted that certain cultural and traditional practices have continued to slacken women's access to and control of productive resources.

### **3. EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF WOMEN AND GIRL CHILD**

#### **3.1 Education policy and objectives**

The GSE believes that the core of its development strategy lies on the quality of its human resource. The dire need for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the economy will depend on the development of its human resource and the production of a modern, literate and skilled manpower. To meet these objectives, the GSE has declared free and compulsory basic education for all its citizens irrespective of sex and ethnic origin.

The national development strategy, as outlined in the Macro-Policy document of 1994 includes the following objectives:

- ◆ Improved agricultural production through the development of irrigated agriculture, and through enhancing the productivity of peasants, pastoralist and agro-pastoralist.
- ◆ Developed capital and knowledge-intensive, export oriented, industries and services.
- ◆ An upgraded and technologically informed informal sector.

To achieve the above goals, the general objectives of the education sector intend to:-

- Produce a population equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and culture for a self reliant and modern economy.

- Develop self consciousness and self-motivation in the population to fight poverty, disease and the attendant causes of backwardness and ignorance.
- Make basic education available to all, irrespective of their ethnic origin, sex, religion etc.

Based on the belief that education is a human right and a major tool for development, peace and equality, the education sector policy, which has been developed since 1991 states:-

- ◆ Promotion of an equal opportunity in terms of access and continuity of education to all school-aged children and ensure equity and relevance of the education rendered.
- ◆ Provision of elementary education (Grades 1-5) in respective mother tongue languages.
- ◆ Provision of middle (Grades 6-7) and secondary (8-11) level education in English.
- ◆ Encourage the provision of education by the private sector.
- ◆ Provision of continuing education through formal and non-formal channels to achieve a more literate and skilled population.
- ◆ Steadily increase enrollments in secondary, technical and vocational schools to meet skilled manpower requirements, with emphasis on imparting multi-craft skills.
- ◆ Make serious efforts in the sharing of the costs of education between government, communities and parents.

### **3.2 Women and Girl education**

Like all developing nations, ensuring that all citizens acquire the basic tools of literacy and numeracy is one of the formidable challenges facing present Eritrea. The commitment of the GSE to meet the basic learning needs of the new generation is reflected in the education policy of the MOE. Ensuring equal distribution, equal participation and provision of quality education are the major goals of the five year development plan (1995- 2000) of the MOE.

The main objective of the MOE has been to make sure that 50% of all primary school-aged children have easy access to education by the year 2000. With 51% of enrollment rate achieved in 1999, the objective has been already achieved.

To meet these objectives, mobilization of resources, both human, financial and material has been of great concern within the ministry, international organizations and the community at large. Several measures have been undertaken to make accessibility easier for all school aged children with focus on the most disadvantaged sectors of the society, mainly girls and the geographically remote areas of the country.

- ◆ Construction of new schools with focus on the rural and remote areas.
- ◆ On the job training for primary and secondary school teachers.
- ◆ Recruitment of more teachers taking into consideration the demand of female teachers, the ethnic diversities of the school population and reducing the teacher: pupil ratio.
- ◆ Sensitization of teachers within the teacher training institutions (TTI).
- ◆ Creating gender awareness in the communities to acknowledge that education is the basis for equality and social change.
- ◆ Curriculum review that would ensure the quality education rendered meets the local demand and the required standard.
- ◆ Provision of school facilities and teaching-aid-materials and production of gender-sensitive teaching materials have been the major concerns of the MOE.

Several studies, workshops and seminars have been conducted in the last four years (1995 - 1998) to identify discrimination in girl's education. As the outcome of the studies reveal, economic and social factors have been found out to be the major causes of girls lower participation, retention and achievement in education. The home factors that affect girl's access to education have been realized to be the customary and traditional attitudes on girl's education, early marriage and the heavy domestic responsibilities.

School factors include inadequate educational facilities and materials, shortage of female teachers in remote areas and school distance have been found out to be the major causes of lower retention and achievement of girls irrespective of the equal opportunities granted.

The MOE is trying to challenge the social and economic drawback through the enforcement of marriage law, reducing domestic chores in collaboration with the responsible ministries, bringing schools nearer to the community and provision of facilities. It is expected that such measures would ameliorate the gender imbalances in education, reduce drop out rates and improve girls' performance.

The following tables indicate the efforts exerted to expand education and increase enrollment ensuring equity, development of training programs to upgrade the quality of teachers and educators and recruit more teachers with focus on the minorities and female teachers, since 1995.

Table 3.1: Primary level (1-5)

Planned Actions	Base Year, 1995			1998		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Schools	-	-	510	-	-	585
Enrollment	124544	99743	224287	146172	121266	267438
Gross Enrollment ratio	54%	44%	49%	55%	47%	51%
Teachers	3609	1974	5583	3906	1893	5799
Qualified teachers	65%	51%	52%			68%
Flow rate: Repeating	17%	21%	24.1%	20%	23%	21%
Withdrawals			7.1%	7%	6%	6%
Promotion			68.8%	73%	71%	72%

Table 3.2: Middle level (6-7)

Planned Actions	Base Year, 1995			1998		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Schools	-	-	88	-	-	111

Enrollment	19310	15885	34995	37230	28938	66168
Gross Enrollment ratio	25%	22%	23%	39%	31%	35%
Teachers	809	139	948	963	164	1127
Qualified teachers	77%	13%	22%			43%
Flow rate: Repeating			18.9%	12%	25%	17%
Withdrawals			7.9%	8%	7%	7.6%
Promotion			73.2%	80%	68%	75%

