

A NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION  
FOR THE  
IMPROVEMENT OF WOMEN'S STATUS  
IN IRAN

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION OF IRAN  
TEHRAN, IRAN  
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## I. INTRODUCTION

*Since there are wide divergencies in the situation of women in various societies, cultures and regions, reflected in differing needs and problems, each country should draw up its own national strategy, and identify its own targets and priorities within the present World Plan.*

### World Plan of Action

This publication describes the National Plan of Action for the Improvement of Women's Status in Iran — its goals, development, implementation, and evaluation mechanisms. This National Plan is a specific response to the World Plan of Action's call for priority actions over the ten-year period from 1976 to 1986 as part of a sustained, long-term effort to achieve the objectives of the International Women's Year and the United Nations Decade for Women.

Iran's National Plan of Action for the Improvement of Women's Status was officially approved by the Iranian Cabinet on May 1, 1978. This approval was preceded by over two years of research and formal and informal discussion; and <sup>includes</sup> suggestions and comments on the part of women's organizations, concerned institutions and organizations, and government ministries. The basic purpose underlying this national plan was to widen the opportunities and involvement of women in all areas of social, economic, political and cultural life; to promote and ensure equality in these areas; and to improve the status of women and increase their contribution to the development process.

The broad goals reflected in the National Plan of Action for the Improvement of Women's Status are shown in Appendix I. During the actual implementation of the national plan, these goals will be translated into programs and projects within the frame work which has been established to implement and monitor progress. The following sections of this publication describe the strategy of "multisectoral machinery" which has been created to ensure the effective and rapid implementation of this national plan. The planning and implementation phase outlined will be

completed in the fall of 1978. Since the budget year is based on the Iranian calendar (beginning approximately March 21st of each year), the first complete year of operation under the National Plan of Action will be the Iranian year 1358, or March 1979 to March 1980.

This publication has been prepared with two objectives in view: to explain the approach undertaken in Iran; and in the hope that this material may be of use to other women's organizations throughout the world who are actively working towards the objectives contained in the World Plan of Action. The development of a national structure for implementation which combines all required elements — government, women's organizations, concerned individuals, political parties, and grass-roots groups — is the primary factor in ensuring that adequate attention is paid to the goals of an undertaking that will eventually touch all institutions and every individual.

*The United Nations General Assembly ... in its proclamation on the Decade laid particular emphasis on the development of planning and monitoring systems, including national machinery and national strategies, to ensure the integration of women as a stated priority within the framework of overall development plans, policies and programs. The General Assembly's endorsement has, in effect, placed a major emphasis on national action as a primary means of achieving the goals of the World Plan of Action.*

*We feel that this was a realistic decision — that the status of women and their full integration in all aspects of social, political and economic life can only be improved if government policies and strategies show awareness of, and are responsive to, the needs of women. This is the approach that we have taken in Iran.*

*To translate the ideals and goals we share concerning the changing roles of women into a formal statement such as a plan of action requires a continuing dialogue among various*

*elected bodies, and, finally, the translation of these agreed upon needs into a workable and realistic system of priorities capable of being realized within the framework of governmental plans and budgetary potentials.*

Mahnaz Afkhami  
Minister of State and  
Secretary-General of the  
Women's Organization of Iran

Statement before the Ad Hoc  
Preparatory Committee for the  
1980 Conference, Vienna, Austria  
June, 1978

## II. DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION

*As a matter of general policy there should be a clear commitment by the highest levels of government to take appropriate action to implement this Plan within the framework of national development plans and programmes.*

World Plan of Action

### Beginning a Commitment

The first steps toward the development of Iran's National Plan of Action began during the International Women's Year in 1975.\* Iran's delegation to the Mexico City Conference, headed by Her Imperial Highness Princess Ashraf Pahlavi, was active in the development of the World Plan of Action. Two major steps were taken during 1975 in conjunction with the International Women's Year activities within Iran.

First, over 700 informal gatherings, sponsored by the Women's Organization of Iran, were held throughout the country

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\*Iran's support of the International Women's Year has continued on an international basis through the establishment of the Asian and Pacific Center for Women and Development in Tehran in February 1977; the pending establishment of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women in Tehran in late 1978; and, the invitation and acceptance of Tehran as the site for the Mid-Decade Conference in 1980.

and involved women from all sectors of society. The purpose of these sessions was to both publicize the International Women's Year and the goals of the United Nations Decade for Women, and to elicit information from women themselves on their perceptions of priorities as well as needs.

