



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

Distr.: General
25 May 2004
English
Original: Spanish

**Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women**

**Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under
article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms
of Discrimination against Women**

Fifth periodic report of States Parties

Paraguay*

* The present report is being issued without formal editing. For the combined initial and second periodic reports submitted by the Government of Paraguay, see CEDAW/C/PAR/1-2 and Add.1 and Add.2, which were considered by the Committee at its fifteenth session. For the combined third and fourth periodic reports submitted by the Government of Paraguay, see CEDAW/C/PAR/3-4.

Status of compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

**Government of the Republic of Paraguay
May 2004**

Introduction

The present report by the Government of the Republic of Paraguay examines the progress made, and the setbacks and obstacles encountered, with respect to the country's compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) during the five-year period from 2000 to May of 2004. Accordingly, this report does not contain information on periods covered by previous reports. The report reviews the main articles of the Convention and examines how the advances, setbacks and obstacles identified serve to indicate the fulfilment of the objective of eradicating discrimination against women in all its forms. However, in view of the importance of certain areas relating to the advancement of gender equity, across-the-board issues having to do with decentralization and the implementation of an gender approach in the institutions of the State and civil society are discussed separately at the end of the report.

A variety of factors – infighting within political parties, very brief intervals between elections, a lack of financing and the high cost of political campaigns at election time, the fact that NGOs have not taken the lead as much as before, and women's lack of power – have weakened the efforts the women's organizations as partisan political interests have gained ascendancy over the interests of gender issues. The effort to consolidate democracy in the present difficult social and economic circumstances has meant that women have become active leaders in the struggle for freedom, justice, equity and the defence of human rights in all their various aspects, even though women are increasingly and visibly absent from senior political decision-making posts.

The institutional gender perspective is being rebuilt first and foremost through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as institutional channels for activist women's groups, a process that faces a number of difficulties and challenges at the social, cultural and political levels. Difficulties include achieving the necessary empowerment of women and gaining recognition for women's NGOs as valid spokespersons on gender issues, particularly in reference to social policy in gender matters. Challenges include the absence of women from decision-making and the need to make a conceptual distinction between women and gender, to break the circle of political parties so that equity and equality can be made a reality in the country, and above all to struggle against the increasing weakness and lack of coordination of the social involvement required. Although there have been significant changes, social policy forms part of the comprehensive strategic vision that the country's development process requires, but which it has not yet been possible to achieve.

Although there was intense participation on the part of women in general for the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, women's involvement has been waning with the passage of time owing to the country's critical social, political and economic situation and a lack of focused effort on the part of feminist activists. The latter is largely the result of cuts in international

assistance and the resulting shrinking of activities, programmes, studies, and so on in this area and, above all, the lack of a gender perspective in the programme of male and female leaders in the public and private sectors alike. Women hold only 8 per cent of public posts, and 9.7 per cent of professional and technical posts, even though they are considered theoretically less susceptible to corruption in managing public assets.¹

The Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic (SMPR) and the Paraguayan Women's Movement believe that the commitments undertaken by the Government of Paraguay at the 1995 Beijing conference have been partially fulfilled, as significant advances have been made, particularly in the 10 action areas designated as having high priority for the country,² although there are challenges, both old and new. In relative terms, all the objectives of the areas of the Platform for Action of the Beijing conference have also been fulfilled, particularly in regard to the process of democratic governance, progress in incorporating a gender perspective in the institutions of the State and coordination with civil society.

There has been a change in how social policy is conceived. Where previously it was limited to fulfilling certain basic social functions entrusted to the State (education, health, social security) without there being any overarching vision, it has now been expanded to include new social functions and has been broadened according to a more comprehensive perspective concerned with factors that cross many sectors (primarily gender and citizen participation),³ although may not necessarily be reflected in practice in day-to-day government activities.

The transformation that Paraguay has undergone since the establishment of democracy is a fundamental one that goes right to the core of the country's institutional structure, the mass communications media, and the behaviour and attitudes of individuals, who are strategic players in the political process, although Paraguayan institutions are subject to certain problems that act as constraints on the country's democratic governance.⁴

This report is structured as follows:

Part I

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

- Article 1: Human rights
- Article 2: Legislation
- Article 3: Policy
- Article 4: Equality of opportunity and of treatment
- Article 5: Family education; maternity
- Article 6: Prostitution

¹ Common Country Assessment (CCA), Paraguay, 2001, United Nations system, p. 8.

² Definition of priorities of the World Conference on Women, Paraguay, 1996, CMP, SMPR, United Nations system.

³ National Human Development Report, Paraguay, 2003; UNDP, DGEEC, Paraguay, 2003.

⁴ Joan Prats, *Libro Blanco sobre la Reforma Institucional en Paraguay* [White Paper on Institutional Reform in Paraguay], Institut Internacional de Governabilitat (IIG), UNDP, February 2003.

Part II

Article 7: Political participation and public life

Article 8: International representation

Part III

Article 10: Education

Article 11: Employment

Article 12: Health

Article 13: Socio-cultural discrimination

Article 14: Rural women

Part IV

1. Decentralization

2. Inter-agency development:

2.1 At the central government level, SMPR

2.2 At the local government level

2.3 In civil society

Part V

3. Strengthening of gender mainstreaming

4. The Paraguayan population in 2004

Part I**The Convention****Article 1: Human rights**

For the purposes of the present Convention, the term "discrimination against women" shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

The Paraguayan Human Rights Coordination Unit (CODEHUPY) has published its eighth report, *Derechos Humanos en Paraguay 2003*, which gives an overview of the human rights situation in Paraguay from the perspective of 26 non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In that report, each NGO, from its own viewpoint, describes the main factors and events that have had an impact on human rights in Paraguay. With specific reference to women's equality and the challenges facing the new government, the report states that since the 1990s women's organizations in Paraguay have made great strides in their struggle to win equality and eliminate discrimination against women. As a result, the country now has in place a legal framework which, over all, guarantees the protection of women's human rights. Progress in the legislative arena, however, has not been accompanied by cultural advances. Discrimination against women persists in many areas. The

high maternal mortality rate, acts of violence against women, low levels of political participation and women's unemployment are the main problems to which the government must give priority if it is to achieve true fairness and justice for both men and women in Paraguay.⁵

In 2003, Paraguay for the first time had a permanent representative on the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in the Inter-American system, as well as a permanent United Nations representative for children, adolescents and youth.

Although more than two decades have passed since the mainstreaming of gender equity began in the political and socio-cultural sphere, there are still some forces active that seek to maintain their hegemony rooted in centuries of domination, and that are extremely difficult to defeat in a society in which democracy has still not become strongly enough established to make gender equity an integral part of relations between men and women, whether in day-to-day life or in the public arena, especially in the country's institutions.

A ground-breaking event in the history of the country's criminal-justice system occurred in April 2004, as a public oral proceeding was conducted in which a member of the Armed Forces was charged with torturing and killing his stepdaughter, a little girl only seven years old, and the woman who was the man's common-law wife and biological mother of the little girl was charged with being an accessory to the crime. The fact that a member of the Armed Forces was charged with domestic violence is due to the decisive action and influence of the mass media and the public outrage that ensued. Similarly, a public oral proceeding is to be held in which a father is charged with systematically raping his minor daughters. He is being brought to justice thanks to the efforts of his older daughters who were raped in the same way when they were younger and, now that they are adults, have reported him to the authorities.

In March 2004, under the slogan "Putting an end to government violence against poor, organized women",⁶ the Women's Secretariat of the National Campesino Federation (FNC), published a statement denouncing specific cases of mistreatment, torture and extreme violence by law-enforcement agencies against campesinos, and particularly against women in the departments of Caaguazú, San Pedro and Caazapá, among others. In addition to such acts of physical violence, women suffer another form of human-rights injustice in that they do not have enough land or do not hold title to their land, given that title is usually held in the name of a woman's male partner or the man in the household. This situation applies at least until the implementation of the new Agrarian Act, which expressly deals with this point and permits title to land to be registered in the name of a woman as well.

The draft paper on poverty and inequality that has been published for discussion states, "Among people in extreme poverty, there exist social groups which are characterized by inequality by reason of gender, age, culture, circumstances or geographic location and which require specific intervention policies and programmes targeted by the government to their needs." These groups

⁵ *Derechos Humanos en Paraguay 2003* [Human Rights in Paraguay, 2003], first edition, Paraguayan Human Rights Coordination Unit, Asunción, December 2003, 478 pages.

⁶ National Campesino Federation, Women's Secretariat; e-mail of 21 March 2004 from <miro@telesurf.com.py>.

include campesinos who have no land or only tiny plots of land, households headed by women, children and adolescents who work and indigenous persons. The paper also looks at issues that cut across many sectors, such as gender equity, environmental sustainability, citizen participation, accountability and systematic evaluation.⁷

It is important to bear in mind that democratic governance and gender equity can be linked whenever women gain strength and legitimacy in the public arena and participate in debate, by linking gender concerns with the broader interests of democracy. The basis for this lies in the establishment of a discourse which recognizes new rights and reaffirms those already in existence such as sexual and reproductive rights, economic rights, and sexual preference as a human right, as well as those rights already laid down in the Magna Carta of Paraguay. There is also an urgent need to establish and promote a strategy to combat sexual violence, rape, sexual abuse and harassment, the exploitation of children and adolescents, procuring and traffic in women.

In 2004, Paraguayan human rights organizations worked to secure the Paraguayan government's vote in favour of the resolution entitled "Human rights and sexual orientation" to be placed before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights at its session in Geneva. Working together with civil-society organizations, the committees of the National Congress concerned with equity, gender and social development agreed to promote a debate in the National Congress on the subject of discrimination by reason of sexual orientation, based on the proposition "Sexual orientation is a human right",⁸ even though a lack of understanding and knowledge continues to prevail in this area. Similarly, draft anti-discrimination legislation was submitted to the National Congress in April 2004 aimed at preventing and eliminating all forms of discrimination against all persons, in accordance with Article 46 of Paraguay's National Constitution, and at promoting equality of opportunity and of treatment.

With regard to the social role of women, there should be a return to the agendas of feminists and of the authorities responsible for the mainstreaming of gender equity within State institutions. Curiously, the communications media have replaced the concept of "women" with that of "gender", as if the two were synonymous, leaving males outside the discussion and removed from participation in programmes concerned with relations between the sexes in everyday life. In contrast, only males participate in programmes concerned with politics, economics, or the reform and modernization of the State, while they are absent from issues relating to human reproduction and the transmission of social values.

The following are some of the forms of discrimination that still exist today: (a) the right to maternity leave, which is established under the Labour Code, does not extend to women who hold elected office; (b) the law establishes criminal penalties for abortion with the result that many women (especially those who cannot

⁷ *Estrategia Nacional de Reducción de la Pobreza y la Desigualdad* [National Strategy to reduce Poverty and Inequality], Social Action Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic, UNDP, IDB, World Bank, ILO, Asunción, November 2002, pp. 24-25.

⁸ "Resoluciones sobre orientación sexual y derechos humanos" ["Resolutions on human rights and sexual orientation"], an electronic newsletter, Working Group of GLTB (gay, lesbian, transgendered and bisexual) Organizations and Human Rights Organizations coordinated by the Aireana association, 26 March 2004.

afford high-quality treatment) who obtain clandestine abortions that are badly performed under unsanitary conditions are very reluctant to turn to the public health services to seek treatment for complications because they run the risk of being reported to the authorities; (c) in the case of women who work as domestic employees, private-sector teachers or self-employed workers, the provisions of the Labour Code do not extend insurance benefits to their husbands or common-law partners, and do not give them the full benefits of allowances and pensions from the Social Provident Administration (IPS); and (d) there are no mechanisms in place to enable housewives to receive social-security pension benefits except through their husbands.⁹

According to the UNDP report *Democracy in Latin America*, Paraguay is the country with the highest degree of acceptance of authoritarian government in Latin America, with 62.8 per cent, while the people, as a result of the country's worsening social problems, have little faith in public authorities, political figures, or the branches of government.¹⁰ The International Monetary Fund forecasts that Paraguay's economic growth rate this year will be 2.7 per cent, which is inadequate for a population growing at a rate of 3.5 per cent a year.

Article 2: Legislation

States Parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and, to this end, undertake to embody the principle of the equality of men and women in their National Constitutions or other appropriate legislation and to ensure, through law and other means, the realization of this principle.

Articles 47 and 48 of the National Constitution of 1992 recognize the equality of men and women in Paraguay and lay down guarantees in that regard. The government will promote the necessary conditions and establish appropriate mechanisms in order to make that equality genuine and effective. Mechanisms to advance a gender perspective and establish national institutions to further that effort at the level of the State, central government and local government began in the early 1990s when an office for the status of women was set up having ministerial rank.

Important constitutional, legal and institutional reforms put in place in the 1990s serve to explain certain significant changes in overall indicators. The 1992 Constitution, the promulgation of new laws, and the establishment or overhauling of many government institutions have helped to invigorate political pluralism, advance public freedoms of speech and assembly, assure increasingly honest elections and dismantle the repressive apparatus of the State. The following is a list of achievements with respect to Article 1 during the period covered by this report:

1. The international commitment known as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was ratified pursuant to Law 1683/2000.

⁹ Ofelia Martínez and E. Santaella, "Avances legislativos sin cambios culturales" ["Legislative progress without cultural change"], in *Derechos Humanos en Paraguay 2003* [Human Rights in Paraguay, 2003], Paraguayan Human Rights Coordination Unit, Asunción, December 2003, pp. 110-116.

¹⁰ *La Nación* newspaper, 21 April 2004, p. 7.

2. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court was ratified pursuant to Law 1663 of 17 April 2001.
3. Convention No. 100 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on equal remuneration for equal work was ratified in 2001.
4. In January 2002, Law 1863/02 was promulgated establishing the Agrarian Act, following action by campesino women to ensure that a gender perspective was taken into account. Among the most important features of the Agrarian Act are provisions that: promote women's access to land and their ownership of land; guarantee tenure by establishing that women can hold title to land; guarantee women's access to credit and timely technical support; assign first priority to women heads of families; and lengthen the payment period when land is purchased by a woman.
5. Law 34/92 was promulgated, establishing the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic (SMPR), as a result of awareness-raising and lobbying by the Paraguayan Women's Coordination Unit (CMP) together with other NGOs and feminist groups. This marked the beginning of productive collaboration and teamwork between civil society (through the NGOs) and the government (through the SMPR). The main objective of the SMPR is to develop, coordinate and implement public policies with a gender perspective, eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, and to promote equality of opportunity and of outcomes so as to strengthen the democratization of society.

The Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic of Paraguay raised its international profile in 1995 when Paraguay became a member of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women for a term ending in 2000, with responsibility for following up on the Platform for Action adopted in Beijing. The country has played an important role in this area within the United Nations system, and has been very active in matters relating to the drafting of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was ratified in 2001.¹¹

Paraguay's current President has established a government programme covering the period from 2003 to 2008 which includes, as a central element of the defence of human rights, the strengthening of public policy in regard to gender, through the Women's Bureau and other government agencies, working in concert with civil society. On 8 March 2004, the President of Paraguay approved Decree 1958/04 establishing the Second National Plan for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women for the period 2003 to 2007. This Second National Plan is intended as a framework for gender policy, and has been given legal status. Civil society and counterpart agencies in the government worked together to develop and evaluate the Plan, and in 2002 it was reviewed internally and externally with the financial support of GTZ, UNIFEM and UNFPA: as a result, it enjoys a high degree of legitimacy and broad consensus. The Paraguayan Women's Coordination Unit

¹¹ Graziella Corvalán, "La conformación de un campo político" ["Establishing a policy area"], in *La Institucionalidad de Género en un Contexto de Cambio de Gobierno: el caso de Paraguay* [Gender mainstreaming in a context of government change: the case of Paraguay] by Virginia Guzmán and Graziella Corvalán, ECLAC/DAW/United Nations Project, Women in Development Series, Santiago, October 2003, pp. 25 *et seq.*

believes that the way in which the Second National Plan has been developed bodes well for its implementation (as reported in the newspaper *ABC*).

The separation between governmental and legal measures concerned with families, on the one hand, and those concerned specifically with women, on the other, is attributable chiefly to the provision contained in Article 50 of the 1992 Constitution, which states: "Every person has the right to establish a family, in the creation and evolution of which the woman and the man shall have the same rights and obligations." This article does away with the provision contained in Article 51 of the 1967 Constitution, which referred to duties appertaining to men and women "with a view to the purposes of marriage and the unity of the family".¹²

The Women's Movement has undertaken a number of legal initiatives to eliminate situations of sexual discrimination. A major achievement in this area was Law 1600 on domestic violence, which was passed by the National Congress on 6 October 2000 in accordance with Article 207, paragraph 3, of the National Constitution. Under the new law, violence against women was made a crime pursuant to Article 229. As well, sexual harassment provisions were included and penalties were established for trafficking in persons. Women's organizations have criticized some aspects of the law, however, because although it establishes penalties for physical violence it does not cover other forms of violence defined in the Convention of Belém do Pará. In any case, the passage of Law 1600/2000 on the types and causes of domestic violence and the widespread publicity the new law was given at all levels in both the public and private media served to heighten the general public's awareness of domestic violence. This represented the major accomplishment marking the start of the new decade on the part of the Women's Movement, the SMPR and the Tripartite Committee established to follow up on the Beijing conference (consisting of the CMP on behalf of civil society, the SMPR on behalf of the government and UNDP on behalf of the United Nations in Paraguay). Indeed, domestic violence is a scourge which had hitherto been perceived as a private matter, and it was a major achievement to bring it out of the shadows and design policies to tackle it, as well as to organize public services to provide the victims of domestic violence with assistance and support.

Although a number of support services exist, as described in the previous report covering the period up to May 2000, they are inadequate and, worst of all, many do not have a specific area to assist women. Moreover, there has been no increase in the number of NGOs dedicated to helping women who are the victims of violence. Women are continuing to be victims of domestic violence even though the general public's awareness has been heightened with respect to violence of every kind against women or other family members. In 2003, an emergency telephone service was set up whereby the National Police can be reached by dialling 911 in any cases involving violence. This has filled an important need, and helped alleviate a growing sense of insecurity due to social violence.

The Childhood and Adolescence Code was established pursuant to Law 1680/01, following intense lobbying by the SMPR and the Office of the First Lady. In 2000, not only was the Office of the Public Defender set up, but also Children's Rights Councils (CODENISs) were established in municipalities throughout the

¹² Article 51 of the 1967 Constitution reads as follows: "This Constitution establishes that men and women have equal civil and political rights, with duties appertaining to each which shall be established by law with a view to the purposes of marriage and the unity of the family."

country. These organizations are not held in high esteem by the general public, however, as they are unable to solve the problems of the growing numbers of street children who beg or do menial work, as well as indigenous children and youth, all of whom are at high risk owing to sex tourism.

In addition to the various international instruments to which Paraguay is a signatory, in the areas of human, economic and other rights, there are a number of other legal provisions that have been put in place which are concerned exclusively with women:

Law 496/95 amending the **Labour Code** (Law 213/93) establishes the same rights and obligations for both men and women. Article 128 establishes special protections with respect to maternity; Articles 129 to 135 provide for (a) special rest periods while breastfeeding and (b) day-care facilities for children under two years of age in companies with more than 50 employees. Sexual harassment is established as grounds for terminating employment (Articles 84 and 81). It is prohibited to engage in pay discrimination on the basis of sex (Article 229), or to establish different pay levels for men and women (Article 47). Employment rights are established for domestic workers.

Law 834/96: The **Elections Code** fixes a 20 per cent minimum quota for participation by women and establishes penalties for parties that fail to comply. Pregnant women are given priority at polling stations, and sexually discriminatory content in political and electoral advertising is prohibited.

Law 1160/97: The **Penal Code** establishes penalties for sexual harassment (Article 133), domestic violence (Article 229), sexual coercion including sexual abuse without intercourse (Article 128), trafficking in persons (Article 129), sexual abuse of those who cannot defend themselves (Article 130), sexual abuse of persons held in custody, sexual abuse of children under 14 years of age, sexual abuse of persons over whom the perpetrator has guardianship, sexual intercourse with a minor who has not attained the age of consent (Articles 130, 131, 135, 136, 137 and 230 respectively). Provision is also made to review extenuating circumstances based on sex.

Law 1286/98: The **Code of Penal Procedure**, for the first time, explicitly sets forth victims' rights in Article 68.

Law 1600/2000: The **Domestic Violence Act** extends protection not only to women but also to other members of the household, i.e., children and the elderly.

Law 1652/2000: This law, which established the **National Employment Training System**, recognizes the importance of providing women with training opportunities so that they can join the labour force.

Resolution 586 of 4 July 2000: By this resolution, the Senate established the **Standing Advisory Committee on Equity, Gender and Social Development**. The Committee is responsible for reviewing draft legislation, resolutions and declarations having to do with equity and equality of opportunity for women, minorities and vulnerable groups.

Decree 1958 of 8 March 2004, whereby the President of Paraguay approved the **Second National Plan for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women** for the period 2003 to 2007. The Plan sets out guidelines addressed to men or women or both aimed at moving forward in establishing gender equity, together with specific

objectives for promoting the mainstreaming of a gender perspective. It gives the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic the authority to establish integration mechanisms between sectors, local governments, and so on.

General Order 54 issued by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff in April 2002. This Order gave approval for women to pursue military careers, and reserved 20 per cent of new admission spaces for women. The measure met with different reactions from the women's section of the Conscientious Objectors' Movement, which opposed it, and the Paraguayan Women's Coordination Unit, which supported it. From a socio-cultural perspective, the Order represents something very new, even though it has had no visible impact on society thus far.

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime were approved pursuant to Law 2298 of 25 November 2003. Deposit of the instrument of ratification with the United Nations is pending.

The Government has adopted two National Sexual and Reproductive Health Plans, the first covering the period from 1997 to 2001 and the second the period from 2002 to 2006, which incorporate the guidelines and principles enunciated at the Cairo conference for effective actions in support of the full exercise of sexual and reproductive rights, as a task shared between the State, the family and civil society.

The task that the Paraguayan Women's Movement and the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic need to undertake in the short term is to mount gender equity programmes that will imbue the thoughts and actions of the people's representatives with a thoroughgoing awareness of the issue, so that gender equity will be a reality in the new Congress. Consequently, it is essential to be able to discuss a legislative agenda worked out in concert with the Women's Movement which will provide for institutional strengthening, and ensure that the traditional dichotomy of gender versus party will not become a stumbling-block for women politicians, feminists, or the enactment of legislation to promote the advancement of women. As well, legal services targeted to women's needs have to be expanded on a decentralized basis to make them accessible to women in all parts of the country, particularly rural women who live far away from urban centres. Work has to move forward in identifying and remedying any legal gaps that may exist, together with any applicable procedures.

There is a need for an explicit population policy that is comprehensive and addresses the issue fully. Progress in areas such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equity, the right to development, environmental balance, sustainable land use and so forth are critical for the people's development within a full and comprehensive government policy that promotes a high quality of life.¹³

It is evident that public, private and technical-cooperation agencies and the programmes they have carried out have helped to develop the country's capacity to

¹³ Hugo Oddone, "Estado actual y perspectivas de la política de Población" ["Current state of the population policy, and outlook for the future"], in *Población y Desarrollo* [Population and Development], Faculty of Economics, National University of Asunción, Year IX, No. 23, December 2003, p. 45.

carry out activities in the area of sexual and reproductive health. In addition, the establishment of the National Council on Sexual and Reproductive Health (CSSR), organized under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MSBS), has been a key step in making the participating institutions more aware of conceptual and operational advances, thereby helping to foster a more systematic appreciation of the issue that focuses on increasingly effective action at every level in the system under the new National Sexual and Reproductive Health Plan covering the period from 2003 to 2008. The First Paraguayan Population Congress, held in Asunción in August 2003, did not produce a population policy that had been thoroughly discussed and on which a consensus had been reached; the wait for such a policy continues.

In preparation for enacting legislation in regard to the various forms of discrimination, and for the purpose of initiating a wide-ranging debate on the issue, the Equity, Gender and Social Development Committee of the Senate and the Gender and Social Equity Committee of the House of Representatives, together with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Centre for Documentation and Research (CDE), have published papers on forms of discrimination and anti-discrimination measures concerned with areas where discrimination occurs in Paraguay, such as in regard to race, Guaraní unilingualism, indigenous peoples, disabilities, sex and gender, age, homosexuality, and membership of a political party.¹⁴

Draft legislation on responsible paternity and maternity is now being examined in the Senate, in preparation for consideration by the full National Congress. The bill has been prepared at the initiative of the Equity, Gender and Social Development Committee of the Senate, with the technical support of the CDE and the technical and financial support of UNFPA.

The process being followed in taking up this draft legislation and moving it through the National Congress, and the experience of the Senate Equity Committee in this regard, represent a major advance in how legislation is considered given that the process has traditionally been a conservative one. Moreover, it shows that the National Congress will take note when an issue arises that is of keen interest to the general public. This has been a significant step forward in regard to the management model for the Committee, inasmuch as the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare has made provision in the National Budget for the establishment of a Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme, and set aside resources to provide supplies for family planning programmes in order to continue bolstering the population policy. So that this initiative can be pursued, negotiations are being carried on with UNFPA to arrange a consultancy, and efforts are under way to make provision for the concept of equity in the budgets for areas falling under the jurisdiction of other ministries (the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Education and Culture); these are well on track.¹⁵

¹⁴ Line Bareiro (ed.), UNFPA, Equity, Gender and Social Development Committee of the Senate, CDE, Asunción, June 2003.

¹⁵ JOPARE, UNFPA Paraguay, Year 2, No. 8, March 2003.

Article 3: Policy

States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on the basis of equality with men.

No progress has been made regarding measures to improve women's representation on the candidate lists of parties and political movements, even though the electoral system was modernized and electronic voting machines were introduced for the 2003 elections. Nor has this innovation made it possible to distinguish between men and women voters at polling stations. The political parties regard such a separation as a financial impediment to defraying the costs of polling officers in electoral contests.

The Elections Code fixes a 20 per cent minimum quota for participation by women. The United Paraguay Party [Partido País Solidario] has changed its by-laws to raise the quota for women's participation to 50 per cent, and proposed that candidate lists be drawn up with men's and women's names alternating: this will be done for the next municipal elections, to be held in 2006.

In Paraguay, the subject of positive discrimination has not entered the thinking and actions of political parties, civil society or the government. According to the Adviser to the Superior Court of Justice for Elections (TSJE), the system of quotas for candidate lists "is only useful for the Senate, but has little impact so far as the House of Representatives is concerned. It is a political tool intended to favour groups that are under-represented. For that reason, the proposal that lists show men's and women's names alternating would be more effective, because it would guarantee a minimum level of participation by women of 37 to 40 per cent."¹⁶ However, women believe that the quota system has helped women attain decision-making posts, particularly at second-tier levels.

In the 2003 general elections, men's participation rate improved if the number of candidates is compared against the number of those elected, whereas the opposite was true for women as only half the women candidates were elected. The gap is wider in the list of those elected as principals than in the list of those elected as alternates, and shows that the closer one gets to the seat of power the fewer women one finds. The fact that the proportion of women candidates elected was so small is attributable to the fact that more women's names than men's appeared lower down on the lists to pad them out, and candidates listed towards the bottom of the list are unlikely to be elected.¹⁷

The interest of the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic in regard to leadership, political participation by women and gender equity has led it to undertake a variety of activities in different locations around the

¹⁶ "En busca de una representación compartida" ["In search of balanced representation"] in *La Otra Mitad* [The Other Half], quarterly publication of the Centro de Promoción de la Mujer y Gestión Social (PROMUR/GES), Year 3, No. 11, November 2003, pp. 12 and 23.

¹⁷ Clyde Soto, "Continuidades sin fisura. Panorama electoral y participación femenina" ["Unbroken continuity. The electoral landscape and participation by women"], in *Novápolis, Revista de Estudios Políticos Contemporáneos* [Novápolis, A Journal of Contemporary Political Studies], issue No. 3, Paraguay, May 2002.

country aimed at strengthening mechanisms that will promote women's participation and facilitate their access to decision-making posts. Similarly, it has done research of the nature of leadership and the characteristics of women political leaders in Paraguay, and as a result has organized courses on leadership and published books and educational materials in this area.

The Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic, working jointly with the Office of the Public Defender, has presented the Speaker of the House of Representatives (by official communication 341/04) with a proposal to reform the Elections Code by approving draft legislation to amend paragraph (r) of Article 32 of Law 834/96 establishing the Paraguayan Elections Code so as to assure women's participation in the collegiate bodies of the Republic, given that women have been overlooked and have had little real chance to become members of such bodies. The proposal is to increase the minimum quota of women on candidate lists from 20 per cent to 50 per cent from the first position on the list to the last position, and to improve women's access to administrative posts. Men's and women's names would alternate starting from the first position on the list. The proposal was referred to the committee for study in March 2004. The most important and most striking feature of the proposal is that it establishes penalties for any party or movement that fails to meet these requirements.

Women's participation in the communications media is increasing, although women are still under-represented. There are still significantly fewer women than men occupying managerial posts in news organizations, with women serving as announcers, reporters, photographers and videographers, even though statistical data indicate that women working in news organizations have a higher level of education.

Recent years have seen the feminization of communications studies. Women account for 63 per cent of those graduating from the communications studies programme at the Catholic University. Recent data on journalists belonging to the Paraguayan Association of Communications Professionals show that 61.1 per cent of its members are women, while 39.9 per cent are men.

Another important point to consider is the image of women projected by the media. Two different studies have shown that women are featured in news stories only very rarely, and that they do not appear in major segments. Television programmes intended for women viewers still show women in traditional roles, thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes. In newspapers and magazines it is still very difficult to find news items about women in the sections covering national, political or financial news; meanwhile, newspapers and magazines still contain specific sections intended for women readers.