Table 3.3: Secondary level (8-11)

Planned Actions	Base Year, 1995			1998		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Schools	-	-	33	-	-	36
Enrollment	22097	14831	36728	25198	16899	47823
Gross Enrollment ratio	17%	12%	15%	16%	13%	16%
Teachers	973	108	1081	850	124	974
Qualified teachers	12%	88%	47%			71%
Flow rate: Repeating			28%	18%	33%	25%
Withdrawals			6.8%	8%	7%	8%
Promotion			65.2%	73%	59%	67%

The past three years of the education system (1996-1998) have witnessed a gradual increment of the student enrollment at all the primary, middle and secondary levels. As can be seen from Table 3-3 the gross enrollment ratio for girls has gone up from 44%, 21% and 12% to 47%, 31% and 13% at all the three levels respectively. With the aim of the expansion of education, the capacity of the system to construct and rehabilitate existing schools has also improved. Since 1995, 191 schools have been constructed and 161 schools rehabilitated for three levels of the education system.

One of the critical areas that adversely affect the quality of education is the quality of teachers. Over 50% of all the teachers in the primary and secondary levels were unqualified. To improve the qualification of the teachers, in 1996/97 the unqualified teachers were expelled from the system which led to the overall decline of 5.4% of the number of teachers. However, the in-service-training rendered for teachers at all the three levels; the recruitment of expatriate teachers at secondary level; sending senior regional staff abroad



for management training and development of partnership with various international institutions for training the teachers, school heads and supervisors has resulted in the improvement of teachers qualifications. In 1998, the percentage of qualified teachers at the primary, middle and secondary level was 64%, 43% and 71% respectively. The impact is observed in the improvement of the flow rates of the school population at large.

The growth in the number of female teachers is keeping pace with the overall growth in the number of teachers. Introduction of affirmative actions to increase the recruitment of female teachers, with focus on the minorities; coaching for female teachers; the establishment of an effective support system and the integration of gender sensitive issues, methodologies and increasing awareness of the teachers' role in the educational process within the teacher training programs and the school organization has helped to improve teachers' effectiveness and the recruitment of female teachers.

Improving the effectiveness of teaching methods and efficient and continuous assessment procedures have been the major targets in reducing wastage and raising the retention rate of girls in particular. This plan has considered the attainment of higher learning achievements of girls and more guidance, extra help and counseling have been the major parts of the teaching methods. To put girls at an advantage, more efforts have been made to raise the participation of girls in practical activities of the curriculum and extra curriculum activities of the school, including math and science clubs, discussion groups and debates.

Regional seminars and workshops on girls' education have been conducted to raise awareness about the status, role and contribution of women and girls in society. Greater participation of the parents through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to tackle the major problems of girls education have been introduced at school and village levels.

Improving the curriculum and provision of textbooks has also been the main concern of the ministry in the last four years. Development and review of the

existing curriculum to make it more responsive to the diversities, local needs and demands of the society, to make it more gender sensitive, and the integration of basic moral and civic values in the national curriculum have been given greater considerations. Textbooks have already been printed and distributed to all the primary and secondary level school population and had a direct impact on the performance of both the students and the teachers. The increment of the promotion rate in the last three years shows the impact of the textbooks.

Efforts have been extended to consolidate the greater enrollment of girls in science and technology areas thus avoiding the conventional belief that girls tend to enroll more in arts and commercial streams. In general, the major effort has been to change the orientation of the secondary education towards work oriented fields of study rather than pure academic studies.

### 3.3 Technical and Vocational Training.

As already stated, the production of a technical and skilled manpower is the main catalyst for the economic development of Eritrea. To meet the required manpower of the nation's development process secondary schools have been oriented towards a work-oriented field of studies. Opening of more technical schools, improving the capacity of the existing technical schools and introduction of basic vocational centers in all the regions of the country has gained ground to involve not only school graduates but also primary and secondary drop-outs to be self-sufficient. It also helped over-aged school children to join the centers and acquire basic skills consequently leaving more space for the school-aged children in the formal education system.

Table 3.4: Female participation in Vocational and technical training, 1998

Area of training	Base year, 1995	1998
	Female %	Female
Asmara Technical	2.8	14%

Asmara business & commerce	34.8	28%
Basic Vocational Centers		25%
Teachers' Training Institute (TTI)	11.2	18%
Nursing School		
Health Assistants		
Paramedics		
Midwife	68.4	78

Source: MOE, Education Statistics, 1997/98; MOA, 1998; MOH, 1999.

At tertiary level, the secondary school leaving examination has been one of the main hindrances from the continuation of education for both the boy and the girl students. A review of the exam and an increase in the capacity of the Asmara University to entertain more students has opened the opportunity for more high school graduates to join the university. Female enrollment has gradually increased with the introduction of a positive discrimination by lowering the university entrance criteria. Female enrollment has reached 14% of the total day and evening participants.