Following this, the beginning of a governmental network to address national efforts relating to women was begun in late 1975 through the establishment of the High Council for Cooperation. This Council, chaired by Princess Ashraf, consisted of eight Cabinet Ministers and other high government officials and the head of the National Radio and Television Organization. The initial goal of the Council was to plan programs and discuss legislation relating to women that came under the jurisdiction of the ministries involved. Linkage to women's issues was provided by the appointment of a Minister of State for Women's Affairs in December 1975. (This Minister, Mahnaz Afkhami, concurrently served as Secretary-General of the Women's Organization of Iran.)

During 1976 and 1977 the Council was influential in introducing many legislative and governmental policy changes supporting the increased participation of women in education, economics, and politics. Moreover, the establishment of the Council was the first step toward development of a National Plan of Action for the Improvement of Women's Status.

#### Building a Partnership of Government and Women's Groups

The momentum towards development of a National Plan of Action for Women grew during 1976 with the establishment of an informal executive committee composed of the Deputy Ministers whose organizations participated in the High Council for Cooperation. This group of high-level decision-makers took up the task of establishing the basic elements of a national plan.

The timing was particularly advantageous since it corresponded with the development of policy and programming decisions already in progress for the Sixth 5-year Development Plan of Iran which would outline national policies and the goals to be achieved between March 1978 and March 1983.\*

At this same time the Women's Organization of Iran continued to broaden dialogue with both urban and rural women through its routine activities, the massive campaign conducted to urge women to participate fully in the political processes, and through the twelve provincial seminars it conducted on women's needs and issues. WOI's research findings, the conclusions of its seminars, and the channel it provided to all areas of the country through its provincial branches, provided an additional level of sensitivity as this material was relayed to the committee of Deputy Ministers.

Both government organizations and the Women's Organization of Iran undertook a series of activities designed to extend the discussion and eventually the impact of the National Plan of Action as it was being formulated. Each involved Ministry, for example, undertook a review of the functions of its organization regarding women, surveying current programs and their effect on women and developing new policies and programs. This effort was assisted by the newly formed Women Employee Organizations which had been established in many government agencies.

Continued work towards the Sixth Development Plan also provided an additional means of vetting women's needs and issues in relation to the setting of national policy. This planning document encompassed all aspects of national efforts in social, educational, economic, health and other related areas. Each committee had at least one woman member and in several, a woman held the position of deputy chairperson. Due to coordinated efforts

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\*Ministries and governmental organizations represented on this committee were: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health and Welfare, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Finance, the Plan and Budget Organization, National Radio and Television.

of the involved Deputy Ministers, the Sixth Development Plan was the first such to make direct reference to and address the needs of women. Representation of women on the numerous planning committees was ensured and the Plan and Budget Organization and the Women's Organization of Iran jointly conducted a seminar for those individuals actively involved in the evolution of this plan, to further stress the need to coordinate decision-making in regard to women's issues as an integral part of the planning process.

The Women's Organization of Iran was a major agent in ensuring coordination between the two national planning efforts -- the Sixth Development Plan as well as the National Plan of Action for the Improvement of Women's Status in Iran.\*

#### Obtaining a National Consensus

*National plans and strategies for the implementation of this Plan should be sensitive to the needs and problems of different categories of women and of women of different age groups. However, Governments should pay special attention to improving the situation of women in areas where they have been most disadvantaged and especially of those in rural areas.*

#### World Plan of Action

As a result of the efforts described above, a draft National Plan of Action for Women was completed by mid-1977 and submitted to a wide review. Review at the seminar sponsored by the Women's Organization of Iran and the Plan and Budget Organization on the Sixth Development Plan, and review by the High Council for Cooperation ensured a greater integration at the top levels of governmental decision-making.

