

## 2. THE CONVENTION AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1 Overview

The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (Nairobi FLS) states "the role of women in development is directly related to the goal of comprehensive social and economic development and is fundamental to the development of all societies". (Para 12). It acknowledged therefore that women, are an important national resource who can contribute to national development as long as they are able to participate both equally and fully.

The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women** is a legal document. Thus it appears to be aimed at the promotion of **equality** for women primarily through legal rather than other forms of change. It may appear to have more relevance for women who live in developed countries rather than women in developing countries where full participation in development is a pre-requisite for equality. The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women**, however, has the capacity to be used as a 'tool for development' and is as such a catalyst for implementing the changes necessary for women to be able to contribute equally with men in the development process.

The capacity for the Convention to be used as a tool for development can be seen in its primary objective in eliminating discrimination in the "political, economic, social, cultural or any other field". To achieve this objective obstacles which impede women's contribution to development must be identified so that the Convention can be used to bring about the necessary legal and other changes. Furthermore, the Reporting process, provides a useful system of checks and balances as it necessitates the collection of information. This information can be used to isolate particular pockets of discrimination which impede national development. Insofar as the procedure requires a report every four years, it serves as a continuing tool for monitoring the contribution of women to development.

A detailed examination of the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women** reveals the measures which are required to ensure that the role of women in development is dealt with consciously rather than left to chance. Particular articles which are relevant here are **Article 14** which deals with Rural Women, **Article 10** which deals with Education, **Article 11** which deals with Health and **Article 12** which deals with Employment.

### 2.2 Articles which Relate to the Role of Women in Development

**Article 1** - In its definition of discrimination, **Article 1** includes the denial of human rights and fundamental freedoms in political, economic and social as well as other fields. As any women denied these human rights and fundamental freedoms will be unable to make a full contribution in their societies they will be precluded from taking part in the development process.

**Article 3 and Article 7b** - **Article 3** states that States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development and advancement of women. It specifically refers to political, economic and

social fields. Article 7(b) provides that States Parties shall take necessary measures to eliminate discrimination in the political and public life of the country. Both articles thus refer to the participation of women in the formulation and implementation of Government policy which must include such areas as development planning.

**Article 10** - The Nairobi FLS state that education is "the basis for the full promotion and improvement of the status of women". However, levels of education are much lower among women and illiteracy levels are much higher than among men. This affects women's ability to contribute to the development process. Thus as Article 10 calls *inter alia* for equal access to education including continuing education, adult and functional literacy programmes, career and vocational guidance and access to the same curricula as men, it facilitates women's participation in the development process.

**Article 11** - Although the International Labour Organisation (ILO) indicates that women, as stated in the Nairobi FLS at present constitute 35% of the world's labour force and are likely to make up a greater proportion in the future, they tend to be concentrated "in areas requiring lower skills and lower wages and minimum job security". Measures such as the right to equal pay for work of equal value, job security and social security, addressed under Article 11 are designed to ensure the same rights for women as men in the field of employment. Providing equal employment opportunities will enhance women's participation in employment which will in turn enable them to make a greater contribution to development.

**Article 12** - As women are the providers of health care both inside and outside the home they have an important role to play in the achievement of Health for All by the Year 2000. Article 12 emphasises the need to eliminate discrimination against women both with regard to health care and access to health care services including those related to family planning and pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period. Its implementation, therefore, will serve to reduce risks to women's health and thereby enable them to play a productive role in society.

**Article 13** - Included in Article 13 are the rights to "family benefit" and to "bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit". In many countries women are the major food producers. They are, however, denied equal access to finance and credit and this has impeded their effective participation in the development process. Moreover the growing incidence of households headed by women who are uneducated but have significant responsibilities for children or others also contributes to their powerlessness. The provision of equal access to credit and loans makes it possible for women to move out of a subsistence existence and achieve self-reliance in food production.

**Article 14** - Under Article 14 which deals specifically with the problems faced by rural women, States Parties shall take the necessary measures to ensure equal participation for women in rural areas. In particular this Article ensures equal rights for rural women with regard to participation in development planning, health care facilities, training and education, self-help groups and co-operatives, agricultural credit and loans and adequate living facilities. As such it provides a basis for the necessary changes which have to be made to ensure full contribution to development. By implementing this Article, States Parties would enable women in rural areas to participate in the development process.