

be an important factor affecting implementation of the Convention, particularly with regard to the reservation to article 2, since it is fundamental and a core provision of the Convention.

Other factors and difficulties impeding full implementation were identified as the country's slow rate of economic growth, coupled with frequent natural disasters and prevailing stereotyped attitudes and practices justified on social grounds, which create an environment for the acceptance of discrimination against women.

The Committee noted with satisfaction the existence of constitutional guarantees of equality between women and men, the high status accorded the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in the government, the inclusion of women's concerns in all development plans, and the declaration of the Policy on Women's Advancement, which is the government's main blueprint for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Similarly, the Committee noted the positive impact of the policy of reserving 30 seats for women in Parliament, as well as the seats constitutionally reserved for women in all municipal and local government bodies, and in the public sector. The emphasis placed by the Government on increasing literacy among women and girls, with the aim of achieving education for all by the year 2000, was welcomed as were the government's efforts to popularize and disseminate the Convention by translating it into Bangla.

Areas of concern identified by the Committee included: alarming levels of violence against women in all its forms, including acid throwing, stoning and dowry death; the inability of the government to enforce effectively existing laws, as well as to provide immediate relief and justice to victims of such violence; lack of access to education for a very large percentage of women and girls; continuing high rates of maternal and infant mortality; inadequacies and inaccessibility of primary health and reproductive health services to poor, rural and marginalized women; the fact that family planning services mainly targeted women and that not enough emphasis was placed on male responsibility in reproduction; a lack of measures to protect women migrant workers from Bangladesh in all stages of the migration process; continued prevalence of stereotyped and patriarchal attitudes towards women in society, reflected in such practices as son preference; the poor working conditions of women workers in both the private and public sector; non-implementation of minimum wage levels and the lack of social and health benefits, including paid maternity leave; the lack of adequate child care facilities in the private manufacturing sector; and, the lack of government monitoring of the conditions of women in the informal sector.

The Committee also expressed concern at: the lack of disaggregated statistical information related to marriage, birth registration, and incidents of violence against women; the absence of special prisons for women; the trend towards globalization and liberalization of trade policies which, despite economic and micro-credit programmes for rural women, may have an adverse economic impact on the poorest of the poor, especially women in the rural areas; the lack of monitoring and assessing the impact of development plans on women; the absence of adequate information and analysis, as well as programmes, directed at addressing prostitution in general; the reported imposition of fatwas, using religious

justification to punish women; and, the small number of women in decision-making positions, despite affirmative action to encourage the participation of women;

The Committee recommended that the government:

- ▶ review its remaining reservations to the Convention with a view to eventually withdrawing them;
- ▶ strengthen its primary health and reproductive health services to improve substantially the health and well-being of women;
- ▶ strengthen its enforcement and monitoring of existing laws, policies and mechanisms on violence against women in order to provide victims with responsive and effective measures of protection and prevent further violence;
- ▶ set up a separate prison facility and comprehensive programme of rehabilitation for women committed to prison;
- ▶ bearing in mind the impact of globalization on the rural economy, give high priority to the issues and problems of rural women, especially with regard to ownership of land and access to credit, loans and skills training in new agricultural technologies;
- ▶ strengthen gender sensitization and training programmes for the judiciary, police and health professionals, particularly those related to violence against women;
- ▶ strengthen education and public information programmes to combat social attitudes, prejudices and social and traditional practices, particularly son preference, that discriminate against women and ensure that these programmes are geared towards reinforcing more positive images and roles of women in society;
- ▶ pay particular attention to improving the wage levels and the terms and conditions of women workers, including training in new technologies, in the export processing zones as well as in the informal sector;
- ▶ strengthen mechanisms to protect migrant women workers from exploitation throughout the migration process, including by actively exploring bilateral and multilateral initiatives addressing this issue;
- ▶ systematically register births and marriages in order to enable laws prohibiting child marriage to be enforced rigorously;
- ▶ to address the problem of trafficking of women and girls, ensure stronger enforcement of the women and child suppression law of 1995 and provide adequate assistance to women and girl victims of trafficking.;
- ▶ undertake an impact assessment of development plans for women;
- ▶ adopt more proactive measures to speed up the implementation of education programmes to eliminate female illiteracy;
- ▶ conduct research on the root causes and social consequences of prostitution to ascertain the depth of the problem; and,
- ▶ continue affirmative action measures, such as quota seats for women in Parliament, in local bodies and in the civil service, and provide capability building and skills training to enable women to participate actively in electoral politics as well as in the civil service.