Table 3.5: Female enrollment at Asmara University, 1998

Qualification	Male	Female	Total	Female %
<b>Day programme</b>				
Degree	2522	521	2943	14.3
Diploma	465	50	515	9.7
Certificate	130	35	165	21.2
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>3117</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>3623</b>	<b>13.96</b>
<b>Evening programme</b>				
Degree	117	15	132	11.36
Diploma	3	-	3	-
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>11.11</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>3237</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>3758</b>	<b>13.86</b>

Source: University of Asmara, 1998

Table 3.6 Percentage of Female students graduating from the University of Asmara, Degree Programme, 1998-1999

Year	Natural Science	Arts & Social Sciences	Female % of Total
1995	3.8	19	12.9
1996	11.1	16.5	13.2
1997	7.1	12.7	11.4
1998	9.7	17.3	13.1
1999			13.1

Source: University of Asmara

### 3.4 Adult Education

One of the basic principles of the government is to develop and implement education, training and retraining policies in order to produce a literate society that would be able to confront the development challenges of the country. It encourages adult and family engagement in learning to promote total literacy for all the people.

The programme provides literacy program, continuing education and skill development training programs. Considerable efforts have also been exerted to evaluate adults' awareness on agriculture, health, environment and civic education via its educational broadcasting programs.

With focus on women, especially young women and women entering the labor market, the government in collaboration with the local organizations develops training programs to provide them with skills that would meet the needs of a changing socio-economic context and for improving their employment opportunities.

Taking into consideration the issue of unemployment, unemployed women have also been a focal point and training materials have been developed to provide them with new knowledge and skills that will enhance and broaden their employment opportunities, including self-employment and development of entrepreneurial skills.

Educational activities geared towards adults have been rapidly growing since 1996. These activities which are organized and monitored by the MOE and the NUEW have been on a steady and rapid growth since 1996. In 1998, there were 193 centers throughout the six regions of the country. Table 3.7 shows the details.

Table 3.7 Female participation in Adult Educational Programmes, 1996-1998

Year	Total No. of participants	Female %
1996	5609	93%
1997	4710	97%
1998	7936	95.5%
1999	20,000	99%

Source: MOE, Education Statistics Report, 1998; Adult Education, 1999

In addition, the Government of the State of Eritrea and the Government of Sweden have signed a two years co-operation agreement in order to reduce the illiteracy rate in Eritrea. In line with this, a pilot phase is under way since February 1999 and all the necessary preparations for the literacy campaign that will be conducted in 1999/2000 are in place. In this pilot stage there are 350 centers spread out in all Administrative Regions with 20,000 participants, 99% of the participants are women.

#### **4. WOMEN AND HEALTH**

##### **4.1 Health conditions of women**

Health is not only a basic determination of the quality of life in a community, but also major factor in socio-economic development. Eritrea, being one of the poorest countries in Africa, has a GDP per capita estimated at 217-234 USD. This, in comparison to 330 USD for Sub-Saharan African countries as a group, indicates that Eritrea's level of economic development is far lower than most other countries. The devastation caused to socio-economic infrastructure of the country by the prolonged war and recurrent drought, is a testimony to the suffering of its people and particularly women from a number of preventable diseases as well as war related psycho-social problems.

Women of child bearing age group and children, in developing countries, make 60% of the population. Thus, the health and illness of these groups is an important measurement of the health status of a country.

Eritrean Demographic Health Survey (EDHS, 1996) estimated Maternal Mortality Rate in Eritrea to be 985 per 100,000 life births. In 1998, according to the health facilities given, maternal mortality rate is 330 per 100,000 life births (MOH, 1997). This means that in Eritrea 1300 women die every year and 3 to 4 women every day due to pregnancy and delivery related complications. These maternal deaths represent approximately 37% of all deaths to women in reproductive age (15-49). The maternal death in Eritrea is among the worst in the world. As already stated, majority of maternal deaths are related to labor and delivery, hepatitis, anemia and malaria complications (MOH, 1997).

Forced early marriage, early pregnancy and child-bearing pose grave health risks to Eritrean women and girls, especially in the rural areas. Despite efforts by the Government as well as the National Union of Eritrean Women and other concerned bodies, female circumcision is almost universal in Eritrea, with 95 percent of women having been circumcised. Younger women (age 15-19) and women living in the Southern and Central Zones are slightly less likely to be circumcised than other women. Of circumcised women 6 in 10 had clitoridectomy, one in three received infibulation and 4 percent had excision. One in five circumcised women had a problem during sexual relations or during delivery; 9 percent had both types of problems (EDHS, 1996).

#### **4.2 Policy of the Ministry of Health**

The GSE believes that women have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health. In Eritrea, almost all causes of ill health and death in women are preventable with appropriate and accessible health care delivery system. Recognizing the importance of the problem, the policy of Ministry of Health of Eritrea focuses mainly on

improving the health of the mother and the child through Primary Health Care (PHC). Some of the PHC policies that concentrate on women's health are the following:

- ensuring accessibility of fully integrated quality reproductive and sexual health services to individuals and families;
- reducing maternal mortality rates;
- improving the proportion of pregnant women who receive antenatal care
- increasing the proportion of women receiving safe delivery service
- reducing the incidence of obstetric complications;
- increasing the immunization coverage of child bearing;
- eliminating the practice of unsafe abortion;
- increasing accessibility of women to reproductive health information and use of contraceptive methods;
- ensuring women freely choose the number and the spacing of children;
- reducing the prevalence of reproductive tract infection and HIV; and
- eliminating the practice of female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional practices that affect women.

The Community Health Service policy focuses on training Traditional Birth Attendants (TBA) and Community Health Agents (CHA).

