



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women
Eighty-first session**

Summary record of the 1857th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 10 February 2022, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Acosta Vargas

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention *(continued)*

Eighth periodic report of Senegal (continued) (CEDAW/C/SEN/8;
CEDAW/C/SEN/Q/8; CEDAW/C/SEN/RQ/8)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Senegal joined the meeting.*

Articles 10–14

2. **Ms. Bonifaz Alfonso** said that, despite the progress made in some areas of women's education, the high illiteracy rates in Senegal, particularly among women and girls living in rural areas, remained a major cause for concern. She would welcome information on the results yielded by the State party's literacy programmes specifically targeting women, including older women. The Committee was likewise concerned that initiatives such as the awarding of scholarships to girls from impoverished families and the implementation of programmes to increase the enrolment of girls in scientific, technical and vocational education had done little to dissuade girls who married early or fell pregnant from dropping out of school. The delegation might explain what remedial action the State party intended to take in that connection and describe the impact of its efforts to promote positive masculinity and combat sexist stereotypes and the measures taken to reduce the digital gender gap in the country. Lastly, she wondered whether any leadership programmes were available to female school leavers.

3. **Ms. Siby** (Senegal), speaking via video link, said that the implementation of the national literacy programme for young people and adults, and its related action plan, was the responsibility of the Directorate for Literacy and National Languages. The action plan provided for the creation of some 600 places for women in the programme each year. Women were also being provided with tablets as a literacy aid. Literacy programmes were also conducted by the Ministry for Women's, Family and Children's Affairs.

4. To increase the number of girls studying science and technology, the Ministry of National Education had created a specific stream for those subjects within each of the country's six girls' schools and had introduced a mathematics and science competition especially for girls. At the science high school located in Diourbel, girls outnumbered boys in each year group.

5. A circular had been issued allowing pregnant students to suspend their studies for medical reasons, since they could not be provided with adequate care at school. Those students could resume their studies once they had given birth. Under the empowerment programme for girls and young women launched by the Ministry's gender unit, girls who had dropped out of school were identified and encouraged to resume their studies via remote learning.

6. The Constitution provided that both boys and girls must complete 10 years of compulsory education and the amended Education Act specified that both girls and boys were to have equal access to schooling. The need to ensure the inclusion of girls and children with special needs in the education system had also been underlined in several decisions taken by the executive branch. Under the Programme for Quality, Equity and Transparency Improvements in Education and Training, education support programmes for girls and a scholarship programme for the brightest female students from impoverished families had been launched. To facilitate access to education, primary school tuition fees had been waived and secondary school tuition fees had been reduced. The country's 166 school mothers' associations were actively involved in promoting girls' access to education. Female teachers' networks also played a role in encouraging girls to continue their studies and in keeping them in school. Disadvantaged female students, including female students with disabilities, were provided with tablets preloaded with educational materials. Overall, in Senegal, girls still outnumbered boys from preschool through to secondary education and had a higher completion rate.

7. **Ms. Niang** (Senegal), speaking via video link, said that, while, in Senegal, women and girls accounted for over half of students enrolled in vocational and technical training courses, that statistic concealed a disparity, as most of them were training to do jobs traditionally performed by women, such as hairdressing or sewing. To encourage more girls to stay in school and pursue technical and industrial studies, the Government awarded scholarships and prizes to gifted female students and provided girls from impoverished families with health kits. Material and financial support, including childcare, was also provided to single mothers and young divorced women who had dropped out of school to enable them to resume their studies. The range of technical and vocational courses available at the country's training centres had been broadened to attract more female students, and separate bathrooms for female students had been installed in centres where such facilities were lacking to help ensure their continued attendance.

8. It had been decided that, in primary schools, 30 per cent of teaching hours would be devoted to vocational and technical training to increase the number of girls following that pathway. Awareness-raising campaigns targeting girls and their parents had been conducted to that end. Vocational and technical training courses were open to all girls in Senegal without distinction or discrimination. Centres of excellence for vocational and technical training had been established to encourage more girls to enrol in such courses. Female students who successfully obtained their diploma received financial support to facilitate their transition to the world of work.