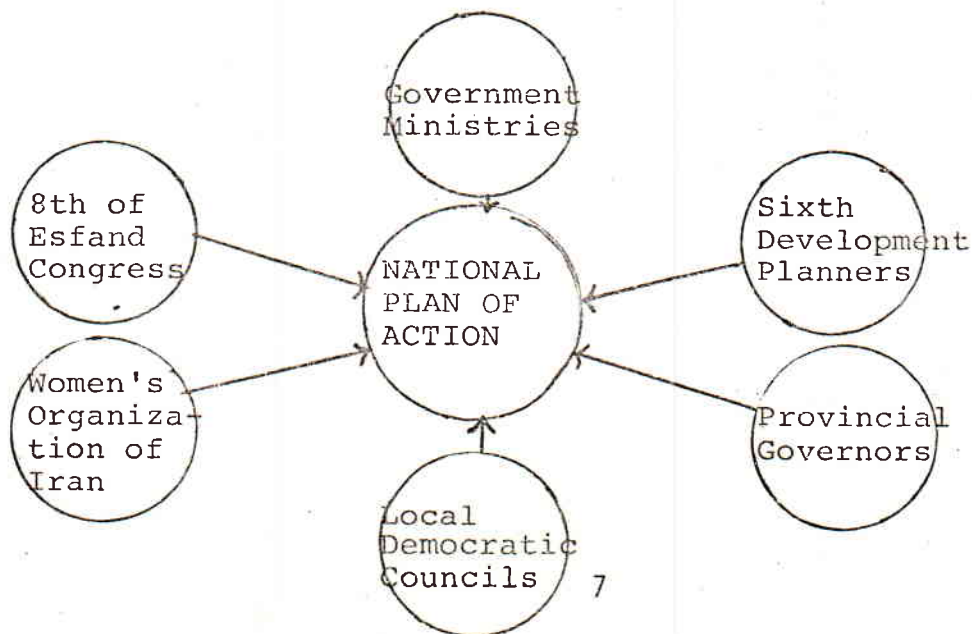
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\*See Appendix III for a brief description of the Women's Organization of Iran.



The National Plan of Action was submitted to all the local Democratic Councils (i.e., rural and town councils) who were asked to review and comment on the plan itself. In addition, members of the branches and provincial councils of the Women's Organization itself participated in this review process. The plan was also discussed at a conference of provincial governors-general for the purpose of informing them of the objectives of the plan, and to receive their comments and enlist their support. This comprehensive review period began in late September of 1977 and was completed in late February 1978. The end of the period coincided with the 8th of Esfand Celebrations (27th of March) which marked the 15th anniversary of the attainment of legal and social rights for women granted under the 1963 Revolution of the Shah and People. This occasion was attended by over 10,000 delegates from local, provincial and national organizations and by groups who had participated in the review of the National Plan of Action.

Revisions made to the initial Plan were based on wide variety of comments received during the five month review period and a Final National Plan of Action was drawn up. This document was presented to the Cabinet and final approval was granted on May 1, 1978. The approval given by the Cabinet covered not only the goals contained in the National Plan of Action, but the process by which the Plan was to be implemented and evaluated periodically as discussed in the following sections.



These differing review mechanisms provided an active and enthusiastic forum for debate and in many ways served as a learning process for both the participants and ministries involved. The objectives contained in the final National Plan of Action for the Improvement of Women's Status are a result of this partnership and process. Decision-makers in government, provincial and local governmental bodies, and interested individuals and organizations all participated in its establishment.