Article 4: Equality of opportunity

- 1. Adoption by States Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in this Convention.*
- 2. Adoption by States Parties of measures aimed at protecting maternity shall not be considered discriminatory.*

The most important accomplishment under the institution-building programme mounted by the Women's Bureau was the First National Plan for Equal

Opportunities for Men and Women (PIO I) covering the period from 1997 to 2001, which was devised as a framework for gender policy government-wide, in support of the equitable, ongoing and sustainable development of the country. In May 2003, the Second National Plan for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women (PIO II) covering the period from 2003 to 2007 was presented, and in March 2004 it was approved by the President of Paraguay pursuant to Decree 1958/04. The document identifies areas of action for the transformation of gender relations, namely: (1) equal rights; (2) a culture of equality; (3) access to economic resources and to work; (4) equity in education; (5) the health of the whole person; (6) a life free of violence; (7) a healthy, sustainable environment; (8) participation in society and an equal-opportunity policy; and (9) effective decentralization.

The effective implementation of the Second National Plan for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women requires the explicit and decisive support of the Government of Paraguay, in accordance with Article 46 of the National Constitution, which states: "All inhabitants of the Republic are equal with respect to their dignity and rights. No discrimination shall be permitted. The State shall remove any obstacles or eliminate any factors that may perpetuate or promote discrimination. Any protection established with respect to unfair inequalities shall not be considered discriminatory, but egalitarian."

An ongoing effort is required over the long term to convert PIO II into a formal component of State policy rather than a policy of the current government, to ensure that it is consistently administered and continues to be applied, as well as to guarantee the efficient operation of the institution responsible for implementing it. PIO II is fully in force, backed by the legal status of Executive Decree 1958/04. Unlike PIO I, PIO II treats men and women as key players who have the power to control the inequity of the socio-cultural system in which they live, although it is women who have historically been at a greater disadvantage in all aspects of Paraguayan society. The topic of shaping the masculine identity and establishing a new mode of behaviour in support of development is beginning to interest some NGOs, which are keen to see a new mode of behaviour put in place between men and women which will ensure full participation by all members of society and foster the development of the competitive skills of every individual.

The Women's Bureau is responsible for coordination of the Plan, which is organized into nine chapters concerned with the main areas of action for the transformation of gender relations, namely: (1) equality of men's and women's rights; (2) a culture of equality; (3) access to economic resources and to work; (4) equity in education; (5) the health of the whole person; (6) a life free of violence; (7) a healthy, sustainable environment; (8) participation in society and an equal-opportunity policy; and (9) effective decentralization.

The Plan sets out the background, objectives and lines of action for each of the areas covered, with specific reference to the dimensions of identification, dissemination, awareness-raising, training, and empowerment, for the purpose of achieving the corresponding objectives, identification, awareness-raising, training, dissemination, change in rules or regulations, support for initiatives, or study and research. In turn, each area of action and guideline is placed in a matrix against the transverse axes of rights, poverty, life cycle and rural area, which are used to establish the priorities that need to be taken into account in regard to the objectives for each area of action. The specific actions to be undertaken are set out in the form

of programmes involving policies aimed at prevention, compensation or inclusiveness, within a comprehensive systemic approach. Priorities for these programmes are then determined by the Women's Bureau.

Traditional culture represents the biggest and most powerful obstacle to changing customs, values and attitudes in regard to relations between the sexes. It is reflected in sexist language and the inequitable distribution of roles within the family and in public life, which serve to foster stereotypes in the communications media. The problem is particularly evident in the case of the substantial percentage of rural women who are unilingual speakers of Guaraní, a language in which popular sayings making fun of women or their abilities are commonly used at all levels of society.¹⁸ Bilingualism means not only that women have less access to information, and often incorrect information at that, but also that there are obstacles to the use of Spanish in public discourse, which is something on which a person's self-esteem and relations with others depend heavily.

In May 2002, the Ministry of Education and Culture implemented resolution 3038 governing maternity leave, breastfeeding and other paid benefits for teachers throughout Paraguay, something that had been long sought by workers in the education sector. Thanks to this measure, 97 per cent of teachers of childbearing age are able to enjoy the fundamental right of 12 weeks' maternity leave. However, implementation of the idea of responsible paternity is far from being a reality, and is an even more remote prospect in the private sector.

The Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic and the Women's Movement have made some progress in reducing the stereotyping of women as sex objects in the media, although the absence of women from decision-making posts in the media means that the gender issue remains invisible. Meanwhile, there are no groups to monitor or impose penalties for advertising that promotes inequality, violence or negative values *vis-à-vis* a gender perspective. Mocking smiles and put-downs are still commonplace and, worse still, are accepted as routine even by women themselves.

This is a difficult road to take but one that must nevertheless be taken, particularly to maintain the ground that has been won so far and continue moving forward in the quest for affirmative-action measures which are still far from being understood in a culture in which gender equity and equality seem to belong to the world of intellectuals and feminists, the latter still being regarded as women who are breaching the social system and the national culture.

One of the forgotten areas of women's participation is the formal economy, since very little research has been done in this area and, as a rule, employment statistics and other data are not broken down by sex. The Directorate-General of Graduate Studies at the National University of Asunción has made a small start in

¹⁸ Graziella Corvalán, "La perspectiva de género en las lenguas del Paraguay" ["The gender perspective in Paraguay's languages"], in *Desafíos de la Educación Intercultural Bilingüe en el Tercer Milenio* [Challenges of Bilingual Intercultural Education in the Third Millennium], IV Congreso Latinoamericano de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe [Fourth Latin American Congress on Bilingual Intercultural Education], National Bilingualism Commission, Ministry of Education and Culture, UNESCO, Asunción, November 2000, pp. 75-88.

this area, with 23 participants in a graduate refresher programme in population and development for which financial assistance was received from UNFPA.¹⁹

In another area, women have headed movements of urban poor, referred to as the *sin techo* or homeless, who take over private property and turn it into precarious dwellings. These households serve to perpetuate poverty because there is no family planning and families grow uncontrolled, with some women having 10 or more children. During the past two years, there has been an increase in the mobilization of women within professional women's organizations, as teachers, nurses and, most recently, university personnel, have demanded social and administrative benefits, although gender equity has not been part of those demands.

In the chapter of PIO II concerned with equity in education, it is noted that, in quantitative terms, female school enrolment has reached a level of 52 per cent. The illiteracy rate among Paraguay's population has been reduced, to 8.4 per cent of the total population in 2000-2001. Nationwide, the figures are 9.8 per cent for women and 6.9 per cent for men, although illiteracy rates are higher in rural areas: 15.4 per cent for women and 10.7 per cent for men. In urban areas, the illiteracy rate is only 5.1 per cent: 6.3 per cent for women and 3.7 per cent for men. According to UNDP figures for 2002, comparing Paraguay to the three member countries of MERCOSUR, Paraguay's illiteracy rate is higher than Uruguay's and Argentina's (3.3 per cent and 3.2 per cent respectively), but less than Brazil's (14.8 per cent).

Those who drop out of school do so for different cultural reasons depending on their sex: the drop-out rates are 3.7 per cent for boys, who leave school to seek paid work, and 12.4 per cent for girls, who leave school because they are needed at home to perform domestic chores, although in recent years rising poverty and lack of public safety in both urban and rural areas have been additional factors.

Publicity campaigns conducted at the national, local and municipal levels on the topics of sexuality, the prevention of pregnancy among adolescents, sexually transmitted diseases, and so on, should be part of the education curriculum beginning in primary school, together with information about the right of pregnant students to remain in school whether the school they attend is public or private.

The Equity, Gender and Social Development Committee of the National Congress, with the technical and financial support of UNFPA, is currently reviewing draft legislation to reform the Health Code from the perspective of gender and sexual and reproductive rights on the basis of the new National Sexual and Reproductive Health Plan for the period from 2003 to 2008, which is now under discussion. With a view to making concrete proposals for redirecting resources in a way that is socially more equitable, the two bodies have carried out a review of the National Budget for 2001, which was published in a document divided into three parts: (1) the concept of equity and its relation to the budget; (2) an analysis of the budgets of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare; and (3) proposals and suggestions to be taken into account in the framework of the National Congress's examination of the National Budget for the 2002 fiscal year, it being recognized that the National Budget is a tool of economic policy that can be used to combat poverty and inequality.²⁰

¹⁹ JOPARE, UNFPA Paraguay, Year 3, No. 13, June 2003, p. 7.

²⁰ Rubén Gaete, *Presupuesto General de Gastos de la Nación, Una Mirada desde la perspectiva de Género y de Equidad* [The National Budget as viewed from the standpoint of gender and equity], Equity, Gender and Social Development Committee, Senate, UNFPA, Asunción, 2001.

Article 5: Family education

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures: to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women to achieve the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women; to ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children.

The National Constitution of 1992 explicitly ordains the equality of rights of men and women, giving special attention to education and the obligations of the State in regard to primary school education (which is both mandatory and free of charge). It also establishes the responsibility of the family, the municipality and the State in regard to education, and charges the State with promoting secondary school education, technical education, agricultural education, industrial education and higher education without discrimination on the basis of sex, social class, ethnic origin, religion, etc.

Intense, systematic awareness-raising campaigns have been mounted by the Women's Movement and the SMPR on the topics of responsible maternity and paternity and family planning methods (both traditional and modern). These efforts have enjoyed the strong, ongoing support of UNFPA, and have met continuing opposition from conservative groups and the Church in general.

Gender inequity as a socio-cultural phenomenon is most strongly and clearly evident in the country's rural areas and at certain levels of society in urban areas, specifically the middle and lower strata of the population, and especially in the case of the services sector in the labour market, where discrimination against women is more pronounced. It is important to disseminate accurate information on women's sexual and reproductive rights more widely, and to eliminate the discrimination that women of childbearing age commonly suffer owing to the possibility of their becoming pregnant and the "natural" implications that becoming pregnant has on their employment.

A Child Schooling Project is being carried out through UNESCO and the Affiliated Schools Plan (PEA), aimed at improving the opportunities of children aged 8 to 14 years to attend school up to Year 9. The project calls for educating entire families in order to ensure that the effort will be self-sustaining.

Article 6: Prostitution

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.

Although prostitution and the sexual exploitation of women and girls has become commonplace around the globe, in Paraguay – as a result of increasing poverty and the fact that 40 per cent of the population live in extreme poverty – the prostitution of women and, in rural areas, the virtual "selling" of girls aged between 10 and 13 years are soaring. Contributing to the problem is the fact that, in rural areas, the rate of unemployment among women was 23.9 per cent in 2002, while women find it impossible to continue their studies in preparation for entering the labour market.

It is important to note the progress made by the Ministry of Education and Culture, in the sense that it now tacitly accepts (or at least remains silent on the subject of) students who become pregnant and teachers who are single mothers. Five years ago, they would have been dismissed from school. Sexual abuse, usually committed against female students or women teachers, is prohibited pursuant to Law 1626/2000 and the Penal Code. Evidence that these provisions are being enforced is provided by the recent case of a teacher who was suspended without pay pending the outcome of the administrative proceeding conducted to look into the matter.

Article 54 of the National Constitution establishes that it is the responsibility of the family, society and the State to protect women and children from malnutrition, abandonment, violence, abuse, trafficking, and sexual and other forms of exploitation. Along the same lines, Law 1160 and Article 139 of the Penal Code establish penalties for these crimes. Criminal activity in this area is often reported, and a lucrative form of international sex trafficking seems to have developed involving Argentina and Spain, as reported in 2002.²¹

Indeed, what is now known as trafficking in persons – women and children – has become a major concern and given rise to an urgent effort to combat sex tourism under the auspices of the Meeting on Women's Issues organized by MERCOSUR, Chile and Bolivia, which agreed to work together urgently to fight the problem of the trafficking and abuse of children, given that an increase in sex tourism and paedophile pornography has been noted, especially on the Internet and in border areas. The Inter-American Children's Institute, an OAS agency, is trying to sound the alarm so that the authorities in the six countries will pay more attention to the problem and establish a common front for dealing with it.²² This is also an ongoing concern for Paraguayan government agencies responsible for preventing trafficking in persons. The Ministry of External Relations recently organized a workshop on the subject, in which the Asunción Municipal Council was also involved.

A tripartite board has been set up consisting of the Children's and Adolescents' Rights Coordination Unit (CDIA), UNICEF-ILO, and the AMAR Project of the Social Action Bureau (SAS), for the purpose of developing a National Action Plan to combat the Exploitation of Children in Paraguay. No public centre exists to give shelter to children and adolescents who have been victims of sexual exploitation. The Luna Nueva NGO in Asunción is managing the only project that works directly with girls who have been sexually exploited.

In 2002, the subject of violence against women was added to the curriculum of the National Police Academy. The Academy published a manual on the topic "Approaches for dealing with domestic violence" and other materials on the subject with support from the SMPR and international assistance from UNFPA; these will be used internally to sensitize the Academy's faculty and students to the issue.

The Standing Advisory Committee on Equity and Gender of the Asunción Municipal Council, which was set up in 2003, presented the plenary Municipal Council, on 1 April 2004, with a draft by-law aimed at curbing the growing amounts of aggressive sexist commercial advertising within the municipality of Asunción.

²¹ Margarita Elías, "Secuestro y prostitución de niñas" ["Kidnapping and prostitution of girls"], in *Informativo Mujer* [Women's Bulletin], CDE, No. 137, Asunción, July 2002, p. 18.

²² *Última Hora* newspaper, Saturday, 27 March 2004, p. 44.

Part II

Article 7: Political participation and public life

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right: to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy and in NGOs.

The intense process of across-the-board mainstreaming of a gender perspective in government agencies has eased off in recent years because of the general elections and the ensuing change of government which put new officials in charge of the various agencies. In 2002, the Ministry of Public Health initiated the National Support Programme for Sexual and Reproductive Health. This year, however, plans call for involving departmental governments, municipal governments and women's groups on a decentralized basis in coordination with other public agencies, and to establish halfway houses and 24-hour telephone help lines to provide assistance in cases of domestic violence.

In 1999, new women's bureaux were set up in nearly all the country's departmental governments. They have a staff of up to five people each and carry out a variety of activities to assist women in their respective departments, primarily in connection with the issue of violence against women. The women's bureaux enjoy a high status because they have the rank of departmental secretariats. In some departments they report to the Office of the Governor, while in others they report to the Office of the Secretary-General. This arrangement will be clarified in conjunction with the implementation of the new departmental administrative structure and the authority given to municipal governments in regard to the mainstreaming of a gender approach as a conceptual and operational tool with which to fulfil the principles of social equity.

In the legislative branch of government, the Senate in 2000 adopted resolution 586, establishing the Standing Advisory Committee on Equity, Gender and Social Development. The Committee, made up of six senators, examines draft legislation with particular reference to the criteria of equity, equality of opportunity, social debt, discrimination and segregation, particularly in regard to women, minorities and vulnerable groups, and issues its findings.

The following is a list of the results of the Committee's work in 2001: access to credit for campesino women under the National Budget; credit and training assistance in support of job creation; in the health sector, special attention to primary health care and prevention, to the needs of working women, and to maternity protection and social security; in the Health Code, inclusion of a gender perspective and sexual and reproductive rights; in the education sector, inclusion of a gender perspective and a language policy governing the use of Guaraní and Spanish in official announcements on such subjects as health, violence, social security and traffic.

Inter-agency cooperation and assistance between the government (through the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic), civil society (through the Paraguayan Women's Coordination Unit), and international aid agencies (through the United Nations Development Programme, part of the United

Nations system) led to the establishment in 2000 of the Tripartite Committee to follow up on the Platform for Action adopted at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing. That Committee set about its work with renewed vigour in 2004, following a period during which it was relatively less active.