9. **Ms. Astou Diouf** (Senegal), speaking via video link, said that efforts to promote positive masculinity had been ongoing since 2012. Under the national "schools for husbands" strategy, the aim of which was to involve more men in the realization of the sexual and reproductive rights of women and in the reduction of gender inequalities at the community level, schools for husbands had been opened in two regions of the country on a pilot basis. In the health districts where the schools were located, the contraceptive prevalence rate, the prenatal check-up completion rate, the assisted delivery rate and the uptake of family planning services had increased on the whole. A training manual had been developed for use not only by husbands and fathers, but also by future husbands and other community actors. It had been decided that existing schools for husbands would be strengthened and that new schools would be opened in the south, the suburbs of Dakar and in the north of the country with a view to involving more men in efforts to combat gender-based violence and harmful practices.

10. **Ms. Ndiaye** (Senegal), speaking via video link, said that a four-year action plan to combat gender-based violence had been devised to complement the national coronavirus (COVID-19) response plan, which did not sufficiently address the phenomenon. The action plan included a code of conduct designed to counter violence, harassment and discrimination against women, which would be implemented once the necessary approvals had been obtained. A tool to assist health-care workers in dealing with cases of gender-based violence had likewise been developed, and the possibility of introducing a multisectoral gender-based violence response system was being examined.

11. **Ms. Diop Dieng** (Senegal), speaking via video link, said that the national literacy programme for young people and adults was helping to reduce the gender literacy gap in Senegal. That programme was complemented by a second literacy programme focused on access to vocational training, which was being implemented in cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank. There were currently 300 men enrolled in 20 schools for husbands in Senegal. Those men played an important role in raising awareness of gender-based violence and of sexual and reproductive health issues in the community, which had a positive impact on women's quality of life.

12. **Ms. Gabr** said that, despite the progress made in some areas of women's health, the maternal mortality and malnutrition rates in the State party remained high and efforts to promote women's sexual and reproductive health and to combat harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation, were often hampered by societal prejudices. She also understood that women living in rural areas still struggled to gain access to health care. The delegation might describe the measures taken or envisaged to educate the population about the dangers of female genital mutilation, early pregnancy and sexual violence and to combat those phenomena, and to promote family planning, improve nutrition among women and

children and broaden access to health-care services, particularly neonatal services, in rural areas.

13. She understood that, in Senegal, abortion was permissible only when the life of the woman was in danger. She wished to know whether abortion was criminalized for religious reasons and, if so, whether the State party might consider following the example of other countries where Islam was the State religion and where abortion was possible when the pregnancy was the result of incest or rape or in case of fetal impairment.

14. **Ms. Ndiaye** (Senegal) said that the National Health and Social Development Plan 2019–2028 defined women and girls as a priority group. Progress had been made in several areas: the country’s maternal mortality rate was steadily declining, and more and more women were availing themselves of sexual and reproductive health services, such as prenatal check-ups, assisted births and family planning. However, women living in remote areas still faced obstacles in gaining access to those services. To remedy that disparity, additional staff had been deployed to health centres located in remote areas. Midwives and nurses worked in tandem to provide a range of sexual and reproductive health services to women living in such areas, and strategies such as the mobile midwives initiative ensured that those women received the necessary obstetric care. New health centres had been built and new equipment had been made available. Efforts had also been made to increase the availability of emergency obstetric care.

15. To further reduce the maternal mortality rate, the Government had taken steps to strengthen the legal framework within which sexual and reproductive health services, particularly family planning services, were provided in the public and private sectors and at the community level.

16. **Ms. Astou Diouf** (Senegal) said that the teenage pregnancy rate had decreased in recent years thanks to initiatives such as the “New Deal” community pact concluded between teenage girls and their parents in the south of the country. Under the pact, teenage girls undertook to continue their studies and not fall pregnant, while their parents undertook not to allow their daughters to marry early. To reduce teenage pregnancy, sexual and reproductive health services for adolescents had been made available in all health-care facilities, health-care workers had been provided with specialized training, a new mobile application on reproductive health, “Hello Ado”, had been rolled out and girls’ clubs bringing together teenage girls who had signed the “New Deal” community pact had been set up. The “New Deal” initiative had been a success, as none of the teenage girls who were club members had fallen pregnant and or married before 18 years of age.

17. **Ms. Diop Dieng** (Senegal) said that the health of mothers and children was a priority. The maternal mortality rate, although high, had steadily declined in recent years, along with fertility rates, while the use of contraception had increased threefold in the past two decades. Abortion was prohibited in Senegal, except for in very well-defined circumstances where the health of the mother or fetus was at risk. The Government ran information, awareness-raising and health education programmes with the aim of reducing abortion rates.

18. **Ms. Gabr** asked how the State party planned to address its high rates of malnutrition and anaemia, what health care had been provided to women during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, particularly rural women, and what care was provided to older women.

