Reporting requirement. Countries that have ratified the CEDAW Convention are required to submit an initial report on the status of women within one year of ratification. Thereafter they are required to submit a periodic report every four years on progress made in removing obstacles to equality since the prior report. Because of the reporting backlog, States parties are encouraged to present consolidated reports (second and third together, for example).

Review schedules. The CEDAW Committee meets each year in two sessions of three weeks each (January and July). Reports are considered in the order in which they were submitted, with some variations to provide geographical balance and a balance of initial and periodic reports in each session. Countries are invited to be reviewed according to a list drawn up by the Committee at each session for future sessions. Governments do not have to accept the invitation to be reviewed in a particular session, and the Committee includes a number of "reserve" countries to be invited if any on the initial list decline. Therefore the list tends to remain tentative until two or three months prior to the session. Although many reports are overdue, because of the number of States parties the Committee has a small backlog of reports to be reviewed. NGOs can expect that country reports may not be reviewed until, on average, two years after submission.

NGO reporting. Governments’ assessments of their efforts to comply with the Convention frequently are incomplete and tend to minimize problems and maximize accomplishments. Recognizing this, the CEDAW Committee asks governments whether they have involved NGOs in preparing the government report. The Committee has invited direct NGO input, in the form of independent or "shadow" reports and informal presentations, to bring women’s real concerns to national and international attention. The CEDAW Committee recognizes that even where the NGOs have been consulted in preparation of the official report, the final version may omit their point of view. In many instances the NGOs have submitted a shadow report to complete the record. The Committee commends governments that include NGO inputs in their official reports.

Organizing the report

Obtaining the government report. The government report is the basis of the CEDAW review. The Committee experts use their discretion as to consulting other sources, and many do use information provided by NGOs. Some NGOs organize their report primarily as a commentary on the government report, which can be extremely effective.

States parties’ reports should be available from the Foreign Ministry. Some governments fail to distribute the report within the country, despite the CEDAW Committee’s strong recommendation that they do so. The government report is a public document and should be available to all citizens once it is submitted to the UN.

1 www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/proceduralguide-08.html
Government reports are available from the UN for public distribution after they are translated into all UN languages. Frequently the reports may not be available from the UN until fairly close to the beginning of the CEDAW session. Therefore it is important to request the report first from the government. If the report cannot be obtained within the country, contact IWRAW for information on the status of particular country reports.

**Coordinating the contributors.** It is possible for a single organization to prepare a helpful shadow report. However, many NGOs collaborate with other national and international NGOs in preparing reports. Collaboration can enhance the impact of the report on the government, as it can demonstrate a consensus voice and the existence of broad constituencies in favor of positions taken in the report. Coordination also helps the Committee use NGO information effectively, as the experts cannot be expected to give adequate attention to multiple reports, especially if they arrive in the last few days before the session. If submitting a report in alliance with other NGOs, it is important to budget time for coordination, identifying the strengths of each participating NGO, the tasks, resource- and cost-sharing, how to make final editorial decisions, etc.

**Organizing the report for maximum impact**

1) Organize the information according to articles of the CEDAW Convention, not by issue. If an issue concerns more than one article, choose the article that is most on point for a full discussion. Indicate briefly the other articles that may cover the issue.
2) Try to limit the report to no more than 30 pages. Not all the experts will be equally interested in each country, but are more likely to read a brief document. **Provide a table of contents.**
3) Provide an executive summary with specific language that the Committee could use in asking questions and drafting concluding observations, regardless of the length of the report. An executive summary should be no more than three pages (a very long report may require up to five pages of summary). The summary is essential to draw adequate attention to particular issues.
4) **Analyze** rather than describe the problems, the evidence, and the suggestions for change.
5) Prioritize issues. The Committee will not be able to focus adequate attention on more than a few issues. It is important to decide the most important issues to the NGO community.
6) Include analysis of reservations and accounts of NGO efforts relating to their withdrawal.
7) Include some background information about the country or region.

**Organizing the content.** It may seem difficult to organize the report according to articles of the Convention rather than according to the issues that most concern NGOs. One useful approach is to identify the issues, discuss and prioritize them, and then consider which articles of the Convention apply. For each issue, it is important to provide examples or evidence of how the issue affects women, identify obstacles to elimination of that form of discrimination, and make specific recommendations for addressing the problem. The CEDAW experts will find the identification of obstacles and recommended solutions extremely useful.