An agenda for democratic governance from a gender perspective was developed on the basis of the findings of workshops conducted in 2001, in which the participants were women from the three political parties represented in Paraguay. The aim of the workshops was to develop a non-partisan agenda based on a consensus among the women participants concerned with issues relating to the democratic governance of the country, with emphasis on women's full access to political citizenship and the practical broadening thereof, through the institutional strengthening of political parties.

Women politicians are aware of the obstacles they face in attaining democratic governance, such as problems relating to party structures and the sectarian practice of politics, but they say that there is very little debate regarding proposals in general, and particularly regarding proposals involving gender issues, beyond access and continuation in government. Women's political participation is inadequate, and not on an equal footing with men's. There is no encouragement for women to occupy positions of leadership, or for positive steps to be taken to remedy the situation.

The purpose of drawing up a common agenda to strengthen gender mainstreaming is to support lines of action that are of high priority for the attainment of democratic governance and the inclusion of gender equity in the process of gender mainstreaming that has already begun, by decentralizing gender policy and assuring its application across the board, mainly at the central and local government levels, and in the plans and programmes of the country's various women's bureaux.

The matter of women's political representation remains in the hands of the political parties. This is a rarefied sphere to which very few women have thus far had access, partly because of traditional socio-cultural factors and the usual lack of economic resources. But another reason is that the Women's Movement has been unable to overcome the still-present dichotomy of gender versus party as it has relied on laws and regulations, maintained its non-partisan status, and sought consensus in meetings of women representing different institutions, some of whom have militant partisan affiliations.

Indeed, when the possibility arose for several women to enter the political arena within the three parties vying for elected office during the past two years, the women's movements did very little to give them visible, decisive support; and as a result the chance was lost to achieve more, and perhaps better, female political representation. So it was that during the 2001 municipal elections, the opportunity was lost to support a woman candidate for the post of Mayor of Asunción and other women candidates for election to municipal councils throughout the country. Out of all candidates for mayor and council posts, 25.6 per cent were women.²³

²³ Verónica Villalba, "Las mujeres en las elecciones municipales" [Women in the municipal elections"] in *Informativo Mujeres* [Women's Bulletin], CDE Women's Section, No. 152, October 2001, Asunción, pp. 13.

In the 2003 general elections, there was one woman candidate for President and there were four women candidates for Vice-President, as well as a number of others for seats in the Senate and House of Representatives. Among the latter candidates were two members of NGOs who were on the list for the House of Representatives for the capital. The Women's Movement did not play any visible part in supporting these candidates, which calls into question its role as a leader and engine of social, cultural and especially political change in this area where we have made the least progress – that is, getting women into top-level decision-making posts – considering that major gains have been achieved in getting women into second-tier and third-tier posts such as departmental councillors, directors, prosecutors, and judges.

The critical path that women politicians have followed in order to achieve power through participation in political parties has not yet attained the degree of visibility necessary in order for them to be able to communicate sufficiently with the electorate in order that the relationship may be strengthened. For the moment, they have opted to be seen by their male and female peers – by leaders who shape opinion – so that they will have a privileged position from which to negotiate access to the already limited and segregated spaces available in the highest levels of the public arena. Women politicians' lack of self-esteem *vis-à-vis* their male peers is combined with a lack of direct political experience on the part of women leaders, and is exacerbated by a lack of formal education in regard to political theory, the practice of political discourse in the public sphere, the presentation of a line of reasoning in debates, and analysis of the political, social and economic situation at a time of great change.

In Paraguay, seats are allocated on the basis of national and departmental constituencies. The fact that a closed party list system is used, in which voters cannot indicate any preference amongst the candidates put forward by each party, means that the system does not favour the election of women. Of the country's nine parties and political movements, only four managed to win seats in the National Congress when votes were translated into seats for the term of office from 2003 to 2008.

Given the inadequacy of the existing quota system for improving women's representation in political posts, new measures need to be introduced such as: (i) changing the criterion for the minimum separation between men and women on candidate lists; and (ii) giving incentives to political parties, movements and alliances to encourage them to improve the political representation of women, and providing incentives through the tax system or under the mechanism whereby political parties receive funding from the State, such as, for example, increasing the amount of public funding a party receives on the basis of the number of women holding political office (UNDP, 2003).²⁴

Election results for the three branches of government

(i) The executive branch of government

The executive branch (President and Vice-president) has been made up of men since 1993. From 1995 to 1999, Paraguay had three Presidents and two Vice-Presidents. In 1998 and 1999, two women served as ministers, one as Minister

²⁴ *Libro Blanco sobre la Reforma Constitucional en Paraguay* [White Paper on Constitutional Reform in Paraguay], Institut Internacional de Governabilitat de Catalunya (IIG), UNDP, February 2003, pp. 17-19.

of Health and the other as Minister of Education. From 1989 to 1993, a woman served as Minister of Health. The change of government that emerged in the aftermath of the bloody violence of March 1999 marked a return to a cabinet composed entirely of men. The restoration of democracy did not mean that women were included in top-level decision-making posts. In the most recent general elections, for the term of office from 2003 to 2008, the results showed an absence of women from the offices of President and Vice-President, while only one of the 17 departments elected a woman governor (5.9 per cent).

The Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic has retained its ministerial rank since its inception. With the most recent change of government, the Minister of Education has assumed responsibility for this portfolio as well. The new government for the term of office from 2003 to 2008 has six women ministers, among them the Minister of Education, the Minister of External Relations, the Minister responsible for the Women's Bureau, the Minister of Tourism, the Minister of Repatriated Citizens, and the Minister of Children and Youth. As well, it is significant that a woman has been named to the post of Director-General of Customs.

Posts to which a single individual is named are more difficult for women to attain, as there is no opportunity to influence the decision by means of affirmative-action measures (these being understood as transitory remedies aimed at overcoming discrimination against a particular social group) by deliberately increasing participation by women in specific spheres of social, political and economic activity in which they are under-represented. Consequently, access by women to such posts is based on the personal merits of the woman who engages in the battle, although raising awareness and opening up the idea of having women leaders in such posts may indeed be a collective achievement.²⁵

(ii) The legislative branch of government

The national and departmental levels

The National Congress saw an increase in the proportion of women parliamentarians from 5.6 per cent for the term from 1993 to 1998 to 8 per cent for the term from 1998 to 2003. The most significant increase took place in the Senate, where the proportion rose from 11.1 per cent to 17.8 per cent thanks to the establishment of the 20 per cent minimum quota for women candidates under the Electoral Code. However, in the House of Representatives, where there are 80 seats, the proportion of women was only 2.5 per cent: the affirmative-action measure represented by the 20 per cent minimum quota had little impact because representatives were elected from small electoral constituencies.²⁶

In the general elections for the term from 2003 to 2008, the Senate saw women elected to four of its 45 seats (8.9 per cent) while the House of Representatives saw

²⁵ Clyde Soto, "Continuidades sin fisuras. Panorama electoral y participación femenina" ["Unbroken continuity. The electoral landscape and participation by women"], in *Novápolis, Revista de Estudios Políticos Contemporáneos* [Novápolis, A Journal of Contemporary Political Studies], No. 3, Paraguay, May 2003.

²⁶ *Implementación de la Plataforma de Beijing en Paraguay 1995-2000: La Mujer en el Ejercicio del Poder y la Adopción de Decisiones* [Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Paraguay, 1995 to 2000: Women exercising power and making decisions], non-governmental report, Paraguayan Women's Coordination Unit, UNDP/UNIFEM/RLA/99WO4.

women elected to eight of its 80 seats (10 per cent). Clearly, gender inequity and inequality continue to exist in the membership of the National Congress. It is believed that the small increase in the number of women elected to the House of Representatives from two to six is attributable to women having gained power within their respective political parties, while the decline in the number of women elected to the Senate is due to internal divisions within the major parties.

Departmental councils and municipal governments

In the previous administration, the breakdown of candidate lists for departmental councils showed that 90.70 per cent of the candidates were men and 9.30 per cent were women. In the most recent elections, held in 2003, however, the proportions were 71.4 per cent men and 28 per cent women. All told, 40 women were elected to posts in the executive branch, legislative branch and departmental councils. We regard this as a major advance over 1993, when a total of 15 women were elected, and 1998, when a total of 26 were elected.

The municipal elections of 1996 saw six women elected as prefects and 236 as councillors. In the municipal elections of 2001, out of a total of 215 prefectures and 2,173 council seats, 11 women (11.53 per cent) were elected as prefects and 385 (17.71 per cent) were elected as councillors.

(iii) The judicial branch of government

It must be noted that the highest decision-making levels in the judiciary, such as the Supreme Court, the Council of Judges, the Judges Investigation Panel, and the Superior Court of Justice for Elections remain closed to women, for women in the judiciary are concentrated in magistrate's courts, prosecutor's offices and public defender's offices.²⁷ In March 2004, for the first time since 1910, a woman was named to the Supreme Court following an intense nationwide lobbying campaign under the slogan "Women on the Court" which was mounted by three women's organizations forming part of the Paraguayan Women's Coordination Unit, supported by the efforts of the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic and the Gender Directorate of the Supreme Court, thanks to the political will shown by the current President of Paraguay. This was an occasion where the general public's keen interest in the issue played a critically important role.

In the Court of Appeals, which has 100 members, 18 members are women and 79 are men (18 per cent and 82 per cent respectively). In the lower courts, there are 52 women and 122 men (29.8 per cent and 70.2 per cent respectively). In the magistrate's courts, there are 103 women and 151 men (40.5 per cent and 59.5 per cent respectively). In the public defender's offices, there are 91 women and 57 men (61.4 per cent and 38.5 per cent respectively).

As usual, one finds that women predominate at the level of court clerks and attesting officers: 206 women and 155 men (57 per cent and 43 per cent respectively). These data show that the more women have access to posts, the more likely the posts are to pay low salaries and to be associated with the public interest,

²⁷ *DECIDAMOS, PLURAL* [We decide – All of us], newsletter published by Decidamos: Campaña por la Expresión Ciudadana [We decide: Campaign for expression of the will of the people], February-March 2003.

while posts that pay higher salaries, offer greater scope for managing resources, and wield greater power are significantly less likely to be held by women.

Article 8: International participation

Appropriate measures shall be taken to ensure that women have the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.

Paraguay's diplomatic corps has only two women ambassadors, although a number of women occupy various second-tier posts such as consuls and first, second and third secretaries. Unfortunately, women are not considered when shortlists are being drawn up for selecting officials to represent the country. To date, organized women's groups have not had any input into the new high-level committees and working groups recently established by the new Administration.

At the same time, no collective demands are being expressed for participation in decision-making posts, and as a result women are left on the sidelines when key aspects of institutional reforms relating to women's interests are discussed and decided. Overall, there is little participation in the democratic governance and gender process. However, the process of raising awareness about women's new role has proceeded at a steady pace and has had success, particularly at the middle levels of the civil service. Thus far, it has been management levels, in both the public and private sector, that have shown themselves to be the most indifferent and resistant to the gender perspective.

In 2000, the Paraguayan Women's Coordination Unit joined the MERCOSUR Feminist Network (AFM) for the period 2001–2002, a group made up of national networks and coordination units in the countries of the Southern Cone, plus Bolivia and Peru, so as to provide a means for women to take part in debates and proposals by establishing an open and inclusive forum to strengthen regional coordination amongst the various national processes under way. One of its specific objectives was to encourage national organizations and regional networks to make a critical assessment of MERCOSUR and the effects that trade and economic integration policies have had on women's living conditions.

The MERCOSUR treaty has become a real challenge to the women of the Southern Cone, a concern shared by the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), which is chaired by the Paraguayan minister. The issue centres on women's continued access to economic resources within the deepening regional economic and political integration process under way in the countries that have banded together to form MERCOSUR. One year later, in Rio de Janeiro, the officials responsible for women's issues in the governments of MERCOSUR member countries signed a declaration calling on the Council of the Common Market to implement the necessary mechanisms to include equality of opportunity for men and women as part of MERCOSUR's institutional structure, although efforts in that regard have not yet been successful.

At the same time, the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic has been encouraging and assisting women in the private sector to organize a Paraguay Chapter of the MERCOSUR Women's Forum, a non-governmental organization that has been very active at the national level in member countries, principally with women entrepreneurs. It receives ongoing

support from the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic to facilitate its active participation in all meetings of the MERCOSUR Meeting on Women's Issues, to which it is an adviser.

In 2000, Paraguay endorsed the Millennium Development Goals, but either it did not follow through on most of the international commitments it took on, or they were matters of passing concern. The *Social Watch 2003* report states that Paraguay has not made satisfactory progress on commitments made in the area of education.²⁸ This is an international report which reviews the progress made on eradicating poverty, achieving gender equality and fulfilling the government's international commitments. One of the 10 specific commitments assumed by Paraguay which is of particular interest here has to do with improving the gross school enrolment ratio (GSER) for girls as a percentage of the corresponding ratio for boys: on that point, the goal set for 2015 has already been achieved.

However, in regard to improving the GSER for girls in secondary school as a percentage of the corresponding ratio for boys, it says that, if the same pace is maintained as during the period from 1990 to 2000, the country will continue to suffer setbacks. Forecasts indicate that, at the present rate, Paraguay will be unable to achieve the goals that have been set for the coming decade: for example, there will be deterioration of the net school enrolment ratio at the primary level and of the gross school enrolment ratio for girls at the secondary level.

In regard to an eventual national policy on migration, one regulatory question that Paraguay will have to sort out is that of deciding which agency will be responsible for establishing such a policy. For now, the National Government has sent two initiatives to the National Congress: an Agreement on Migration with the Argentine Republic, and a proposal which is under study in the four member countries of MERCOSUR, plus Bolivia and Chile, regarding multiple residency in any of the six countries for the citizens of all six. In addition, the National Government has signed the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and submitted it to the Senate for review. Once again, it is important to focus not just on gender equity but on the specific concept of migrant women in developing the general lines of a national policy on migration.²⁹

From 2001 to 2004, six meetings were held of the Meeting on Women's Issues (REM). At the fifth meeting of the REM – held in Uruguay in the first half of 2001, with delegations from the member countries of MERCOSUR plus Bolivia and Chile in attendance – it was agreed that the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Rome Statute would be promulgated and disseminated so that a gender perspective might be implemented across the board *vis-à-vis* subgroups, as well as in the education sector in MERCOSUR.

²⁸ "Compromisos incumplidos en el área educativa" ["Education commitments not fulfilled"], *ABC* newspaper, 12 June 2003, p. 30.

²⁹ *Lineamientos para una Política Nacional de Migraciones* [Principal lines of a national migration policy], UNFPA, Ministry of External Relations, IOM, Asunción, September 2003.

Part III

Article 10: Education

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure equality of men and women.