#### **4.3 Measures undertaken to achieve the objectives**

After the independence of the country, 155 health facilities were constructed. These health facilities are organized within the structure of the health care delivery system of the Government which is based on five levels:-

1. National Level: There are 7 national referral hospitals, expected to serve the total population. There are 49 and 4 maternal and child health care centers through out the country.
2. Zone level: There are 11 hospitals and 5 mini hospitals expected to serve 80,000-200,000 population.

3. Sub-zone level: There are 55 sub-zones and 261 functioning health facilities in the country, expected to serve 300,000 people.
4. Surrounding administrative level: There are 149 health stations and 36 clinics, expected to serve 5,000 - 10,000 people at group of village.
5. Community level: There are more than 200 trained TBA's and 152 community health agents, expected to serve 400 to 1000 people at a village level. There is also a plan to train about 400 TBAs and 150 CHA in 1999, and 1400 CHAs who will deal with malaria related problems.

The following tables, Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 show the existing health facilities and the type of training conducted within the country in detail.

Table 4.1 Health Facilities in Eritrea

Facilities	1991	1995	1998
Hospitals	12	20	23
Health centers	22	40	49
Health stations & clinics	72	161	189
Total	106	221	261

Source: MOH, 1999

Table 4.2 Health Coverage per year

Coverage Rate	1996	1997	1998
Antenatal service	41.7	42.7	44.2
Delivery service	23.7	23.8	18.6
DPT 3 in children	53.6	55.5	59.1
TT 2 in women	7.45	17.1	22.7
Family Planning Service	4.3	4.9	5.2

Source: MOH, 1999



The increment in the health converge rate per year reflects the improvement of the MOH capacity in giving services.

The decreased delivery service coverage rate in 1998 is due to the lack of delivery service report from health stations. In 1998 out of the total health education sessions, 60.3% were exclusively related to child and women health (MOH, 1998).

Efforts have also been extended to improve the quality of MOH professionals and increase the number of women in the health professions to achieve equality. Table 2.4 indicates the details.

Table 4.3 Health professionals be sex

	Qualification	Male	Female	Total	%
1.	Doctors: surgeon, medical	93	15	108	13.88
2.	Radiology/physiotherapist	4	-	4	0
3.	MA in public health, pharmacy, malaria experts	21	1	22	4.55
4.	Nurses, Health officers	278	348	626	55.59
5.	Health assistant, barefoot doctors, practical dressers	395	792	1187	66.72
6.	BA in natural & social sciences and others	28	8	36	22.22
7.	Technicians - lab, X-Ray, pharmacy	172	90	262	34.35
8.	Sanitation	17	3	20	15
	Total	1008	1257	2265	55.50

Source: MOH, 1999

#### 4.4 HIV/AIDS

The programme on HIV/AIDS includes the assessment of HIV infection in adolescent, bar attendants and other individuals. The total reported AIDS cases at the end of 1998 were 1610, out of which 603 were women (MOH,

1998). The incidence of AIDS may seem small at this time but the government and other agencies will have to intensify preventive measures particularly in public awareness campaigns.

In addition, the NUEW has a program focused on Mother and Child Health Care since 1995. Training of Trainers (TOT) in Health Education has been given to 22 women from six Administrative Zones, who in turn have trained 19,864 women across the country. The training programs covered topics on Pre-natal and post-natal, child care, balance diet, preservation of food, traditional practices like FGM, family planning, sanitation and pollution, sexual transmittal diseases, (STD, HIV/AIDS) and gender sensitization. The issue of FGM and HIV/AIDS was strongly focused by the NUEW and the National Union of Eritrean Youth (NUEY) whereby intensive campaigns and group discussions were conducted among the youth and women. Efforts to encourage all sectors of the society including the public sector to develop compassionate and supportive, non-discriminatory HIV/AIDS related policies and practices that protect the rights of infected individuals were highly focused.

Gender sensitive health research and information centers have been promoted within the ministry in order to introduce systems that allow for the use of data collected, analyzed and disaggregated by, among other factors, sex and age, and other demographic criteria and socio-economic variables, for decision making, monitoring and evaluation.

## ***5. WOMEN, THE ECONOMY AND POVERTY***

### **5.1 Economic strategies and programs**

The Eritrean economy is primarily based on agriculture and animal husbandry, with 60% of the rural population engaged in subsistence farming and 30% are agro-pastoralist. Trade and industry accounts for a very small percentage of employment and self-employment in Eritrea. Eritrean economy has been influenced by colonial policies, war for independence and recurrent drought.

At the time of liberation in 1991, the public enterprises were non-operational and the agricultural sector, social services and infrastructure were destroyed. In order to revive and develop the dismantled economy the Government has adopted free market economic policy, in which the private sector plays a leading role in the economic development. The government's intervention is limited to facilitate the social and economic development and participate in certain business activities to stabilize the market.

To implement the Macro-policy (published in 1994), the government has developed broad based growth strategies that mainly include human capital formation, export-oriented development both in industry and agriculture, infrastructure development, environmental protection and the promotion of private sector. This policy framework was to promote social justice and assure an equitable share for all Eritreans in the country's future prosperity.

At present, Eritrean women comprise 50% of the total population and they are mostly engaged in, as employers, employees and self employed. However, their performance in trade and industry is still poor due to the completed problems and obstacles they face, which mainly include - low capital, low level of education, inadequate credit facilities and social and cultural attitudes.

In line with the government policies, there are strategies and programs that would increase the contribution of women in economic development without discrimination. The most important ones are:

- Provision of equal access to credit facilities.
- Provision of training programs
- Dissemination of information relevant to their business development.
- Provision of technical and market research assistance.
- Creating an environment conducive for the effective participation of women in trade and industry.
- The right to own land.