1) **Identify concerns and the applicable articles of the Women’s Convention.** Organizations may identify a series of issues based on experience and knowledge and determine priorities later.
2) **Gather documentation and evidence to illustrate the issue.** This is important to make the case for both the necessity and the possibility of change. Documentation can include statistics, legal cases, anecdotal information, news clips, academic research, provisions of national and local laws and regulations. Statistics are most useful if disaggregated by sex, age, marital status, class, ethnicity, etc, if possible. Case histories should be complete, including enough detail and contextual information to indicate the impact of particular actions or inaction by the government.
3) Identify major obstacles and recommend approaches to removing them. Consider the practical approaches to solving the problem. Which actors should be involved? Who needs to be trained or made aware of the Convention and national laws and regulations regarding women: judges, police, prosecutors, women’s advocates, school administrators, teachers, etc? Keep in mind how local women can be involved in monitoring the process.

4) Recommendations for action should be concrete, suggesting specific action. Language from the CEDAW General Recommendations or prior Concluding Comments of the Committee may be helpful. Questions that remain open from consideration of prior reports - stated in the Concluding Comments - should be addressed. Specificity is important; for example, "government should protect women from domestic violence," is not sufficiently precise. It would be more helpful to propose: “government should a) collect accurate data on the incidence of domestic violence against women (on the national and local level); b) increase the allocation of resources to women’s shelters by 50%; c) train the police to ensure that they offer battered women timely assistance."

5) Reference to implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action is now required.

6) Reservations. If your government has entered reservations to the Convention, it is important to suggest the changes that would allow for withdrawal. This could include analyzing the reservations in light of the current law and state of society to suggest narrowing the reservations to reflect the actual circumstances of society, or suggesting changing in law and policy that would lead to withdrawal. Reservations are supposed to be made with an eye to eventually withdrawing them as the law and culture change to better allow for meeting Convention obligations. They are not supposed to indicate a total refusal to change.

Special attention to context and analysis. This is important because the CEDAW Committee experts may not have a great deal of information about the country. The Committee will be able to use information on the social, political and economic background of the country to understand how this context affects the situation of women.

Context also will also help experts to evaluate particular situations. For example, if an employment law includes remedies available only through an administrative system, such as the Ministry of Labor or a local authority, it is important to analyze the general attitude of that authority. If the court system generally has not been sympathetic to women’s claims, it is important to note how judges are selected and trained and address the obstacles and opportunities for changing that system.

**SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR SHADOW REPORTS**

| To provide the essential information and guidance to the reader, the report should include: |
| 1) Title page including title, author(s) and date of the report; |
| 2) Executive summary (see below); |
| 3) Table of contents; |
| 4) Introduction that gives more information about the production of the report; |
| 5) The main body, organized by Convention article, including recommended actions; |
| 6) Concluding remarks; |
| 7) Appendix (text of important laws, lists of references or participants in report preparation, etc.) |

**Executive Summary** An executive summary is a brief presentation of information that allows busy readers to almost instantly get a clear idea of the main points in the shadow report. A good executive summary saves time for the reader and helps determine which part of the shadow report is of most interest. It is imperative for use by CEDAW members whose first language is not the language in which the report is written. An executive summary is
usually no more than three pages long. Information must be concise, accurate, and carefully selected. It should include:

- the main points of the report;
- the evidence/data included to support the main points;
- recommendations for government action to address the key issues, in language the Committee can use in its concluding observations.

The executive summary usually is the most difficult part of the report to produce. It should state clearly where in the shadow report the reader can find more details about a particular point if she wishes to know more. Some suggestions:

- All information about one article of the Convention should be possible to summarize in one paragraph. If you cannot do so, it probably means information in the discussion does not have a clear focus and may have to be reorganized.
- Every important paragraph can be reduced to one sentence; not every paragraph needs to be represented in the executive summary.

**WORKING WITH THE CEDAW COMMITTEE**

The CEDAW Committee consists of twenty-three independent experts, elected by the States parties to the Convention. The membership represents a geographical distribution as well as an attempt to include experts from different political and legal systems. Because they are by the terms of the CEDAW treaty “independent,” the members serve in their individual capacity and do not take formal instructions from their government as to their approach to consideration of the reports. (However, they must be nominated by their government so their views are likely to be acceptable to their governments). This independence also allows for a certain level of flexibility in organizing their working procedures and in working with NGOs.

At the CEDAW session, for each country, the Committee listens to a presentation by a government representative. For periodic reports, questions are prepared in advance of the session by a working group and conveyed to the country’s UN mission for answer during the opening presentation. The country representative returns, usually within three days, to answer questions that could not be answered in the first discussion.

The Committee issues Concluding Comments on the country, including both commendable progress and recommendations for improvement of policies and processes concerning women’s human rights. *This Concluding Comment is the crucial product for NGO action, as it is a public statement given to the government that specifies further action required to live up to its obligations under the Convention. It is crucial that NGO shadow reports highlight the major priorities that can be readily reflected in the Concluding Comments. Copies of the CEDAW reports, and Concluding Comments, should be available from the Foreign Ministry.*

Each country report is assigned a rapporteur who has the responsibility of reading all the background material provided by the UN (and NGOs) and presenting her analysis of that information to the Committee during its deliberations. The country rapporteur usually is assigned to write the Concluding Comment on that country. Contact with her is crucial.