Among the most important advances made in this area are those that have to do with people's access to formal education. Although the illiteracy rate remains high, it shows a persistent downward trend, and fell by 13 per cent in 2001. The highest illiteracy rates are found among women, particularly campesino women, poor women and women who speak Guaraní. Literacy rates are not evenly spread throughout the country. In the Eastern Region, for example, 90 per cent of districts and 90 per cent of the population have literacy rates of over 80 per cent. In addition to a reduction in illiteracy, there has been an increase in primary-school education coverage, although this has not been accompanied by an increase in the quality of education.³⁰ It is illustrative in this connection that the 2002 census did not find any difference between the sexes so far as the average amount of schooling received by people aged 15 years and over was concerned – for women the figure was 7.0 years, while for men it was 7.1 years – although there was a significant difference according to where people lived: those living in urban areas had an average of 8.2 years of schooling, while those living in rural areas had 5.3 years.

The promulgation of the General Education Act in 1998 represented an important step forward in the field of formal education since, for the first time, it laid out (in Article 10) the principles of (a) equality in regard to access to schools and continued school attendance, (b) effective equality of the sexes, and (c) prohibition of all forms of discrimination. However, there are significant gaps in the school curricula regarding subjects such as violence and family-life education, which are often neglected and need to be discussed right from the earliest levels in order to initiate a cultural change in areas that are fundamental for everyday coexistence between the sexes.

Nor did the census find significant differences between women and men as regards their level of education, which could be an indication that both sexes have equal access to formal education. Nevertheless, sexism and discrimination against girls and female adolescents in schools continue to exist in various forms, reflecting cultural patterns of behaviour that cannot be properly measured. For that reason, it is important to insist that the mandates set forth in the education reform programme be fulfilled in areas such as equal treatment, the promotion of democratic values and especially in sex education, which was one of the overall objectives of the reform programme but on which there has been no action to date.

Access to public primary-school education, covering Years 1 to 9, is open, free and equal for both sexes. No legal impediments exist to such access, except in the case of one religious private school which accepts girls only and continues to function on that basis. In the public sector, there were only two single-sex schools up to 2003: the National College of the Capital (CNC), which accepted only boys, and the National Girls' College (CNN), which accepted only girls. In 2004, despite great resistance on the part of female and male students alike, both schools were

³⁰ *Informe Nacional sobre Desarrollo Humano Paraguay 2003* [National Human Development Report, Paraguay, 2003], UNDP, DGEEC, Paraguay 2003, p. 8.

made co-educational. However, the bitterness of the confrontation with the ministerial authorities and the administrators of the two schools is a clear warning of how deeply entrenched traditional sexist education is in the two schools. Two months into the school year, the boys would not allow the girls to exercise their constitutional and human right to vote in elections for the executive council of the CNC Student Centre. The anti-virtue of machismo and the practice of excluding women have a tight grip on Paraguayan society.³¹

The Ministry of Education and Culture has published the Strategic Plan for Education Reform, subtitled "Paraguay 2020: Meeting the education challenge". That Plan was conceived as a management tool for Paraguayan education based on broad social consensus, primarily with respect to two different areas which, in one way or another, affect the entire education system, namely bilingual education and the gender perspective. Indeed, the National Programme for Bilingual Education is being implemented to adjust the offering of primary-school education to the country's specific sociolinguistic situation, characterized by the presence of two languages in contact, Guaraní and Spanish. In 2002, 59 per cent of the population habitually spoke Guaraní while 36 per cent spoke Spanish and 5 per cent spoke other languages, not taking into account those who spoke both official languages.

Although Guaraní is an intrinsic part of the country's culture and identity, Paraguayan bilingualism is the most important problem facing the education system, particularly in view of the fact that there is a need to teach foreign languages such as English and Portuguese, that these languages must be given priority if the country is to achieve competitiveness and excellence as it strives for better opportunities in the formal labour market and in higher education, in the context of the process of regional integration and increasing globalization.

In contrast, the change in sexist language on the part of education authorities, politicians and journalists in general has been one of the main achievements in the fight for non-sexist education. Certainly this is true from the President of Paraguay on down, except for certain teachers who most stubbornly resist linguistic change not only because they cling to linguistic purity but also because of their traditional upbringing and the way they have been socialized.

There is a continuing need for a gender perspective to be included in the teacher training curriculum, along with a systematic process of increasing the awareness of senior authorities regarding the issue of a gender perspective, beginning with the Minister of Education and the members of the National Council on Education and Culture (CONEC).

Curiously, in the technical baccalaureate programme (a university-stream programme which leads to secondary-school graduation at the end of Year 12), boys account for 51 per cent of those enrolled, only a very slightly larger proportion than girls, while in technical education outside the university stream girls account for 55 per cent of those enrolled. The reverse is true in urban centres in the Interior, where the male economically active population (EAP), according to the 1996 household survey, indicates that men have a higher level of technical education than women (Corvalán, Elías, 1999).

³¹ "Elecciones del Centro de Estudiantes se consumaron sin la participación de las niñas" ["Student Centre elections held without girls' participation"], *Última Hora* newspaper, Saturday, 17 April 2004, p. 24.

The growing proliferation of private universities, coupled with the fact that there are no common standards with which to assess their quality and measure their impact on Paraguayan society since the beginning of the political transition and the lack of available information, makes it very difficult to analyse enrolment figures at the university level broken down by sex. Overall, the system of higher university education is the subject of serious questioning by students, professors and society as a whole. Enrolment figures for women in the faculties of the National University of Asunción that are regarded as the most competitive were as follows in 2003: in law, 45.5 per cent women out of a total of 650 students enrolled; in the professional notaries programme, 73 per cent women out of 100 students enrolled; in medicine, 50.8 per cent women out of 130 students enrolled; and in kinesiology, 70 per cent women out of 30 students enrolled.

Studies and research based on the gender perspective in education continue to constitute another of the outstanding debts owed to women, not only in the education system overall but also at the university level and in social-science research centres. The drop in international cooperation funding in the late 1990s resulted in a sharp decline in the production of knowledge, and today the topic of gender is altogether absent from the university curriculum despite the fact that it is essential in order to ensure that Paraguayan women can achieve the advances they must achieve in this critical area of professional development at the university level, in preparation for facing the education and employment challenges posed by the MERCOSUR economic integration process.

A further outstanding debt owed to women continues to be a significant level of sexism in the invisible curriculum in the profession. Indeed, gender awareness still does not form part of the thoughts and actions of teaching staff overall, and it must be fostered through an intense process of gender awareness training. To a certain extent, however, discrimination has been remedied in textbooks and teaching materials in regard not only to their content but also to the status of male and female figures represented.

Since 2001, the National Council on Education and Culture has had two women members, although the Council has not given consideration to the gender perspective and most of its members are still men. The offices of university presidents, academic councils and other senior bodies in the formal education sector are controlled by men.

Article 11: Employment

All appropriate measures shall be taken to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights.

In spite of the increase in population and certain demographic changes, labour force participation by individuals aged 12 years and over has held steady at around 51 per cent. In the space of 10 years, from 1992 to 2002, women's share of the labour force has risen from 23.8 per cent to 37.3 per cent, while men's share has declined from 78.4 per cent to 62.7 per cent.³² The increase in poverty has driven large numbers of women into the labour market, although this does not suggest that the work they have been able to obtain is of high quality. However, the growth in

³² *Informe Nacional sobre Desarrollo Humano Paraguay 2003, op. cit., p. 42.*

women's numbers has not been accompanied by changes in the status of working women in the occupational pyramid, within a labour market that has traditionally been segregated by sex. The "glass ceiling" continues to be a reality in Paraguay's formal economy.

According to the 2002 census, 25.6 per cent of households are headed by women. In rural areas, the proportion rises to 29 per cent, and the households are poorer. Working women in the poorest groups – rural labourers, migrants, workers in the informal sector, domestic employees, and so on – are characterized by distinctive socio-cultural, educational and economic traits.

It is important to bear in mind that 24.2 per cent of households are headed by women, a situation defined as one in which there is no adult male provider or one is only present occasionally. According to the comprehensive household survey, this situation is more prevalent in urban areas (27.3 per cent) than in rural areas (20.1 per cent). It is believed that 7 out of every 10 women heads of households have no partner. It is these households that are the most vulnerable to falling deeper into poverty, a situation that shows a change for 2000-2001 inasmuch as 2 out of every 10 households are headed by women.

In urban areas, the economically active population accounted for 71.3 per cent of men and 44.5 per cent of women in 2002, whereas the corresponding figures in rural areas were 74.1 per cent of men and only 19 per cent of women. The invisibility of women's work has been a constant factor in the statistics that have been compiled, since the tools used to gather data have been incapable of capturing all the productive tasks performed in the home.

The sexual division of labour which traditionally has limited women to childbearing and motherhood has had an impact on the labour market and "is reflected in laws and regulations concerned with protecting the health of working women" to such a point that the laws and regulations themselves have become discriminatory against women, and in some cases have become obstacles denying them access to certain activities in the formal labour market.³³

In terms of employment, women are relatively worse off than men. In 2001, the unemployment rate for women was 47.4 per cent, while for men it was 31.0 per cent. The situation is worse in rural areas, where women are three times as likely to be out of work than men. In the growing informal sector, however, women hold 40 per cent of the jobs – of which 65 per cent are in the personal services category (cook, maid, etc.) – while men hold 35 per cent.

Sixty-six per cent of the women are itinerant vendors, most of them between 25 and 44 years of age. In urban areas, the informal sector accounts for 38.2 per cent of working women. Most women working in the informal sector fall into three occupational categories: self-employed, 33.7 per cent; maid, 21.2 per cent; and unpaid family worker, 7.2 per cent.³⁴ The 2002 household survey, however, found that 59.8 per cent of working women were professionals, scientists or intellectuals, compared with 40.2 per cent of men.

³³ *Comisión de Equidad, Género y Desarrollo, Informe Anual 2001* [Annual Report of the Equity, Gender and Social Development Committee for 2001], Second Programme to Strengthen Democratic Institutions, National Congress, IDB.

³⁴ *Encuesta Integrada de Hogares 2000/2001* [Comprehensive Household Survey, 2000-2001], DGEEC, 2001.

Rural workers, women, and Guaraní-speakers are those most likely to be self-employed, while urban workers, men and Spanish-speakers are those most likely to be employed by others.

So far as pay levels are concerned, no matter what a given individual's level of education, men's average pay is higher than women's. This is the best indicator of the inequality and inequity between men and women. There are, however, a very few occupational groups in which women earn more: haute couture seamstress, embroiderer, food preparer.³⁵ Ninety per cent of rural women in the labour market receive less than the minimum wage fixed by law, and they are paid one-third as much as urban women.

The situation is more serious in rural areas, where 14 per cent of the jobs are held by women and 86 per cent by men, although the last agricultural census, conducted in 1991, found that productive activity performed by women had increased significantly among women under 25 years of age (43 per cent). Of women who do farm work, 32 per cent work on a year-round basis and 42 per cent on a seasonal basis, although only 8 per cent are paid for their labour.

Flows of migrants, primarily women migrants owing to the nature of the work available in border areas, come mainly from Brazil. These are women who have little formal education, lack legal protection and are exposed to clear discrimination. Paraguayan campesino women who migrate to the major urban centres in search of work are typically illiterate or have very little schooling, and are in the same situation. For both groups, the lack of formal education is a clear determining factor for discrimination in finding and holding jobs in border areas, where the greatest concentration of industrial enterprises is to be found. Women are not part of the industrial workforce.³⁶ And migrant women are even less likely to be able to find jobs: according to the comprehensive household survey conducted in 1997–1998, 75 per cent of migrant men were able to find jobs, as compared with only 41 per cent of migrant women.

One form of legal discrimination affecting many women relates to conditions of paid domestic employment, since this occupational category employs 25 per cent of the economically active female population but only 0.6 per cent of the economically active male population, with such employment accounting for 0.5 per cent of the economically active population overall. For those who work in this sector, the Labour Code establishes a number of important differences *vis-à-vis* the rights of other workers, although there is not always compliance with the relevant provisions. Nevertheless, since November 2003 the possibility has been opened up for the government to intervene and institute certain measures aimed at eliminating these discriminatory laws, which hold thousands of women in conditions of near-slavery in Paraguay. The ILO has prepared a research paper on domestic employment in Paraguay which was presented at a joint workshop held

³⁵ María Victoria Heikel, "Paraguay: la calidad del empleo de la mujer" ["Paraguay: Quality of women's jobs"], in *Más y mejores empleos para la mujer? La experiencia de los países del MERCOSUR y Chile* [More and better jobs for women? The experience of the MERCOSUR countries and Chile], Chile-ILO, 2000.

³⁶ Graziella Corvalán, "Revision of the Country Profile Study on Women in Development (WID) in Paraguay", Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), January 2000, Planning Department, Asunción, December 2001.

with the Domestic Workers Union and the National Tripartite Commission to examine and promote women's participation in the workforce.

As the general public is aware, the municipal executive and legislature in Asunción are studying the project proposal entitled "Women in the driver's seat for public transport", which is aimed at hiring more women for jobs as drivers in the public transport system. To enable the project to go ahead, agreements have been signed with a number of companies and organizations, among them the Association of Professional Taxi Drivers of Asunción (APTA) and the Metropolitan Area Association of Transport Company Owners (UCETRAMA), with which agreements have been signed to provide apprenticeships for students who successfully complete the driver training course.

One of the first things that the Standing Advisory Committee on Equity and Gender of the Asunción Municipal Council did in 2004 was to organize a course entitled "Women in the driver's seat", combining theoretical and practical training, which was offered to women of meagre resources to enable them to gain access to the formal labour market as taxi and bus drivers. Continuation of the programme in the form of a second course offered in collaboration with the private sector and the Office of the Mayor of Asunción will be assessed on the basis of the number of women who have been hired as drivers, and in light of the cultural and financial obstacles that exist. In order to register for the training programme, a woman must have attained the age of majority, hold an identity card (*cédula de identidad*), hold a municipal driving licence if applicable, and live in Asunción.

The setting up of day-care centres to look after the children of working women could be made a true government policy, as a means of promoting equity of access to employment. In Paraguay, there are Child and Family Welfare Centres (CEBINFAs) which are day-care centres that look after boys and girls up to five years of age who are the children of working parents. There are 40 such day-care centres in Asunción and the Metropolitan Area, organized according to the father's or mother's place of employment.

The CEBINFAs focus their efforts on marginal neighbourhoods, although not all the centres that have been established meet this requirement. The day-care centres set up by the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic and those operated by the Municipality of Asunción in some neighbourhood offices around the city are the best known facilities of this kind. As well, more and more private day-care centres are being established to serve those families that can afford them. To date, there has been no success in getting medium-sized and large businesses to set up day-care centres of their own, even though this requirement is established under Paraguayan legislation.

From the standpoint of institutional decentralization and the need for women to be engaged in productive roles, a project carried out in 1999–2000 within the framework of the Network of Centres for Women's Development Initiatives (CIDEM Network) is of particular interest. It consisted of setting up a revolving social investment fund, and demonstrated that women were highly capable of earning a satisfactory rate of return, contrary to popular opinion which holds that women "are good for nothing" so far as the formal economy is concerned. In one of the four departments where these funds were set up, the result in 2003, when the project came to an end, was a rate of arrears of only 0.5 per cent. These are small funds, consisting of both a repayable component and a grant component, but they

serve as an example of how women can be engaged in productive roles as important providers for their families and as contributors to the national economy.