### III. IMPLEMENTATION

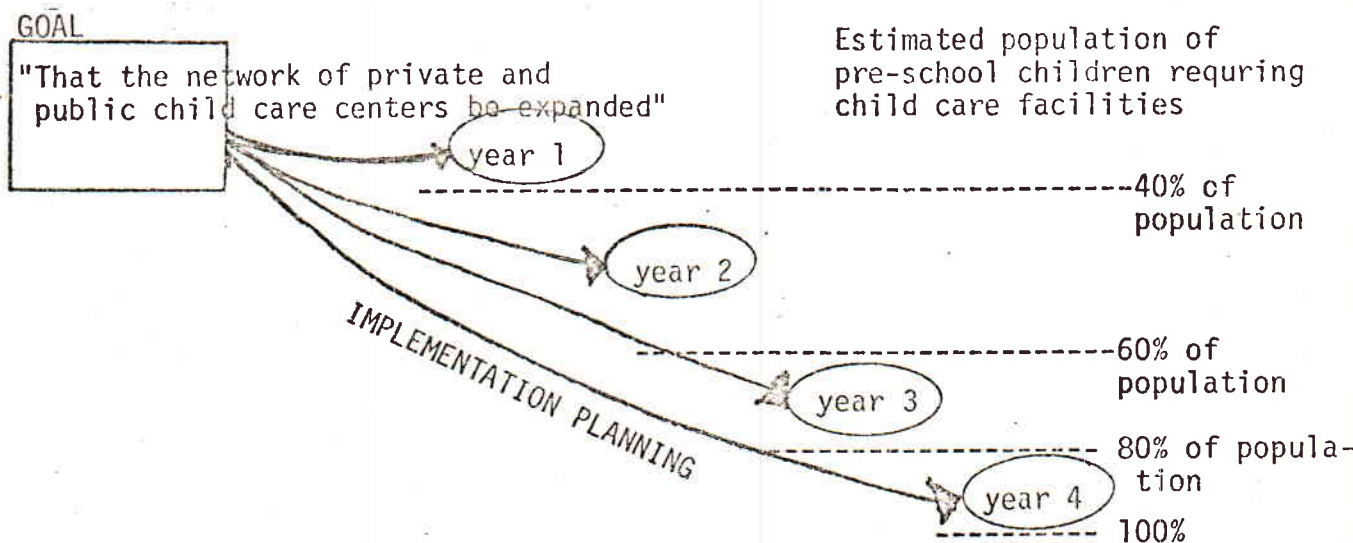
*In elaborating national strategies and development plans, measures should be adopted to ensure that the set targets and priorities take fully into account women's interests and needs, and make adequate provision to improve their situation and increase their contribution to the development process. There should be equitable representation of women at all levels of policy- and decision-making. Appropriate national administrative machinery and procedures should be established if they do not already exist.*

World Plan of Action

Although the approved National Plan of Action for the Improvement of Women's Status is purposely broad and all-encompassing, it nevertheless attempts to specify long-range objectives that include the achievement <sup>of the</sup> minimum goals for 1980 contained in the World Plan of Action, and the outline of priority strategies and programs to be achieved within the Sixth Development Plan of Iran (1978 to 1983). The selection of priority areas outlined in the Plan reflects the participation of government ministries, women's organizations, concerned individuals, political parties, and grass-roots organizations. Each of these provided input and have left their mark on this Plan in terms of the proposals it contains. The process of consensus produced a document which directly specified some objectives while only broadly addressing others. While some objectives may be easily attainable in a short period of time,

others will require greater resources, institutional and/or social change, and may not be achievable within the time stipulated. The specific items listed in Appendix I, however, directly reflect the process of developing such a plan and the perceived priorities of the participating individuals and institutions.

The establishment of a specifically selected goal is only the beginning of the process involved. This only resolves the question of "what should be done"; the questions of "how" and "when" must also be resolved. The implementation process primarily involves extensive planning; goals must be translated into concrete objectives, placed within a conceivable framework of time and resources (both funds and human resources), and programs need to be revised or initiated. For instance, if the goal is the expansion of child care centers, implementation must consider the size of the potential population, the time span allowed and their relative adjustment.



Along with its approval on May 1, 1978, the Cabinet issued instructions for the implementation and evaluation of the National Plan of Action. During the rest of 1978 the broad goals *of* the plan will be translated into actual policies, strategies and programs at all levels. The Cabinet will have overall responsibility for implementing the directives of the Plan and each Ministry head who serves on the Cabinet will have the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the proposals relevant to his or her organization are effected. This responsibility also ensures the establishment of a structure to oversee both the actual planning and implementation phase and its periodic review of progress made.

#### Planning and Followup Committees

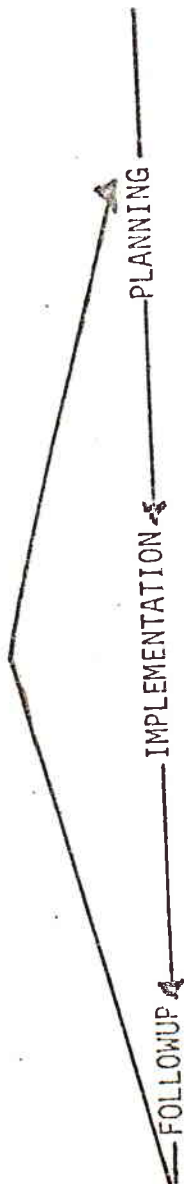
To oversee the efficient and effective implementation of the Plan, each government Ministry or organization will establish a Planning and Followup Committee under the direct supervision of the Minister or agency head. These committees will develop work plans to implement the National Plan of Action, will review subsequent implementation progress, and then report on this progress. The committees will be headed by a Deputy Minister and will consist of:

1. Individual(s) responsible for the budget and management of the organization;
2. The director or a representative of the Women Employee Organizations of the unit (in those units where no such group has yet been formed, one of the senior women employees will be appointed);
3. A representative of the Plan and Budget Organization of the Government of Iran;
4. A representative from the Women's Organization of Iran;
5. Individual specialists from pertinent fields who may be invited to attend committee sessions by the Chairman.