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2 If they are not, contact IWRAW http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/
NOTE that a member from a country under review, according to the Committee’s rules, is not permitted to participate in the review of her country.

**NGO input at the CEDAW session.** While there is no formal mechanism for NGOs to present information in the official CEDAW session, NGOs may approach the CEDAW members in several informal ways. The process is relatively open, and at least some of the members are quite open to working directly with NGO materials.

- Most of the CEDAW members want to have written shadow reports to enable them to ask useful questions. They should be couriered to at least a few members, including the Chairperson and the country rapporteur, prior to the session. All of the members should receive a copy of the shadow report at the opening of the session.
- The presessional working group adopted a practice of asking NGOs from countries submitting periodic reports to orally present information during the presessional working group (which focuses only on periodic reports). If NGOs can be present at that time as well as at the time their country comes up for review by the full committee in the second or third week, this presentation can be extremely useful to them.
- The Committee holds two midday meetings during the session to hear country-specific information directly from NGOs. This is an opportunity to make your points to a number of the experts at once. NOTE that these meetings may be held without interpretation, and the working language is English.
- Many of the CEDAW experts are readily approachable individually before and after the working sessions to talk informally about the issues that concern NGOs. Some will be willing to have a full-length meeting before a working session or at midday. Most will be approachable to at least have a few words. **BE PREPARED for these meetings by having your specific points of concern ready to be conveyed in a few words and on a single sheet of paper.**

With the practicalities in mind, be sure to shape your report to be effective in the circumstances and provide a good framework for developing very specific points for lobbying. While your report may be ultimately intended for a large audience, including government officials and the public, it should be planned for effectiveness with the CEDAW Committee. As an audience the CEDAW Committee has particular requirements:

- CEDAW experts read the shadow report to obtain specific information that can help them evaluate the government report.
- The Committee experts cannot be familiar with the political and economic background of every country. They may need contextual information to understand the issues.
- CEDAW experts always have a limited amount of time and want to receive information about the most pressing issues in a concise format.

**CONVEYING THE REPORT TO CEDAW MEMBERS**

To be most useful, a shadow report should be presented to the CEDAW Committee at least six weeks prior to the session at which the country is to be reviewed. NGOs may convey their reports directly to CEDAW members. Courier is recommended to ensure timely receipt. Because courier is so expensive, it is suggested that the report be conveyed especially to the Chairperson and to the person designated as country rapporteur. The Division for the Advancement of Women will distribute NGO reports to the CEDAW experts. However, the Division will not guarantee that it will distribute reports prior to the opening of the CEDAW
session. To be certain of earlier delivery, NGOs must send the reports directly to the CEDAW members. To be sure of distribution at the session, send 24 copies to the Division. NGOs attending the session also should bring 24 copies with them, as many members do not bring all the documents they received at home before the session.

CEDAW GUIDELINES FOR GOVERNMENT REPORTS

CEDAW has adopted guidelines for the form and content of initial and periodic reports to assist State Parties in the preparation of reports and to ensure that reports are presented in a manner that allows CEDAW and State Parties to obtain a complete picture of Convention implementation. CEDAW has issued two guidelines, one for initial report, the other for second and subsequent reports.

Initial reports should be in two parts. Part I should clearly describe the country in all its aspects. It is to provide general information on the land and people of the State, its general political structure, general legal framework concerning the protection of human rights, and a description of efforts made to promote awareness among the public and the relevant authorities regarding the content of rights. Part II should provide specific information in relation to each provision of the Women's Convention. The following issues should be addressed with particular attention:

a) The constitutional, legislative and administrative provisions or other measures in force;
b) Progress that has been made, including the programs and institutions that have been established since the entry into force of the CEDAW Convention;
c) Any other progress made in the fulfillment of each right;
d) The gaps between women's legal status and their status in fact;
e) Any restrictions or limitations, even of a temporary nature, imposed by law, practice or tradition or in any other manner on the enjoyment of each right.

The Committee’s guidelines for second and subsequent reports indicate that they should focus on progress and new problems that have occurred since the submission of the preceding report. Particular attention should be paid to the following issues:

a) If the government report lists laws adopted in recent years with the purpose of eliminating discrimination, does it discuss realities of and remedies for noncompliance?
b) Are enough data disaggregated by sex?
c) Does the government report deal with the CEDAW comment on the preceding report? If so, is it adequate?
d) Has the government made serious efforts to implement the Convention since the submission of the preceding report?
e) If the government has entered reservations, does the government report address the reservations? Do the reasons for reservations still hold?