The maquiladora system in Paraguay is different from similar in-bond manufacturing arrangements in other countries because it makes provision for upholding the rights established under the Labour Code. Paraguay's system was endorsed by the Maquiladora Industry Association, which is headed by a woman, and was enacted pursuant to a law that was adopted in 1997 but for which the implementing regulations were not established until 2001. The purpose of Paraguay's maquiladora system is "to contribute to the country's industrialization, create jobs, attract technology from abroad and support vocational training".³⁷ However, the education and training element needs to be expanded, particularly with regard to women in rural areas.

The International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) of the ILO is concerned not only with eliminating child labour but also with trying to promote the development of appropriate educational alternatives for children and the elaboration and implementation of laws to protect children and prevent child labour. However, children and adolescents who work or beg in the street mounted a demonstration in front of the National Congress in 2003 urging a halt to the adoption of a law banning child labour.

In October 2003, Law 2063 was promulgated, which established a unified pension regime and amended certain provisions of Law 98/92 which prevented working women insured under the Social Provident Administration (IPS) from extending their social-security benefit coverage to their husbands or common-law partners, despite the fact that men insured under the IPS did have the right to extend such coverage to their wives or common-law partners. As a result, the new law includes the husband, common-law partner or widower of an insured woman as a beneficiary for purposes of health coverage as well as retirement and survivor's pensions.

Article 12: Health

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination in the field of health care in order to ensure, on the basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning.

In so far as overall health is concerned, this is regarded as the great outstanding debt owed by the Paraguayan State to the nation's women. It is reflected in the high maternal mortality rate which, although it has been noticeably reduced, remains high in comparison with other countries. The statistics for 2001 indicate that there were 168.7 maternal deaths for every 100 000 live births. Because of substantial under-reporting, especially in rural areas, the true figure is put much higher, and is estimated at between 330 and 336 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births. Other causes of death among women include disorders of the circulatory system (38 per cent), cancers (13.4 per cent), and infections (5.6 per cent). Mortality is most often associated with the reproductive organs or infections, and abortion ranks as the leading cause of death although it may be

³⁷ "La Maquila como fuente de desarrollo" ["The maquiladora system as a source of development"] in *La Otra Mitad* [The Other Half], PROMUR/Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Year 2, No. 5, Paraguay, May 2002, p. 18.

reported in some other way so as to conceal its true nature, such as "haemorrhage of obstetric origin".³⁸ About 400 deaths a year are due to clandestine abortions. In contrast, the principal causes of death among men are related to violence, often as a result of drinking to excess, and the increasing crime rate.

The infant mortality rate in 2001 was recorded as 19.2 deaths for every 1,000 live births. Estimates that take into account under-reporting in this area put the figure at 38.4 deaths per 1,000 live births, reflecting the first wave of the country's current baby boom.³⁹ The infant mortality situation has been deteriorating because the health of a child is heavily dependent on the prenatal and postnatal care that its mother receives.

Since 1994, the government's priorities have focused on improving health services and on family planning. Family planning is not widespread, even though the 1992 Constitution guarantees the right to family planning services. In 1999, only 58.6 per cent of the population used some method of contraception. Since then the proportion has fallen to 48 per cent, 41 per cent in rural areas and 59 per cent in urban areas (UNICEF, 2001).

According to the National Survey of Health and Reproductive Rights conducted in 1998, life expectancy in Paraguay is 69.7 years. The population's rate of growth during the period from 1995 to 2000 was 2.59 per cent, a relatively high figure for Latin America. The overall fertility rate was 4.0, with a significant gap between urban areas (4.1) and rural areas (6.1).

Reducing the maternal mortality rate is one of the objectives of the National Reproductive Health Plan for the period from 1997 to 2001, in view of the fact that health and reproductive rights are referred to in the National Constitution even though no laws exist with respect to them. Discussions are beginning this month on the new National Reproductive Health Plan for the period from 2003 to 2008, so that ideas can be exchanged among the various sectors involved and the new Plan's themes and lines of action can be devised, aimed at improving the way reproductive health programmes and projects are implemented and assuring equitable access to high-quality services. The Plan was unveiled at a public ceremony early in 2004.

A study conducted by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare concerning the quality of services under the Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme identified such problems as: (1) a high rate of pregnancy at the extremes of women's childbearing years, especially an increase in teenage pregnancies; (2) a high occurrence of abortions performed under poor conditions, with a significant impact on morbidity and mortality; as well, 32 per cent of pregnant women give birth at locations other than health facilities, with the attendant risks that that implies; (3) shortcomings in school sex-education programmes, lack of social involvement, lack of mass-media involvement and many other institutional problems.

³⁸ *Diagnóstico Sociodemográfico del Paraguay* [Socio-demographic analysis of Paraguay], Technical Planning Secretariat, Asunción, 2000.

³⁹ J.M. Carron, "Cambios demográficos y culturales: Un nuevo horizonte en el Paraguay de nuestros días" ["Demographic and cultural change: A new outlook in today's Paraguay"], in *Población y Desarrollo* [Population and Development], UNFPA, National University of Asunción, Faculty of Economics, San Lorenzo, Paraguay, No. 25, December 2003, p. 80.

Statistical data show that the locus of the HIV/AIDS epidemic is continuing to shift to women and the poor. Now that two decades have passed since the disease emerged, there are 1.2 men infected for every woman. This demonstrates the need to include a gender perspective in actions and measures undertaken in this area. As of October 2003, Paraguay had a total of 45 cases – 25 men and 18 women.⁴⁰

A network of NGOs was set up in 2002 to take part in elaborating and implementing public policy in regard to HIV/AIDS and to try to change society's perceptions of the disease. The network is involved in prevention efforts and in fighting for the rights of persons living with HIV/AIDS (PWAs), as well as in national and international decision-making forums such as the country coordination mechanism pursuant to the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted at the twenty-sixth special session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGASS, Articles 55 and 58). Faced with the severe shortage of anti-retroviral drugs, the lack of government funding, the spread of the epidemic, discrimination against PWAs and stigmatization of them, the NGO network adopted a political position on the issue. One of the six points listed in its position concerns the amendment of Law 102/9, better known as the AIDS Act, and of national regulations and legal provisions that could give rise to discrimination in regard to HIV/AIDS and PWAs. In cases of discrimination, the law should establish appropriate penalties and compensation.

With respect to HIV/AIDS, the National Programme to Control HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (PRONASIDA), of which the NGO network and PWAs form part, has been organized in order to provide a national response to the epidemic, and has been strengthened thanks to support received from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ). One proposal is to set up a social fund with capital contributed by private and even foreign sources to provide funding in areas where there are urgent needs.

The inclusion of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme in the budget of the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare was an achievement made possible through the successful work of the Equity, Gender and Social Development Committee of the Senate during the 2002 budget approval process, with technical assistance provided by UNFPA. Incorporating the concept of equity in the National Budget had a very important political impact. Once budget allocations are made, that makes it possible to extend coverage and provide benefits to more families and more women in the areas of sexual and reproductive health.

Although decentralization is appropriate in sectors closely tied to the health of the general population – such as education, water resources and the environment – in the case of gender equity, health becomes a life-or-death issue if a woman and her family do not have access to comprehensive health services relatively close by at the moment they are needed, or if basic public health services do not exist. As a result, any sort of reform of the health sector must focus on improving the coverage of health care services, with particular reference to pregnant women, trauma, preventable death, and the poorest and most vulnerable segments of the population.

UNICEF's estimate of the overall rate of malnutrition among children in Paraguay in 2001 increased from 3.7 per cent to 5.2 per cent, although chronic

⁴⁰ *JOPARE*, UNFPA Paraguay, Year 4, No. 15, December 2003.

malnutrition nationwide increased from 12.6 per cent to 10.9 per cent. The figures were 7.4 per cent for urban areas and 14 per cent for rural areas. The National Technical Committee for the Development of Nutrition Guidelines for Paraguay was set up in 1999. To improve the nutrition of schoolchildren, programmes to distribute glasses of milk in public schools have been set up, administered by parents' associations.

Article 13: Socio-cultural discrimination

States Parties shall take measures to eliminate discrimination against women in other areas of economic and social life in order to ensure, on the basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular: (a) The right to family benefits; (b) The right to bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit; and (c) The right to recreational activities.

Women's right to loans and other forms of credit used to be a matter not of gender but of economic status: the issue was one of women's access to credit, or alternatively, women's access to title to their land. Thanks to the reforms made to the Civil Code and the Agrarian Code, men's and women's rights are equal from the legal standpoint, and it is only socio-cultural traditions that we need to cast aside.

A couple of years ago, the National Directorate of Sport was headed by a woman; women's football (soccer) teams are now regarded as nothing out of the ordinary; and in past years there have been two women tennis players who have done extremely well at the international level. However, women tend to remain active in sports for a relatively brief time, typically only until they get married.

Over the past two decades, the issue of a gender perspective has come to be part of public discourse in both the government and private spheres, and while the decentralization process has ensured that equity and equality between men and women would become the basis for expanding and strengthening gender mainstreaming, there has also been continuing insistence that the status of the Women's Bureau be maintained. One area where the process has seen setbacks concerns the visibility of the gender perspective and the involvement of newspapers, magazines and television in highlighting projects by and for women in general, aside from actresses and models. Greater involvement in this area is needed on the part of women journalists and militant feminists, because the press continues to be the Achilles' heel of feminism in this country.

Indeed, the politics of equality and the topic of gender equity are perpetually absent from news coverage in general, and particularly from news coverage on television and in newspapers and magazines. There are no institutional policies in the media in regard to equity and equality issues. As was evident in the reports prepared for Beijing+5, the common denominator has been the absence of women from leadership roles in the media, even though women are regarded as more honest and more reliable. In any competition for advancement, the possibility that a woman may become pregnant works against her whether in the media or in the formal labour market.⁴¹

At present, there are only a handful of publications devoted to gender equity: *Informativo Mujer* [Women's Bulletin], from the CDE; *La Otra Mitad* [The Other

⁴¹ "La imagen de la mujer en los medios de comunicación" ["The image of women in the media"], panel, JOPARE, UNFPA Paraguay, Year 2, No. 8, March 2002, p. 3.

Half], from PROMUR; *Construyendo Igualdad* [Building Equality], from the SMPR, *JOPARE* from UNFPA; and *Acción* [Action], a magazine that occasionally publishes articles on women's issues. The same situation is found in commercial radio, as only Radio Ñandutí broadcasts a programme presented by a feminist. However, the growing numbers of community radio stations do provide regular coverage of gender issues.

Mixing policies targeted to families with those targeted to women may seem to be a retrograde step in legal and political terms, particularly when women are considered as individual persons who possess their own rights independent of their family situation, marital status, etc. However, in spite of the strides that women have made in many fields of knowledge and in everyday life, it has not been possible to achieve a division of responsibilities and household tasks within the home, as women remain solely responsible for the care and rearing of children and for the health and well-being of all their family members.

It is clear that a completely different public perspective and cultural landscape have come into being since the 1990s as a result of demographic change, the development of new information and communication technologies, and the expansion of the media, with the result that information has become the focal point in the home, at work and at school. The information society is open to globalization, receives cultural influences from every corner of the world and promotes the spread of mass culture. In 2002, 72.3 per cent of households had television sets and 11.2 per cent had cable television service. Thirty-two per cent had cellular telephones and 16.8 per cent had fixed telephone lines.

Article 14: Rural women

States Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy.

As transport and communications improve, the distinction between urban and rural areas in terms of behavioural characteristics disappears, and the two converge. There is now taking place a "ruralization" of urban life, and a certain urbanization of what has traditionally been known as the rural way of life. Estimates from the 2000–2001 household survey indicate that a significant shift of the rural population towards urban areas is now under way. Such a development could change Paraguay's traditional character as an agricultural country with a primarily rural way of life, and by increasing rural areas' contact with Spanish could increase bilingualism and bring about a serious decline in the use of Guaraní. According to the 2002 Paraguayan census, the breakdown of languages spoken habitually in the home was as follows: Spanish, 36 per cent; Guaraní, 59 per cent; and other languages, 5 per cent. The main migration flows recorded in that census were: urban-to-urban migration, 40 per cent; urban-to-rural migration, 21 per cent; rural-to-urban migration, 16 per cent; and rural-to-urban migration, 21.5 per cent.

The overall fertility rate is 3.9 per cent – 3.2 per cent in urban areas and 4.6 per cent in rural areas. This is clear evidence of the need to provide greater support for family planning and to bring about cultural change so as to put to rest the notion that the various forms of birth control are injurious to women's health, a belief deeply held in rural areas.

In 2000, the Social Advisory Council for the Fight against Poverty was created, to serve as a mechanism whereby the public sector and civil society could participate in advising the executive branch of government on matters relating to the improvement of the population's standard of living, the reduction of extreme poverty, universal access to basic services of high-quality, and the development of human capital. However, there was no follow-through on these initiatives after the Council was set up and the Council lacked the legitimacy necessary for it to function as an effective inter-agency coordination mechanism (Sottoli, 2002).

A new effort to stem the increase in poverty in Paraguay is under way for the period from 2003 to 2008, with the recent establishment of the Group of Social Policy Advisers, made up of recognized experts on issues relating to socio-cultural circumstances, poverty, campesino issues, education and economics. For the first time, there is no apparent partisan political representation in this advisory group; but, as is typically the case, the group does not include any women regardless of whether or not they are gender experts, and there is no evidence that the issue of gender equity is of concern to the group any more than it is to the Group of Economic Advisers.

In brief, Paraguay's worsening poverty is evident in: (a) the severe deterioration of the national economy; (b) the increase in the level of unmet basic needs; and (c) the increased vulnerability of such segments of the population as campesinos, the urban poor, women heads of households, and indigenous peoples. Although the aforementioned Group of Social Policy Advisers was set up in 2003 with the aim of reducing poverty in compliance with the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, visible actions and measures relating to gender equality – which is the third goal listed in the enumeration of Millennium Development Goals – have to date not been taken into account.

The reference here relates to the operational phase of the paper published on the National Strategy to reduce Poverty and Inequality, focusing on those women who are the poorest of the poor. Such women typically possess the following characteristics: they are the heads of their households and therefore more vulnerable; they have large numbers of children; they have little formal education; they are predominantly Guaraní-speaking; they have high levels of illiteracy; they have little or no medical insurance; and so on. Considering that the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic ought to form part of the inter-agency technical team implementing the strategy, so that it can identify areas of interest where the gender perspective should be included in the proposed lines of action under the Second Plan, emphasis should be placed on the municipalities as they are the level of government closest to the people, with the greatest influence on women's participation and community development.

The Centres for Women's Development Initiatives (CIDEMs) that have been set up in nine departments have provided rural women with assistance and advice in the form of legal, psychological and health counselling, thereby functioning as an across-the-board gender mechanism within the government. Specific gender barriers exist that prevent women from participating in decentralization processes on an equal footing, and these represent more severe obstacles in rural areas, in view of the situation of campesino women within the traditional cultural context in which women continue to be second-class citizens even if they are significant contributors to family incomes. To help remedy this situation to some degree, the Women's

Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic has provided intensive training programmes for campesino women in nearly every part of the country, covering topics such as: gender; self-esteem; productive and reproductive roles; sexuality, non-sexist education; and, most recently, management and leadership.