The representative of the Plan and Budget Organization will assist in providing technical help in planning, management and evaluation techniques. The representative of the Women's Organization of Iran will provide technical assistance in identifying the perceived needs of women which fall within the scope of the ministry's activities, help coordinate research activities between the ministry and WOI ongoing projects, and will serve as a general advocate of women's issues.

The specific duties of the Planning and Followup Committees are:

1. To determine the problems of women from different levels of society and backgrounds relative to the duties of the organization.
2. To determine, collect, classify and analyze relevant statistics and information.
3. To prepare a detailed report on the existing situation of women and their participation in society.
4. To review the goals of the Nation Plan relative to the responsibilities of the organization and to develop a three-stage implementation plan covering:
  - (1) Activities (programs and projects) which may be planned and implemented within current resource levels, including those which may require policy redirection.
  - (2) Activities related to new initiatives which would require the approval of new resources, including resource estimates and propose timetables.
  - (3) Activities which would involve the cooperation and coordination of one or more other organizations.
5. To educate units within the organization on the purpose and goals of the National Plan of Action, particularly as they relate to the work of the agency, and to assist such units in developing actual work performance schedules and timetables for implementation.
6. To coordinate and summarize the implementation work schedule plans of the organization.
7. To review the progress achieved on a routine basis and prepare a Quarterly Progress Report.



8. To take corrective action as necessary to resolve problem areas caused by faulty planning estimates, ineffective coordination, etc., based on these quarterly followup/evaluation reviews.

The Planning and Followup Committee may establish a Secretariate under its supervision to assist in performing these duties. As outline above, this committee will be responsible for establishing the broad parameters for planning the specific programs or projects which must be developed; for coordinating these varied programs within the organization and ensuring the development of expertise; and for periodically reviewing the progress achieved in the implementation of the National Plan of Action.

#### Continuing the Partnership

Through representation on the Planning and Followup Committees the Women's Organization of Iran will continue its association with government efforts to implement the National Plan of Action for Women. The WOI representatives will be specialists in the areas concerned — health, education, employment — and will be able to view the activities of the particular government organization from a framework which includes broader issues. They will be able to draw upon the wide activities of the Women's Organization, particularly those related to research or those occurring at the local level, and serve as general advocates.

#### Provincial Participation

A Planning and Followup Committee for the National Plan of Action has been established in each province. This decision was based on the current government decentralization policy which provides the Governor-General and the heads of local government organizations with more control over the resources within a province. The Provincial Committees will be chaired by the Governor-General and membership includes the Secretary of the Women's Organization within the province and representatives of the government organizations located there.

The duties of this provincial committee will involve:

- (1) determining the status and needs of women in the province;
- (2) integrating these needs with programs and projects conducted in the province;
- (3) monitoring progress made and coordinating between varying agencies' plans and programs; and,
- (4) reporting quarterly on progress made.