19. **Ms. Diop Dieng** (Senegal) said that, with the support of the World Bank, a major programme on early child development had been implemented over the previous year that strengthened institutional capacities, with a focus on child nutrition in the first 1,000 days of life. The programme had achieved notable results. Her government had recently assumed the presidency of the African Union and declared 2022 the Year of Nutrition to tackle the issue at the regional level.

20. **Ms. Ndiaye** (Senegal) said that the Maternal and Child Health Directorate had developed a guide to reproductive health in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Regional teams had been trained to support the implementation of responses in relation to maternity care, and gender issues, including women’s and girls’ reproductive health, had been integrated into the country’s COVID-19 response plan. Isolation facilities had been set up to

deal with childbirth complications. Menstrual hygiene kits were distributed to women and girls in isolation and treatment centres, and the staff of such centres had also received training on gender issues.

21. **Ms. Diop Dieng** (Senegal) said that women had been targeted by a project that promoted the use of face masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19 through the sharing of messages via television, radio and women leaders.

22. **Ms. Ameline** said that she would be interested in hearing about the role played by women in the State party's transformation of the informal sector, particularly with regard to land management. Legislation on that matter had been adopted, but few women had acquired land or engaged in land management. She therefore wished to know how women were being encouraged to become owners and managers of land. Statistics on the application of the State party's social protection legislation in the informal sector and in relation to women would be welcome, as would examples of the use of technology to help women in the informal sector to be more deeply involved in the economic process.

23. **Ms. Astou Diouf** (Senegal), speaking via video link, said that women's equal access to land was guaranteed under the Constitution. The specific measures adopted to realize that right in the agricultural sector included plans to integrate a gender perspective into the allocation of developed land, particularly land with high added value, and a 20 per cent quota for women's appointment to decision-making positions. Women also benefited from quotas in decision-making bodies at the national level, such as within the National Agency for Integration and Agricultural Development, and at the ministerial level. Gender was also taken into account in regional programmes, for example through the gender observatory established as part of an agricultural development programme in Matam. Gender issues were also incorporated into the work of the Senegalese Agricultural Acceleration Programme, which ensured women's access to land and agricultural equipment.

24. **Ms. Diop Dieng** (Senegal) said that efforts to support the transition of the informal sector to the formal sector included the National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women, under which a project provided technical and financial support to enable women producers of agricultural products to enter the formal sector. The Directorate for Women's Organizations and Entrepreneurship led a programme to support women's transition to the formal sector, thereby enabling them to gain access to training and funding.

25. **Ms. Niang** (Senegal), speaking via video link, said that, as part of the National Strategy for Social Protection 2016–2035, a simplified reporting scheme for low-income taxpayers was being piloted and a social mutual fund for craftspeople had been established. A single social security code was under development, under which social protection would be provided to self-employed workers and Senegalese migrants abroad who did not enjoy social protection.

26. **Ms. Peláez Narváez** asked how the State party planned to facilitate women's access to, and control of, productive resources to render the agricultural sector resilient to climate change, how women's productivity in small-scale agriculture would be improved and what measures had been taken or planned to strengthen their participation in the management of public investment in rural areas. She wished to know how the needs of women deprived of their liberty were addressed, particularly in relation to the noted shortcomings in sanitation, medicine and food, how visits and vocational training for those women were managed and what specific measures were in place for pregnant and breastfeeding women and those whose children lived with them in prison. The detention of women was a relatively frequent occurrence in the State party owing to discriminatory legal provisions, particularly in the area of sexual and reproductive health, and she asked whether any changes were planned in that connection. She asked how it would be ensured that women were heard by a judge within 48 hours of their detention.

27. Noting the alarming phenomenon of the sexual abuse of women and girls with disabilities as a consequence of the erroneous belief that sexual relations with a woman who was a virgin could cure HIV, an ordeal that caused many of them to contract HIV themselves, she asked how the State party challenged that belief, how those who contracted HIV were assisted in their recovery and how victims' timely access to justice was guaranteed. Many women and girls with albinism were victims of similar crimes, and she wished to know how

they were protected and the perpetrators of torture against them brought to justice. The proliferation of hate speech and incitement to violence against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons was cause for grave concern, and she wished to know how the State party protected that community and whether it would adopt a strategy for that purpose and to bring an end to the campaign of hate and violence.