The government's action to combat poverty has become more visible this year. Overall, poverty has increased since 1995, when the poverty rate was put at 30.3 per cent. Although the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty is comparatively lower now (15.5 per cent) than it was in 1997-98 (17.3 per cent), it remains higher than it was in 1995 (13.9 per cent), so it would appear that the various anti-poverty programmes have had little impact.

In the area of environmental policy, the medium-term objective is to improve the quality of life of men and women by introducing a gender perspective in environmental policies and programmes in support of sustainable development by having women take part in formulating them. Under the Second National Plan for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women, it is considered that there is a need for continuous, systematic reporting of events and situations that may have a negative impact on individuals in order to support sustainable development and environmental protection. Consequently, there is a need to strengthen national, departmental and local mechanisms for receiving reports of environmental problems that may have an impact on people. In April 2004, penalties were imposed on two large soybean producers whose indiscriminate use of toxic agricultural chemicals had severely damaged the health of an 11-year-old boy. This marked the first time in Paraguay's history that such action had been taken.

It has been found that those municipalities with a relatively lower standard of living are those that use fewer chemical fertilizers on average (12.2 per cent). There is lower usage of such products in those municipalities that have a medium level of human development (19.5 per cent). The indiscriminate use of pesticides has brought about a deterioration of the quality of the soil and of water resources, and threatened the sustainability of the system of agricultural production and forestry. In 2002 and 2003, the use of pesticides, especially on large expanses of soybean crops, was harmful to the health of children and pregnant women in particular. At the same time, the degradation of the soil reduces the amount of food it can grow and lowers family incomes. As well, it should be recalled that Paraguay has one of the highest rates of deforestation in Latin America (UNDP, 2003).

The causes of environmental degradation and its effects on the general population, particularly on women, need to be publicized more widely by means of information campaigns on such issues as climate change, water shortages and deforestation. This ties in to the need to raise the awareness of, and provide training to, those responsible for environmental programmes and policies, as well as the owners of the large soybean and cotton farms which are the principal causes of environmental contamination and deforestation in Paraguay.

Ten per cent of the Guaraní Aquifer, the largest in the world, is situated within Paraguay's borders, but in spite of the country's vast water reserves, the risk exists that they could be depleted. A timely example is provided by the drought in Ciudad del Este, where the lake that provides the city with drinking water has been entirely depleted and the city is drawing on the aquifer. The possible depletion of freshwater supplies and the over-exploitation of resources are another area in which

awareness-raising is needed in the schools and among the general public. Another issue along these lines concerns the dumping of garbage in public areas.

Because of deforestation and water shortages due to pollution and drought, women are forced to carry water over long distances to their homes. This has an impact on their health and on the amount of time that they can devote to other family chores or to productive work, particularly in view of the fact that campesino women in Paraguay work an average of 14 or 15 hours a day. It has been shown that the factors that prevent rural women from participating in activities do not stem from farming itself but from certain social factors highlighted in the findings of the Japanese technical-cooperation project, among them "lack of motivation", "high fertility", "the fact that extension agents are usually men", "an aptitude for learning", and "a lack of understanding on the part of men".

The National Committee of Women Cooperative Members was established to promote women's participation in cooperatives. It forms part of the Paraguayan Federation of Cooperatives, which has been experiencing strong growth since 1994. The Committee's objectives are to improve the lives of rural women, to establish and strengthen regional women's committees, and to reach more women cooperative members, especially in rural areas. It is carrying out activities with the support of the Campesino Development Fund, the SMPR and some NGOs. Thanks to the Committee's work, 12 more women's committees have been established or are planned in other cities in the Interior, so that a network of women cooperative members can be formed. Savings and loan cooperatives in both rural and urban areas have proven to be an appropriate area where women can successfully be involved in their productive role, particularly in the case of small-scale craftworkers and vendors who have shown that they can produce a high rate of return so far as financial transactions and decision-making posts are concerned.

In July 2001, a law was enacted setting up the National Environmental System, so that environmental issues could be dealt with from a comprehensive standpoint. The law also established the National Environmental Council as a forum for discussing and formulating Paraguay's socio-environmental policy and the Environmental Bureau (SEAM) as the executive body for coordinating and implementing that policy. However, a lack of political heft and shortage of funds are hard problems to overcome for a country that has vast expanses of arid frontier, growing corruption and a traditional border trade in indigenous natural resources. With the support of the German Agency for Technical Cooperation, a project is under way to set out the elements of an environmental gender policy, with specific activities to be carried out in this field.

Under a consultancy project, the Women's Bureau has prepared a guidebook for incorporating a gender perspective within the National Environmental System, and has incorporated that approach within the National Strategy and Plan of Action for the Conservation of Biodiversity, in the National Plan of Action to combat Desertification and Drought, and in the National Environmental Systems Support Programme.

Part IV

1. Decentralization

Within the framework of the processes of reform and modernization of the State, the National Congress has still not established regulations governing decentralization, which is an important feature enshrined in the National Constitution of 1992, even though the country has a unitary, decentralized system of government under the Magna Carta of Paraguay. There are a great many items to be considered for the possible development of local institutions, and women's participation is essential to assure the legitimacy of governance based on the interests of the whole of Paraguayan society. The system of gender mainstreaming and the equal-opportunities plans have become the framework necessary to strengthen equity within the decentralization process. The strengthening of women leaders and the application of the gender approach across the board in women's organizations and other social organizations is an essential task for the Women's Movement so that gender interests will not be excluded or overlooked. In other words, the gender perspective must be included right from the beginning, through the design, implementation and follow-up phases of policies, programmes and projects mounted by one or more sectors of the government or in the various regions.

The establishment of the Network of Departmental Women's Bureaux has been an important step in implementing the decentralization of offices concerned with women's affairs, the objectives of the exercise being the ongoing evaluation of institutional actions in the framework of the inter-agency coordination process and the identification of joint proposals for the across-the-board application of the gender perspective.⁴²

Decentralization was a topic on the agendas of the contenders for the presidency, the candidates for posts as governors, members of the Senate and House of Representatives, and members of departmental councils, and a great many people who took part in the forums that were held in 14 departments to develop proposals for the decentralization process to be put in place once the new central government and local governments had taken office for the term from 2003 to 2008. Both the President-elect and the other candidates agreed on the need for decentralization and the strengthening of departmental governments, which were topics proposed for an eventual Constituent Assembly. The only women's organization that took part in the decentralization forums was the Paraguayan Network of Women in Municipal Government, even though, among the seven proposals agreed upon for the Programme of Reform and Modernization of the State – relating to such areas as the decentralization of public services, legal, financial and electoral reforms, transparency and citizen participation, local development, and the strengthening of community associations – the issue of gender equity was striking by its absence.⁴³

In fact, the effective decentralization of the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic, in political and administrative terms, began in 1999 with the establishment of the Network of Centres for Women's Development Initiatives (CIDEM Network) aimed at strengthening the process of gender

⁴² *SMPR Informe de Gestión, 1999-2003* [Report on the work of the SMPR, 1999 to 2003], Asunción, Paraguay, August 2003.

⁴³ *ABC* newspaper, "Presentan plan de reformas hacia la descentralización" ["Reform plan unveiled to pave the way for decentralization"], 24 April 2003, p. 32.

mainstreaming already begun in the capital. The project⁴⁴ set up nine operating centres, thus establishing an infrastructure in most of the country's departmental governments. The project is now in the monitoring and evaluation phase, with this work being carried out by a technical team from the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic.

Finally, there are three factors that will have a bearing on the extent to which the objectives of the Second National Plan for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women can be attained: (1) the workings of the Paraguayan government; (2) the constraints that exist within the Women's Bureau itself, such as the fact that the efficiency of internal communication varies from place to place and is more difficult when the offices of the Women's Bureau are physically separated from other departmental offices; and (3) the fact that the Women's Bureau operates on a very limited budget and cannot afford sophisticated technology, with the ensuing impact on the possibility of using e-mail or having several telephone lines.

2. Inter-agency development with respect to gender

Although this does not form part of the CEDAW structure, we believe that the development of gender mainstreaming and the across-the-board application of the gender approach in sector projects and programmes carried out by the Public Administration and by the private sector during the period from 2000 to 2004 represents an important step forward in the fight to eradicate gender discrimination.

2.1 At the central government level

The bodies concerned with gender issues that have been established at the central government level represent the result of (i) commitments assumed by various governments over the years to eliminate inequalities between men and women, (ii) the pressing of demands by the feminist movement at the domestic and international levels, (iii) action by international agencies and (iv) the new policy area of gender equity and women's rights.⁴⁵

The link between the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic and women's organizations that receive support in the form of international cooperation funding in specific areas such as domestic violence is being strengthened and expanded. As well, other women's offices are being set up in different agencies of the Public Administration, and in departmental and municipal governments under agreements, projects and other mechanisms as shown in the annex to this document. In 2002, an agreement was signed with the Paraguayan Mediation Institute to include the mediation model as a tool for preventing domestic violence and to organize workshops on dissemination and awareness-raising. A

⁴⁴ *Red de Centros de Iniciativas y Desarrollo para la Mujer del Paraguay (Red CIDEM), Informe Técnico-Financiero Final, 6 de abril de 1998 al 6 de abril de 2003* [Paraguayan Network of Centres for Women's Development Initiatives (CIDEM Network), final report on technical and financial aspects, 6 April 1998 to 6 April 2003], Commission of the European Communities, Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic.

⁴⁵ Virginia Guzmán, "Documentación del proceso" ["Documenting the process"], in *La Institucionalidad de Género en un Contexto de Cambio de Gobierno: el caso de Paraguay* [Gender mainstreaming in a context of government change: the case of Paraguay] by Virginia Guzmán and Graziella Corvalán, ECLAC/DAW/United Nations Project, Women in Development Series No. 49, ECLAC, Women in Development Unit, Santiago, October 2003, p. 13.

national video competition on the theme "Saying No to violence in Paraguay, and No to violence in the home" was organized by the SMPR and CAVA Productions.

Institutional strengthening of women's offices at all levels is essential in order to provide training and offer technical support in regard to the generation of income, participatory planning and the execution of projects targeted to women in the poorest segment of the population. Under the Second Plan to overcome poverty and inequality, indicators that have already been devised will be used to monitor the degree to which the Plan's objectives are attained and follow up on the situation of men and women in each of the nine areas identified in the Plan, over specific periods of time. The basic objective is to design a strategy for incorporating the issue of women within institutions and programmes, so that the impact of that strategy can then be measured on the basis of the concrete changes that are identified in services and/or actions in regard to women.

Along the same lines, it is necessary to establish programmes to strengthen cultural change in regard to the many roles that women play in modern society, and to establish incentives and penalties to shape the course of such change. To support the bringing about of a change in attitudes, values and behaviours in regard to gender equity, an efficient communication system needs to be set up which is suited to the nature of information concerning the advantages of gender mainstreaming and the speed at which that information needs to be disseminated. Lastly, there is a need to promote the areas in which the Women's Bureau is active, such as poverty, employment, health and social security, economic affairs, the exercise of leadership and public discourse.

From the opinion survey conducted within the women's movement, and the proposals and views put forward by the women candidates running for elected office for the term from August 2003 to 2007, it is clear that the gender mainstreaming system launched a decade ago by the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic has become the most important factor of change aimed at making gender equity the first step in placing women on the arduous and difficult path to power in the central and local governments. However, it must be pointed out that linking government institutions and the women's movement so that they can work together smoothly represents the best foundation for ensuring that democratic governance and gender equity will be a central part of the future institutional agenda for strengthening democracy, on the basis of a new paradigm for relations between men and women.

To be sure, during the 11 years that the Women's Bureau has existed as a secretariat of the central government, formal channels have been established for implementing a gender approach across the board in other government agencies, including ministries, the Prosecutor's Office, the National Police, departmental governments, municipal governments and the Municipality of Asunción. At the beginning of 2002, for the first time in the history of inter-agency relations, the process was begun of applying gender equity across the board in the areas of action with which the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic is concerned, with related agencies, women's NGOs and other NGOs.

The Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic, in adopting a systemic approach based on policies that focus on prevention, compensation and inclusion, has set up steering groups whose members are drawn from the technical staff of the Women's Bureau and representatives of NGOs. Their

role is to guide gender policy in the implementation of the Second National Plan for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women and other specific aspects of national affairs that affect women.

Since the Women's Bureau was established, one of the services it has provided is a legal aid centre to provide women with legal services and advice in matters relating to women and their families, and give women guidance in regard to the rights. The centre also receives reports of violence against women, which, according to statistical data, is of various kinds: physical violence, psychological abuse, economic abuse, and sexual violence.

The House of Representatives now has a Standing Advisory Committee on Social Equity and Gender, which was unveiled in October 2003 in the assembly chamber of the National Congress. This new committee succeeds the Committee on Women, Youth and Sport, which had accomplished little on behalf of women during the previous Administration.

Although the National Housing Commission (CONAVI) does not have an explicit policy of targeting women, it is of interest to note that 39.4 per cent of the housing subsidies paid out are to women.

The National Development Bank (BNF) does not have any specific lines of credit for women, although data indicate that women make up 22 per cent of its borrowers. The average amount of a woman's loan is 33.8 million guaraníes, while the average amount of a man's loan is 51.7 million guaraníes.

The Project for the Sustainable Development of the Paraguayan Chaco (PRODECHACO), which falls under the Ministry of Agriculture, offers courses for campesino and indigenous women in such subjects as livestock and poultry raising, bee-keeping, food production and craftwork.

2.2 At the local government level

So far as gender mainstreaming in local government is concerned, there are a number of municipalities that have set up women's offices within their administrations, under agreements signed with the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic.

By-law 16/02 on the promotion of sexual and reproductive rights has the following objectives: (a) to promote the practice and recognition of individuals' sexual and reproductive rights; (b) to promote the conditions necessary for the full exercise of individuals' sexual and reproductive rights, including information and guidance in that connection; (c) to guarantee that everyone in the community has access to information, services and materials relating to his or her reproductive needs. The government offices responsible for carrying out these activities are the Directorate of Health and the Directorate of Municipal Gender Policy.

Municipal Council resolution 513/02 directed the Mayor's Office to sign an agreement with the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare and the Office of the First Lady to mount a campaign on the theme "Making Asunción free of cervical cancer", centring on informational talks given in the city's riverside neighbourhoods. Also in this connection, municipal by-law 301/02 waives the fees charged by the municipal health clinic for prenatal and postnatal care for expectant mothers under 20 years of age.

There are two noteworthy resolutions in the area of labour regulations. The first is resolution 214/02 concerning the dismissal of pregnant workers. This resolution requires the executive to reinstate pregnant women whose contracts have been terminated by the municipality, so that they are returned to their jobs and/or placed on legal maternity leave, and insists on full compliance with constitutional provisions. The second is resolution 1132/02, which directs the Mayor's Office to take all necessary steps to comply fully with laws and regulations aimed at protecting pregnant women in the workplace. The Municipal Council charges the Mayor's Office with promoting equality of employment opportunities and equality of treatment in recruitment, promotion and pay.

Municipal Council resolution 1259/02 concerns the prevention of all forms of violence against women and the establishment of additional offices for aiding women who have been victims of mistreatment. Resolution 213/02 encourages and supports policies aimed at reducing gender inequalities and promoting women's participation in all aspects of municipal affairs.