More than 50% of the population being engaged in agriculture, the GSE developed the new Land Proclamation adopted by the National Assembly in

September 1994 which states that: "every citizen, man or woman, has the right of access to land for housing and farming upon the attainment of the age of eighteen". Women being given the highest opportunity to own land are greatly expected to participate in the market-oriented agricultural activities.

In agriculture, the main aim of the GSE is to improve production through irrigation and enhancing the productivity of peasants, pastoralist and agro-pastoralist. Policies were formulated to shift agricultural investment towards private production (peasant and commercial), irrigated agriculture and areas with high production potential.

Women's role in agricultural production is extensive, although traditionally they are excluded from ploughing. Women are involved throughout the pre-harvest and harvest cycles; in weeding, planting, harvesting, storage and processing of food. In addition to their farm work, women are responsible for fetching water, fuel wood and all the other domestic tasks of preparing food for their family, washing clothing and raising children. Women also grow vegetables, raise poultry and pottery, handicrafts and other activities to supplement the family income. Despite the back-breaking work, which consumes 16 hours of their day, women's contribution in production and family and national wealth is not considered significant enough to be included in the GDP.

Table 5.1 Number of women engaged in irrigated agriculture

Description	Male	Female	Total
No. of persons	2585	209	2794
Land holding in hectares	2284.2	147.8	2432
Percentage	92.5%	7.5%	100%

Source: MOA, Eritrea Horticultural Survey, 1997/98 (unpublished)

The number of women is lower than men, mainly because cash crops require more agricultural inputs and women can not afford to spend more labor and money.

Table 5.2 Number of Women concessionaires by Region

Region	Female Concession	Male Concession	Size of land, Female	Percentage Female
Gash-Barka	14	396	513	3.6
Maekel	15	71	21.45	21.1
Debub	6	40	69.43	15
S.K.Bahri	5	25	145	20
Anseba	3	10	6.7	30
D.K.Bahri*	-	-	-	-
Total	43	532	756.58	8.08

Source: Ministry of Land, Water & Environment, 1999. \* Inhabitants are mostly pastoralists.

The development of women owned enterprises, like in other developing countries, depend on their performance in market which in turn depends on their level of education, the size of capital, level of skill and the type of technology utilized. Women who own business establishments are mainly found in service giving sector, such as restaurants, bars, hotels, beauty salon as well as retail and whole sale trade. Some women are involved in manufacturing, such as wood products, food stuff, basic metals and jewelry, textile and leather products. There are also few in import and export business. Many of those women who own business mainly reside in cities and regional towns, Irrespective of the barriers they face, it is found out that they are disciplines, devoted, careful and efficient in their activities.

Table 5.3 Women entrepreneurs in Manufacturing, Trade and Services sector and growth

SECTORS	1996		1998		FEMALE	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	%	Growth rate
Manufacture	2475	249	2581	296	10	18
Trade	36366	6926	40973	7804	16	13
Services	6527	1531	8145	1910	19	25

Source: Business Licensing Office, 1998

## 5.2 Women's share in the Labor force

The distribution of human power resource among the different economic sectors is affected by the organization of the economy. The Eritrean economic activity is dominated by trade activities, thus it comprises the higher number of employment, which is 65% of the labor force.

A comprehensive baseline survey was made by Ministry of Trade and Industry (MOTI) in 1996 to identify the registered number of trade and manufacturing enterprises and their employees. The study revealed that the participation of women especially in manufacturing, trade and service sectors shown that the proportion of women labor force as compared to men in industry is 31%, in trade 26% and in service 41%.

Table 5.4 Women's share in total labor force in Industry, Trade and Service and % growth.

Sectors	1996		1998		% of 1996	% of 1998
	Male	Female	Male	Female		
Manufacturing	18679	8308	16941	7610	31	-8*
Trade	55369	16984	81271	28555	6	50
Service	15408	10826	19563	13595	41	26
Total	89456	38118	117775	49760	30	31

Source: Ministry of Trade and Industry, 1996, 1998.

In 1998, the percentage of women employees in industry has shown a declining trend by 8% as compared to that of 1996. The main reason is, most of the public enterprises are now privatized and hence have reduced their employment.

Table 5.5 Women in the total Labor force of Eritrea Micro, Small and Medium enterprises (MSMEs) and location, including the informal sector.

	Total	Sectoral Group		
		Manufacturing	Trade	Service

Employment Total	92288	21633	55684	14971
% Female Employment	42	52	43	25
Size Group				
Micro (1-2 employees)	46	69	42	25
Small (3-9 employees)	38	29	46	25
Medium (10-25 employees)	29	22	37	26
Location				
Urban	40	37	45	26
Rural	47	74	37	19
No. of enterprises	52188	12644	31554	7890
	43	66	40	25

Source: MOTI, National Team and Yacob Fesseha, 1996.

Thus, the higher proportion of women work force in Micro is found in manufacturing, and in Small and Medium groups in Trade, 46% and 37% respectively. Majority of women labor force in manufacturing (85%) is found in textile industry. By location the distribution of women textile labor force is 97% and are found in the capital city Asmara the majority of women labor force in trade, 57% is found in the major towns.