28. **A representative of Senegal**, speaking via video link, said that the Government, cognizant of the social inequalities between urban and rural women, promoted the latter's literacy and access to land, equipment, and credit, among others. They had also been addressed by initiatives under the Emergency Community Development Programme and the Emergency Border Roads and Areas Modernization Programme. In an effort to reduce violence against women deprived of their liberty, women-only detention centres had been established, and studies had revealed that their health, nutrition, work opportunities and visits had improved as a consequence. Detention centres had health-care facilities. Women with albinism received support from civil society organizations and had been classified as having a disability, allowing them to receive enhanced support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

29. **A representative of Senegal**, speaking via video link, said that the Government undertook communication campaigns, for example via television advertisements, to change mindsets when it came to the seriousness of the rape of persons with disabilities and albinism and to inform the public that the act constituted an aggravated crime. The families of persons with disabilities benefited from awareness-raising campaigns to inform them of the need to protect that group and the protection measures put in place by the State.

30. **Mr. Diouf** (Senegal), speaking via video link, said that the rights of women deprived of their liberty were respected. Searches and surveillance were undertaken by female prison officers, and measures to protect pregnant prisoners included their placement in a separate area of the prison for two months before and after the birth. Senegalese legislation provided for prison conditions that were in line with international standards. The prison authorities took inmates' specific needs into account to ensure respect for their rights. The National School of Prison Administration, which had trained a number of prison officers, was headed by a woman.

31. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Senegal), speaking via video link, said that only a small minority of the country's prisoners were women. The Government took their particular needs into account, providing free personal hygiene products, cleaning products, food and health care.

32. Young female offenders in prison were placed in separate quarters. Special arrangements were made for pregnant and breastfeeding women, and women who were accompanied by their children. Pregnant women were legally required to be separated from other prisoners during the last two months of their pregnancy and the first two months after the birth. After weaning, the child could stay with the mother until the age of three, at which point the child would be placed in the care either of the family or of a recognized charitable institution.

33. Prenatal care was available to pregnant women and the prison administration made every effort to provide them with better quality food, taking due account of their special nutritional needs. In the best interests of the child, the birth took place in a medical facility, not the prison. The birth was registered in the normal way and the certificate did not refer to the prison as the place of birth.

34. A variety of training courses were available for women prisoners. Run in Wolof by staff with special responsibility for training, they might include cereal, fruit and vegetable cultivation, sewing, hairdressing, shoemaking or horticulture. A new training and rehabilitation centre had been opened in 2019, where women prisoners could acquire skills that would enable them to meet their basic needs, for example by selling the goods they produced, or longer-term skills in areas such as electronics or computing. They could also learn to train other prisoners.

35. **Mr. Diouf** (Senegal) said that, as the country's national preventive mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the National Observatory of Places of Deprivation of

Liberty, whose Director was a woman, carried out frequent prison inspections in order to ensure the application of human rights in those institutions.

36. **Mr. Seydi** (Senegal), speaking via video link, said that drought caused by climate change had been affecting the Sahel region since the early 1970s. Agriculture, pastoralism and forestry had all felt the effects. Mitigation efforts in the form of reforestation were taking place nationwide and had yielded very encouraging results. Women accounted for 10 per cent of forestry production. Work on adaptation focused primarily on the search for seeds of drought-resilient plant species. In parallel, campaigns were being run to raise awareness of greenhouse gas-producing activities in all productive areas of the economy.

37. **Ms. Diop Dieng** (Senegal) said that her government was participating in the AgriFed programme launched by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), which aimed to increase women farmers' resilience to climate change. Activities centred around sustainable development, labelling, value added products and enhancement of productivity. In the Saint-Louis region, capacity building was taking place in resilient agriculture and food security.

38. With regard to the question of discrimination against lesbian women, she wished to recall that all women in all groups enjoyed the same rights in terms of access to education, health, employment and protection from discrimination and violence. Women and girls living with a disability had additional special protection under the Social Policy Orientation Act.

39. As a matter of policy, in accordance with the constitutional principle of non-discrimination, Senegal did not categorize the various target groups. Furthermore, no special need in that regard that might justify special protection for that category had been brought to the attention of the authorities.

40. She wished to recall that, on a social issue of that kind, her country's attachment to human rights should be seen within the context of the cultural and religious values that underpinned the country's social and political stability.

41. The demonstrations calling for the criminalization of homosexuality had occurred against the backdrop of a debate in the National Assembly on a bill that had the support of religious associations. The bill had been rejected and, since the National Assembly was sovereign, there was no need for further comment on the question.