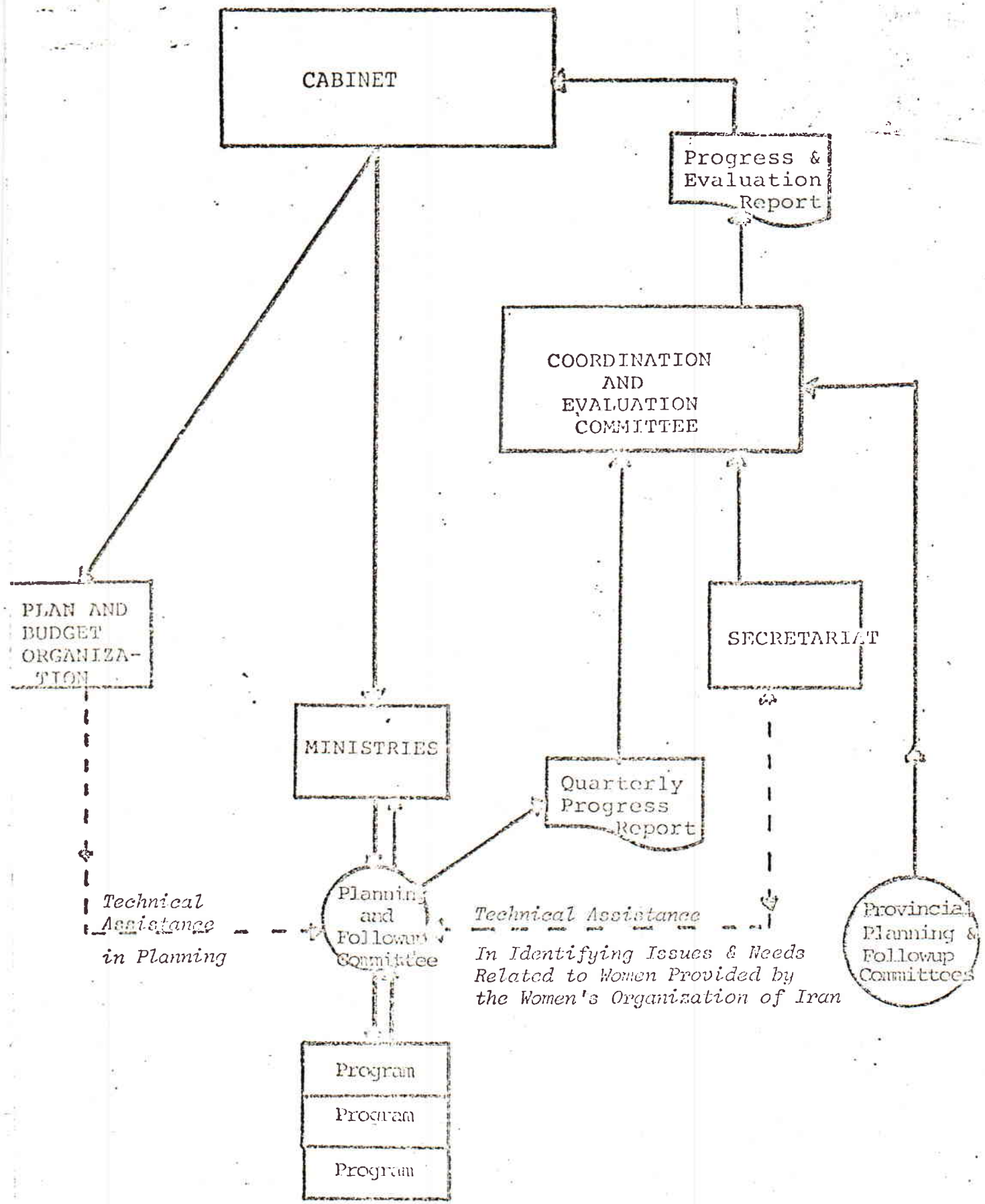
#### IV. COORDINATION AND EVALUATION

The Chairmen of the various Planning and Followup Committees will meet periodically (generally monthly) to discuss implementation problems and coordinate ministry efforts. They will oversee the coordination of implementation plans, particularly those programs requiring additional resources or joint cooperation. This group will also review and evaluate the progress based on the Quarterly Progress Reports submitted by the Planning and Followup Committees. In addition, this body will be responsible for the preparation of an annual report on the achievements of the National Plan of Action for submission to the Cabinet of the Government of Iran.

The Women's Organization of Iran will serve as a secretariat to this group and its meetings will be chaired by the current Secretary-General of the Women's Organization of Iran. The secretariat will be a coordinative and advisory arm of the Cabinet since direct authority for implementation rests with the individual Cabinet Ministers. The use of the Women's Organization of Iran as a supporting secretariat will provide a broad perspective in the annual review process since this organization can utilize its representatives on the Planning and Followup Committees as well as regional and local structures.

An overview of both the implementation and evaluation structure described above is shown on the following exhibit.

ANNEX I  
 IRAN'S NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR WOMEN:  
 OVERVIEW OF STRUCTURE FOR  
 IMPLEMENTING AND EVALUATING





APPENDICES