### 5.3 Measures taken for promotion of women in economic empowerment.

- ◆ Domestic and foreign trade has been liberalized - Quantitative restrictions and prohibitions on imports have been eliminated. Women have equal opportunities and are allowed to participate in all sectors of the economy without restriction and discrimination.
- ◆ Licensing procedures have been simplified and quick and efficient services are provided.
- ◆ Price control have been up-lifted, except with respect to bread and pharmaceutical products.
- ◆ Fair tax regime has been introduced to encourage trade and investments. Import tariffs have been progressively reduced especially those capital goods, intermediates, industrial spare parts and raw materials are made to pay duties-custom, excise and sales taxes. The government has also reduced income taxes both personal and corporate taxes, these would enable women to improve their financial situation.

- ◆ **Credit facilities.** Access to bank loans was made available to women by Commercial Bank, Development and Investment Bank and Housing Bank. These loans were mostly used to start-up business activities especially for domestic trade, manufacturing and agricultural activities. However, few women have benefited from these credit facilities, mainly because they could satisfy normal banking requirements and lack of confidence. Although recent data is not available, it is estimated that a large amount of loan was provided for women by the Commercial Bank in the last four years.

In addition, the Eritrean Community Development Fund (ECDF), National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) and Debub Zone Credit and Saving Schemes (ACORD) have also provided women credit facilities especially to those who do not have sufficient collateral and training and advice related to their business or income generating activities.

Table 5.6 Total number of women clients and amount of credit in the local currency (Nakfa) 1996 and 05/99.

Macro credit Projects	1996		1999 up-May	
	No. clients	Loans	No. clients	Loans
ECDF Savings & Credit	473	407,728	1551	2,126,421
NUEW Savings & Credit	483	442,500	841	953,100
South Adm. Zone Savings & Credit	852	1,595,050	2500	4,720,300
Development & Investment Bank	-	-	10	17,448,819
<b>Total</b>	<b>1808</b>	<b>2,445,278</b>	<b>4902</b>	<b>25,248,640</b>

Source: ECDF, NUEW, South Zone and Devl. & Investment bank, 1999.

Various training programs were designed and conducted by the government in collaboration with non-governmental agencies such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Asmara University, Chamber of Commerce, NUEW, German Otto Benecke Stiftung e.v. (OBS), ACORD, GTZ, etc. The training courses include - carpentry, wood



work, masonry, electricity, metal work, auto-mechanics, weaving, secretarial science, computer, accounting, marketing, etc. Moreover, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has introduced foreign trade training programs in collaboration with PRODEC on export management training and carried out in 1994 to 1998. In addition:

- Investment, related assistance are provided to encourage women to participate in any investment areas..
- Privatization of public enterprises is in the process and some of these are already sold to women.
- Selected industrial products of women such as leather and leather products, garments, sweater, uniforms have been promoted through the participation of trade fairs abroad.
- Substantial improvements have been made and new investments are underway to rehabilitate and modernize the infrastructure facilities such as communications, transport and port services, which helps to improve women's contribution in all economic activities.

Under the Integrated Export Management Training and Foreign Trade Development projects for Eritrea, 1995-1998. 16 training programs were conducted whereby 327,(234 male and 93 female) were trained.

## **6. HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN**

### **6.1 Legal Status of Women in Eritrea.**

The present legislation in Eritrea guarantees equal treatment of women and men, in general, and secures the rights of women in particular. Eritrea being a member of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, reflects the fact that the GSE recognizes the importance of the human rights of women. In addition, the fact that these rights are reflected in the national law guarantees that the mechanism to promote and protect these rights is in place.

However, while women are increasingly using the legal system to exercise their rights, the lack of awareness of the existence of these rights is an

obstacle that prevents women from fully enjoying their human rights and attaining equality. Hence, development of system to strengthen women's ability to exercise their right remains a great challenge. Regardless of their socio-economic status and their education level, women can be empowered and motivated to assert their rights.

The NUEW in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice has designed programs on human rights education and counseling and advisory services to promote an understanding of the human rights of women, including knowledge of mechanisms to redress violations of their rights.

The NUEW has also initiated the process of developing an information system on gender-based human rights violations whose findings will be integrated into all of its programs and activities to ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and practice.

## **6.2 Legal Provisions Guaranteeing Women's Rights.**

The Government of the State of Eritrea, made several revisions on the Ethiopian Civil and Penal Codes to eliminate any discriminatory clauses against women. The proclamation of September 1991, states that:

\* every person under the law has the right and freedoms guaranteed in the National Democratic Program and Constitution of the EPLF, which prohibits any discrimination based on race, color, religion or gender".

And later on, each and every article of the Eritrean Constitution, ratified May 23, 1999 reflects the spirit of equality and protects the fundamental rights of human beings with no discrimination on the basis of race, ethnic origin, disability, age, political view, or social or economic status or any other ground. Article 7 prohibits, "any act that violates the human rights of women or limits otherwise thwarts their role and participation".

Revisions made to the Ethiopian Civil and Penal Codes, on Marriage and the Family include:

- ◆ Women can enter into marriage freely, and are afforded equal rights as men (Article 48).
- ◆ Marriage is based on the free consent of both partners, and needs no parental consent (Article 46).
- ◆ Bride price and dowry are prohibited by law (Article 49).
- ◆ Kidnapping for marriage is illegal (Article 50).
- ◆ The legal age for marriage was raised to 18 years.
- ◆ Marriage is a partnership which gives the husband and wife equal rights as heads of their households (Article 45).
- ◆ Paternity of children born out of wedlock is determined on the evidence and sworn testimony (unretractable) of the mother (Article 60).
- ◆ Divorce can be initiated by both women and men, but the proceedings are still conducted by a committee of elders whose decisions in regard to property, child support and custody are not subject to court endorsement unless one of the parties appeals to the court.