42. **Ms. Peláez Narváez** asked whether the delegation knew of any cases before the courts concerning sexual assault or abuse against girls or women with disabilities or of any violation of the rights of lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex girls in the past year.

43. **Ms. Diop Dieng** (Senegal) said that her delegation had already replied to the question of discrimination against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex girls.

44. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Senegal) said that, of the 451 reported cases of rape involving female minors, 14 had come before the courts. The remainder were still in the investigation phase. There had been no case of rape involving female minors with disabilities.

45. **Ms. Haidar** said that the Committee welcomed the measures taken in the State party to move towards greater equality between women and men in marriage. However, noting that, in its report, the State party referred to its intention to amend various articles of the Family Code, she said that she was disappointed to see that no progress on those amendments seemed to have been made since the Committee's consideration of the State party's previous report. She would be interested to know the timeline for adoption of those amendments.

46. A legal framework was essential if progress was to be made in the areas concerned. Other countries with a Muslim heritage which had put such a framework in place had been able to move forward.

47. Accordingly, she would like to know whether the State party had a timeline for amending other articles of the Family Code such as those concerning the age of marriage and polygamy. The fact that polygamy, for example, was explicitly mentioned in the contract of marriage did not, in the Committee's view, make it non-discriminatory: if polygamy was an option for the husband alone, it could only be discriminatory. The Committee would

appreciate some indication of when the amendments would be made so that the discussion on implementation could move forward.

48. She would also be interested to hear about any measures in place to protect women in non-registered marriages. The fact that a marriage could be registered up to a year later left the woman vulnerable in the event that in the course of that year the marriage was dissolved or became polygamous.

49. **Mr. Diouf** (Senegal) said that the technical committee to review legislative and regulatory provisions that discriminated against women was pursuing its work in consultation with other ministries, civil society and other partners with a view to finding consensual agreement on the necessary amendments. The country's previous experience in amending the nationality legislation through a consultative process showed that such an outcome was entirely possible.

50. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Senegal) said that a report on the discriminatory provisions of the Family Code had been drawn up and was now almost certain to be adopted.

51. **Ms. Astou Diouf** (Senegal) said that, in matters of human rights, it was important to observe the principle of cultural and religious diversity and to take account of the values that underpinned a country's culture. The Family Code represented 40 years of stability and was one of the pillars of social cohesion in Senegal. Polygamy was not considered discriminatory as it was a form of marriage to which the parties freely consented. The marriage contract was not signed until both parties had been informed of the legal implications.

52. As to the age of marriage, any statement of a particular position by the delegation might prejudice the ongoing process of consultation on the Family Code.

53. **Ms. Diop Dieng** (Senegal) said that the State of Senegal as such had as yet no official agenda for the reform of the Family Code. The technical committee was still working on the issue.

54. **Ms. Haidar** said that she was aware that the process could not be rushed. The Committee appreciated the need for thorough consultations in a reform of such magnitude.

55. Recalling that the Committee had addressed the practices of levirate and sororate – which could be viewed as forms of forced marriage – in its previous concluding observations ([CEDAW/C/SEN/CO/3-7](#), paras. 18-19), she said that she would appreciate the delegation's reassurance that those issues had not been forgotten by the technical committee.

56. **Ms. Ameline** said that the entrenched hierarchical structure of the family was an impediment to other reforms that the State party wished to make in order to improve women's status. Accordingly, while there was no desire on the Committee's part to see the legislative reform process rushed through, she would urge the State party to give it a high priority.

57. **Ms. Astou Diouf** (Senegal) said that levirate and sororate were complementary customary practices that were accepted by Islam as a means of providing protection to widows and children and safeguarding the stability of a family. Since they were freely agreed to by consenting adults, they could not be considered forms of forced marriage. They were fully regulated in law and religious precept and the rights and interests of women were duly preserved.

58. **Ms. Gabr** pointed out that, while levirate and sororate might be considered to be customary practices in Senegal, they bore no relation to religion.

59. **Ms. Diop Dieng** (Senegal) said the practices were indeed not related to Islam but were customary practices accepted in Islam. All the issues raised deserved close consideration taking due account of the country's cultural values, on which its peace and stability depended.

60. Her delegation attached great importance to the Committee's mandate for the protection of women. It was grateful for the opportunity to exchange views with the members. Her government would spare no effort in cooperating with the Committee to fully implement the Convention in the interests of creating an egalitarian society.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.