### 6.3 The Labor Law

The Labor Law in Eritrea has been drafted by representatives of workers, trade unions, NUEW and the various governmental bodies. Eritrean labor law is governed by the Provisional Labor Proclamation No. 8/1991. This proclamation was enforced since September 15/1991. Thus, Article 113(3) abrogated all laws and proclamation existed prior to this provisional labor proclamation.

Article 47 requires an employer to pay the same starting salary for the same work. Thus, this proclamation leaves no room for discrimination based on sex, race, religion or any other ground. Moreover, Article 42(2), as amended by the proclamation No.42/1993, allows a woman to take paid maternity leave of 60 days which is counted after the day of delivery. She can also take paid leave before the delivery day if a doctor confirms so (Article 42.1.3).

- Equal pay for equal work.
- Maximum working hours not to exceed 48 hrs/week, 8 hrs/day with guarantees for over-time pay.
- Pregnant women protected from working night shift, overtime and in unsafe conditions (Article 32.3).
- Prohibition of child labor.

Considering the implementation of the Labor Law into practice, at present, the working conditions in many work places have improved slightly than the previous five years. Inadequate safety standards are in place, but to some extent there is a positive change in the vulnerability of workers. However, the organized workers in many sectors of the economy under the umbrella of the Confederation of Eritrean Trade Unions, have yet to be strong and powerful, so that they can have a better bargaining position to ensure minimum wages, improved safety standards, job security and advancement opportunities.

The Confederation of Eritrean Trade Unions has been formed as a union of five federations of trade unions administering to the service, manufacturing, food and beverage, mining and transport and communications industries. With a membership close to 36% of the entire labor force in Eritrea, the Confederation is expected to have major impact on future labor laws that will improve the working conditions and wages of Eritrean workers.

## **7. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. It violates and impairs the enjoyment of women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Knowledge of these gender-biased violence that results in physical and psychological harm to women, knowledge of its causes and consequences has led the GSE and the NUEW to combat it legally. It has tried to enact and reinforce penal, civil, labor laws and administrative sanctions in domestic legislation to punish and redress the wrongs done to women and girls who are subjected to any form of violence, whether in the home, workplace, the community or society.

The issue of violence against women in Eritrea takes many forms. Harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, domestic violence, rape and virginity checks are all manifestations of the lower value placed on the female population, and their unequal status in society. Some of the drafted legal laws include:

- A person who intentionally causes serious bodily injury to another person is guilty of causing serious bodily injury.
- A person who, without lawful authority, kidnaps, abducts or otherwise seizes another person by force or deception is guilty of kidnapping and abduction.
- A person who commits a sexual assault against another person by any act that involves the penetration of the body of the person assaulted is guilty of rape.

Since independence the NUEW, has launched consequent campaigns and seminars to address the legal issue of women. Recently, held a campaign on the "Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls" on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This UN-interagency campaign was initiated and coordinated by UNIFEM.

The Penal Code was also revised to exclude all discriminatory clauses and to add protective measures for women. For example, the death penalty is commuted to life imprisonment for convicted women who maybe pregnant or have children under three years. Abortion, although still punishable under the Penal Code is now permitted in cases where a physician can certify that the woman will suffer grave and permanent damage due to severe physical and mental stress, or the pregnancy has resulted from rape or incest. Rape is punishable under the law with a maximum sentence of imprisonment up to 15 years. Trafficking in prostitution, pornography and other indecent and obscene enclosures are also punishable under the penal code. Pertaining to the issue of contraceptives, women have the right to use contraceptives, receive information and request contraceptives for family planning.

The introduction of moral and civics education in the MOE curricula has helped to introducing training programs in order to sensitize girls and boys and women and men to the personal and social detrimental effects of violence in the family, community and society and teach them how to communicate without violence and promote training for victims and potential victims so that they can protect themselves and others against any violence.

## **8. WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

### **8.1 The role of women in combating desertification.**

During the struggle for independence the importance of the linkage between women and the environment in Eritrea had been recognized. Their contribution towards the management of the environment as well as their profound knowledge of local environment as a result of their being the basic providers of the basic necessities, like fuel in the family was well acknowledged. However, the nature of war became barrier to implement the designed programs properly.

Post independence, a number of projects and programs aimed at raising the level of awareness of the society in general and women in particular to address the environmental issues, was initiated by the government, Ministry of Agriculture and other development agencies. NUEW is involved in mobilizing women to play active role in afforestation programs.

Desertification as defined by the United Nations to Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), is land degradation in arid, semi-arid and sub-humid areas. Land degradation is the main environmental problem in Eritrea. Therefore, a National Action Program to combat desertification is being prepared by a technical committee composed of representatives from institutions relevant to combating technical committee and is contributing a chapter under "the role of women in combating Desertification". The following measures are planned to be taken by the NUEW to combat desertification.

- ◆ Enhance the mobilization of women to plant trees.
- ◆ Integration of desertification issues in skills training programs of the NUEW.
- ◆ Awareness campaigns on environmental protection.

Likewise, in this struggle against desertification, the GSE has initiated a long-term program of protecting the natural resources through Summer Work Programs for Secondary School students and the communities at large with emphasis on women. The programme aims to promote an environmental ethic, reducing resource use and to minimize waste, excessive consumption of natural resources and preservation of the environment.

The programme of planning and caring of more than 60,000 trees at the National park in commemoration of the Eritrean Martyrs who fought for peace and social justice is another indication of the government's commitment for environmental protection and conservation.

#### ***9. WOMEN IN SITUATIONS OF ARMED CONFLICT***

Aggression and armed conflicts affect all people - men and women alike - but it is usually women and children that suffer the most. After independence in 1991, Eritrean refugees from the Sudan and Ethiopia returned back to their country. The Government of Eritrea and the Eritrean Relief and Refugees Commission jointly took the responsibility of the resettlement program to solve the suffering and agony of the refugees. With the assistance of the UN families, and other concerned bodies, the refugees were resettled and provided with basic necessities, like shelter, food, water, medicine, education and training.

After 7 years of peace and reconstruction program, despite the remarkable progress that has been made to accelerate development, a dark cloud now hangs over Eritrea as it currently faces another war with its neighbor, Ethiopia, over a border dispute. This situation which erupted as early as 1997 has not been resolved even though much effort has been made internationally,

involving the OAU and many concerned leaders of different countries, to resolve the issue. The Government of Eritrea is working with utmost care to avoid war, and solve the border conflict peacefully. Regrettably, fierce fighting has resumed and threatens to slow down, and even destroy many of the gains achieved since liberation.

The GSE believes that violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict are violations of the fundamental principles of International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law. This has become the case in the ensuing border conflict with Ethiopia, where we are witnessing the detention, expropriation of property, ethnic cleansing and mass expulsion of more than 61,000 Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin - men, women and children - by the Ethiopian government. The inhuman act contravenes articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

While entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict, women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society and their sex. Currently, women and children who have been deported from Ethiopia make up the majority of the refugees and the internally displaced. Loss of home and property, involuntary disappearance and separation of relatives and family disintegration have become the order of the day especially as a result of the policy of ethnic cleansing of the Ethiopian regime.

The role of women and the NUEW in such a situation of armed conflict has been very crucial. Women have protected and assisted the displaced people; called upon the international community to condemn and act against all forms of atrocities; condemned all the inhumane and degrading treatment of women which the Ethiopian regime uses as a deliberate instrument of war and ethnic cleansing and took several measures to ensure that full assistance is provided to the victims of such abuse for their physical, mental and psychological rehabilitation.



The NUEW and the government have also taken all the necessary steps to ensure that financial and material resources have been provided from the international community and its international organizations for emergency relief that takes into account appropriate and adequate food, safe water, shelter, education and social and health services.

The NUEW has also played a great role in the conflict resolution which includes:-

1. Declaring that first and foremost the NUEW stands for and supports "Peace".
2. The Federation of African Women for Peace took the initiative and called upon Eritrean and Ethiopian women to voice for "Peace" and the Eritrean women added voices to it.
3. In the Sub-regional Follow-up meeting on the Implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action of Eastern and Southern Africa, in Seychelles, in February 1999, the NUEW called upon all African Women, "To work for Peace on the soil of Africa, in-order to achieve the concrete steps to change the position of the down trodden African Women".
4. In the conference on "Women Organize for Peace and Non-Violence in Africa", a Pan African Women's Conference on a Culture of Peace, held in Zanzibar, in May 1999, the Eritrean delegation and the NUEW and all the participants of the conference, including Ethiopia:

Convinced that any conflicts between two countries, especially any border conflict, should be resolved by peaceful means and not by force of arms. Aware that the - border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia is causing among others, untold suffering to Eritrean and Ethiopian women and children called upon:

- ◆ The Eritrean and Ethiopian governments to resolve the conflict peacefully under the OAU Charter and in recognition of the inviolability of colonial borders; taking into account the OAU Framework Agreement on the Resolution of the conflict;

- ◆ The Eritrean and Ethiopian governments to effect an immediate cease-fire;
- ◆ The African Women's Committee for Peace and Development to work with women of Eritrea and Ethiopia in an effort between Eritrea and Ethiopia; and
- ◆ All women and women's organization of the world and the International Community to support and assist these efforts.

## **PART IV FUTURE STRATEGIES**

Based on the conducive atmosphere created by the GSE's commitment for equality development and peace, which plays a prominent role within the NUEW's program for women's empowerment, the major strategies of the coming millennium include to:-

- ◆ Strengthen NUEW's machinery by allocating adequate resources - human, financial and material.
- ◆ Outline practical methodologies for incorporating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating gender perspectives into all aspects of policy making and planning.
- ◆ Redefine the programs that would help women acquire the self-esteem and self confidence needed to take on decision-making responsibilities in family life, business, the community and political institution.
- ◆ Sensitize women and the community at large to increase women's participation in defining the direction of development processes.
- ◆ Specify educational needs and strategies that would benefit women in their efforts to build and sustain a society that reflects the human rights of women and the value of the culture of peace.
- ◆ Strengthen the advocacy role of the NUEW.
- ◆ Promote mechanisms to disseminate and increase women's access to gender information.
- ◆ Develop an information management system of the NUEW and women's communication network for development and peace.
- ◆ Conduct more studies to analyze gender-related factors that hamper or inspire women's development.

- ◆ Develop training methodologies and information to change attitudes and eliminate forms of discrimination against women using the media.
- ◆ Intensify training programs for the community based organizations on women's human rights and ensure that women enjoy their rights.

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