The Municipality of Asunción has been awarded a prize, along with 10 other Latin American cities, in the contest entitled "Affirmative action to promote women's participation in local government" sponsored by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Latin American and Caribbean Federation of Women in Municipal Government, for promoting participation by women in local government and including a gender equity approach in local development planning and public administration.⁴⁶ The three projects for which the prize was awarded, and which are now being implemented, are: (i) fairs focusing on the common cause; (ii) the barter system; and (iii) producing microentrepreneurs. These projects are being mounted by the Directorate of Municipal Gender Policy, which continues in operation.

The Directorate of Municipal Gender Policy of the Municipality of Asunción works to combat poverty from the standpoint of assuring equality of opportunities for women and men and taking affirmative action in support of women. One activity that has been carried out which is highly innovative for Paraguay, and specifically for Asunción, is that of the so-called "community intervention strategies" consisting of: (a) a non-traditional marketing arrangement involving a barter system and community vegetable gardens; and (b) joint productive microentrepreneurial undertakings as a production and marketing strategy. These joint productive undertakings represent an alternative form of employment and development, linked not only to economic variables but also to questions of ethics and common cause relating to self-esteem, emotional ties, stability and quality of life.

As women strengthen their skills and abilities, improve their level of schooling, and gain access to more employment opportunities, this has an immense impact on the lives of all their family members, thus creating benefits at both the individual and community levels. This becomes all the more evident when one takes into account the fact that 25.6 per cent of women are heads of households. In one project, the target group consisted of 115 families distributed into nine nodes (barter groups); men and women learned about the nutritional value of different foods, and women heads of households became active in the community and in organizations.

⁴⁶ Clyde Soto, foreword to the document "Descentralización y Género. Referencias con respecto a la Orientación en Género" ["Decentralization and gender. Reference resources on the subject of guidance in gender programmes"], Dorothee Hammer, GTZ, Asunción, 5 June 2003.

The project "School vegetable garden in the San Blas-Puerto Botánico district" had women and men working in the informal sector as its target group. It sought to increase the percentage of women growing their own food and participating in a barter system, and promote the rational use of their resources. Several groups were formed as part of this project: 10 groups producing cleaning products; two groups preparing flavoured organic soy juices; three groups baking enriched bread; one group preparing sauces and sweets; one group preparing traditional food dishes; two groups making party supplies and favours; and five groups making handmade jewellery.

The project "Training in traditional and non-traditional skills" included courses in such subjects as: making goods out of recycled materials; making cleaning products; making homemade sweets; making soy-based food products; making breads and pastries; fundamentals of electricity and electrical appliances; making party supplies and favours; soap-making; handcrafts and crocheted articles; homemade pasta; and jewellery-making.

For 2004, the Directorate of Municipal Gender Policy of the Municipality of Asunción plans to extend the projects described above and launch two new projects: "Active citizenship and the prevention of domestic violence", and "Processing and marketing of fruits and vegetables for women heads of households and young people in Asunción".

On 6 November 2002, pursuant to Decision 1205, the Standing Advisory Committee on Gender Equity of the Asunción Municipal Council was established in order to meet the challenge of guaranteeing equality of opportunity, upholding this principle which embodies social transformation and progress, implementing affirmative action measures and ensuring that the implementation of public policy in the municipal government incorporates a gender perspective.

Municipalities neighbouring Asunción have their own women's bureaux as well. The objectives of the Women's Bureau of the Municipality of San Lorenzo, which was established in 1998, are mainly limited to training women leaders in social and community matters and promoting women's rights. The Women's Bureau of the Municipality of Fernando de la Mora supports the comprehensive development of women by organizing courses, workshops, and so on. In 2002 and 2003, the NGO Women for Democracy mounted a project in both municipalities centring on the theme of women and local politics, aimed at empowering women in the community.

In April 2004, the Gender Equity Committee of the Asunción Municipal Council asked the full Council to adopt a regulation requiring the use, in all documents, of the proper Spanish masculine or feminine form for position titles, academic degrees and occupations, depending on the person being addressed or referred to.

Because of the technical and financial support that it provides to NGOs, the SMPR and women's offices in the municipalities, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) continues to be the most important cooperation-funding agency in the area of sexual and reproductive health and in the development of policies and strategies in regard to population and development, as it has been for several decades. In this connection, the Gender Equity Committee of the Asunción Municipal Council and UNFPA will, at the end of May, jointly issue a publication

under the title *Presupuesto Municipal de Asunción. Análisis desde las Perspectivas de Equidad y de Género. Ejercicio Fiscal 2004* [Asunción municipal budget. Analysis from the standpoints of equity and gender, 2004 fiscal year].

2.3 In civil society

During the political campaigns that took place in 2002 and the early part of 2003, prior to the change of government, the Women's Movement – consisting of the Paraguayan Women's Coordination Unit (CMP) and its 10 member organizations; the Paraguayan Multiparty Women's Coordination Unit (CIMPAR); the Network of Women in Government; the Paraguayan Network of Women in Municipal Government (RMMP), which has recently and after much effort succeeded in joining the Federation of Regional and Local Government Associations; the Paraguayan Human Rights Coordination Unit (CODEHUPY); and the Directorate of Municipal Gender Policy – joined with the SMPR itself to organize panel discussions and study groups to examine the advance draft of proposed legislation for the reform of the State, in view of the possibility that the legislation could be defeated or revised; and in so doing the Women's Movement demonstrated its solid, visible support for the strengthening of the current SMPR.

In the view of the women's organizations, the advance draft of the legislation known as the Ministries Act marked a serious step backwards *vis-à-vis* the effort expended and the advances achieved over the past several years regarding women's rights at various levels and in various spheres of civil society and the Public Administration, thanks to which the Women's Bureau had become the leading public agency for developing and managing gender policies concerned with comprehensive human development, together with agencies and institutions concerned with the advancement of women throughout the country, utilizing affirmative-action measures in favour of women.

The achievements of Paraguayan women over the past two decades, not only on the issue of legal equality but above all in matters relating to an understanding of the status and condition of women, have given rise to a large number of proposals from various segments of the population aimed at pursuing a growing and irreversible process of social and cultural change. Consequently, the State must play a central role, through education and training, in meeting the challenges of the next millennium. In this effort, education policies, and especially policies regarding higher education, are of critical importance, given the challenges the country must face in the expanding process of regional integration.

The process of institutional decentralization as it is applied to the work of incorporating the gender perspective is also of concern to the Women's Movement in civil society at the present time, as the Women's Movement is seeking out groups through which it can build ties to women's organizations in the Interior, so as to strengthen and increase its membership by gaining new members from different levels of society, develop new women leaders, and expand and strengthen feminist thought and action beyond the city limits of Asunción.

The first activity carried out as part of this process took place in November 2003 in the city of San Bernardino with the holding of the First Paraguayan Feminists Assembly. It was organized by the Paraguayan Women's Coordination Unit, a number of associations (representing women in government, the cooperative movement, and non-formal education) and local women's groups,

with the assistance of UNFPA, the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights (CLADEM) and the private sector. The Assembly was supported by approximately 1,500 people, especially indigenous persons and women, from different parts of Paraguay.

Through the Paraguayan Women's Coordination Unit, the Women's Movement engaged in a participatory process, consulting various groups of women in regard to the drafting of Law 1600/2000 on domestic violence, which involved magistrate's courts, the National Police, health centres and the Women's Bureau. Along the same lines, a national campaign against domestic violence was mounted in 1998. The Workers' Association for the Eradication of All Forms of Sexual Harassment on the Job conducted a very active campaign to raise awareness on the part of workers and employers alike. Worthy of special mention is the successful awareness outreach campaign conducted in the capital and in the Interior, whose messages publicized the names of organizations that assist women who have been victims of violence, in an effort to involve men in the task of assuring the protection of women.

Part V

3. Strengthening of gender mainstreaming

In regard to mainstreaming the gender approach, programmes need to be established to strengthen cultural change, and which use incentives and penalties to support that change. To bring about a change in attitudes, values and behaviours in regard to gender equity, an efficient communication system needs to be set up which is suited to the speed at which information concerning the advantages of gender mainstreaming needs to be relayed. Lastly, there is a need to promote the areas in which the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic is active, such as poverty, employment, health and social security, economic affairs, the exercise of leadership and public discourse.

The gender mainstreaming system launched a decade ago by the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic has become the most important factor of change aimed at making gender equity the first step in placing women on the arduous and difficult path to power in government. However, it must be pointed out that linking government institutions and the women's movement so that they can work together smoothly represents the best foundation for ensuring that democratic governance and gender equity can move forward together.

Obstacles, shortcomings and problems that still exist to hamper the advancement of women

Among the outstanding challenges in Paraguay in dealing with the many and varied circumstances of women and moving forward on social development issues is the need to reflect social objectives in macroeconomic management, in order to generate productive jobs, reduce poverty and improve the distribution of income. Increasing the effectiveness of social spending, improving the evaluation of priorities, and including efficiency and equity criteria based on the setting of priorities for providing basic services, greater impetus for decentralization, citizen participation, training of human resources and institutional strengthening are matters of the highest priority for gender equity and women's empowerment.

In general, actions aimed at encouraging the participation of women have been mounted in the areas of gender, violence, reproductive health, social and political

leadership, the environment, human rights, citizenship, and so forth. These actions have taken the form of courses, workshops, seminars, outreach presentations, etc., and have often been organized in the Interior.

Thus far, no women have managed to attain the most senior decision-making posts in government, although in the elections for the term of office from 2003 to 2008, for the first time in the country's history, a woman belonging to the opposition won a departmental governorship. Women have won a significant proportion of second-tier posts, according to statistics from the Central Elections Commission: 4.7 per cent of municipal mayors, 17.7 per cent of municipal councillors, and 14 per cent of departmental councillors. Women's lack of experience in politics and public speaking, in presenting a line of reasoning in debates, and in analysing the political, social and economic situation are obstacles to their success in politics.

The main problem is that in a country such as Paraguay, which has extremely fragile State institutions, sees frequent changes of government, assigns little importance to women's issues and is racked by economic crisis, speeches and programmes and laws do not always become a full part of the workings of government. Consequently, there is a risk that the First National Plan for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women (PIO I) and the recently issued Second National Plan (PIO II) that was approved by presidential decree, will not be implemented in all government policies across the board or will be ignored when a new government takes office.⁴⁷ The risk increases when civil society is relatively weak, and becomes greater still if very few women hold effective decision-making posts in the central government, local government and decentralized agencies as a result of the fact that gender equity is absent from the agendas of those responsible for conducting the country's political affairs.

4. The Paraguayan population

To conclude this report, the following is a brief overview of the situation of Paraguay's population according to data from the National Population and Housing Census conducted in 2002 and the Comprehensive Household Survey conducted in 2000–2001. The country has a total population of 5,183,080, and for the first time men outnumber women (51 per cent to 49 per cent). This represents a change in comparison with previous censuses in which women have always outnumbered men, as in the 1992 census in which women were 52 per cent of the population. Men outnumber women in rural areas as well (54 per cent to 43 per cent).⁴⁸

The birthrate has fallen sharply, as the annual rate of population growth, which in 1992 was 3 per cent or more, fell in 2002 to a compound rate of 2.2 per cent. Immigration and emigration are not major factors as they were in previous decades, and so the decline in the rate of population growth must be attributable to a falling birthrate. Data from the 2000–2001 Comprehensive Household Survey showed a

⁴⁷ Virginia Guzmán and Graziella Corvalán, *La Institucionalidad de Género en un Contexto de Cambio de Gobierno: el caso de Paraguay* [Gender mainstreaming in a context of government change: the case of Paraguay], ECLAC, Women in Development Series, ECLAC/DAW/United Nations Project, Santiago, October 2003.

⁴⁸ Oscar Barrios, "El Censo Nacional de Población y su incidencia en las políticas públicas" ["The National Census and its impact on public policy"], in *Población y Desarrollo* [Population and Development], National University of Asunción, Faculty of Economics, UNFPA, San Lorenzo, Paraguay, Year XIII, No. 23, December 2002.

certain change in migration patterns over the past decade. During that period, the main migratory flow was the urban-to-urban flow (40 per cent), followed by the rural-to-rural flow (21.5 per cent) and the rural-to-urban flow (17.6 per cent). The ease with which people can move about and the spread of the mass media have brought about a sort of "ruralization" of urban life, as well as profound changes in the way people in rural areas feel and act in general.

Given that the country has both Spanish and Guaraní as official languages, the specific sociolinguistic characteristics of the Paraguayan population are important in connection with educational and cultural development. According to the 2000–2001 Comprehensive Household Survey, the languages most spoken in the home are: Guaraní, 50.5 per cent; Spanish, 24.7 per cent; Guaraní and Spanish, 20.2 per cent; and other languages, 4.5 per cent.

Of the population 15 years of age and over, 91.7 per cent are literate: that is, they have successfully completed at least their second year of school. The illiteracy rate, which is 8.4 per cent overall, varies depending on people's age, sex and place of origin. The illiteracy rate is lower for men (6.9 per cent) than for women (9.8 per cent). Women's lifespans and universal access to education are two factors that come into play. However, for the population 18 years of age and over, the average period of schooling is 7.1 years. Here, the data show no difference between the sexes: the average is 8 years for both men and women. As one would expect, the most striking difference in length of schooling is associated with economic level, ranging from 4.4 years for the poorest quintile of the population to 10.1 years for the richest quintile.

For a decade, the government's priorities have centred on improving health services and family planning, a high-priority area considering that Paraguay has one of the highest fertility rates in Latin America (4.2) and has a very young population overall. In 1999, only 58.6 per cent of the population used some method of contraception. The figure today is 48 per cent, 41 per cent in rural areas and 59 per cent in urban areas (UNICEF, 2001).

During the period from 1995 to 2000, the country's rate of population growth was 2.59 per cent, a relatively high level for Latin America. The overall fertility rate was 4.0, with a significant gap between urban areas (4.1) and rural areas (6.1).

There is a greater need for family planning in poor households because there are a great many of them and there is a significant correlation between fertility and poverty. In urban areas, 46 per cent of poor households consist of more than ten people, 36 per cent consist of six to nine people, and 17 per cent consist of four or five people. In other words, 99 per cent of all households consist of more than four people. The situation is worse in rural areas, where 73 per cent of households consist of more than ten people.⁴⁹

The problem of the ageing of the country's population is more serious, because it is happening more quickly than in other countries. It is estimated that the population over 60 years of age will grow at rates in excess of 4 per cent between

⁴⁹ Manuelita Escobar, "El FNUAP y el reto de un desarrollo sin exclusiones" ["UNFPA and the challenge of pursuing development without leaving anyone behind"], in *Memorias del Foro Pobreza, Población y Desarrollo, POBLACIÓN Y DESARROLLO* [Proceedings of the Forum on Poverty, Population and Development], M. Escobar, L. Bareiro and H. Oddone, UNFPA, Asunción, July 2002, p. 8.

2000 and 2025, and this will have a profound impact on all aspects of individual and community life at the national and international levels. Principally, this demographic shift will result in fewer children, more adults and more old people, given that the 2002 census shows a life expectancy of 73 years for women and 68 years for men. In 2002, 4.9 per cent of the population was 65 years of age or over. As in other countries, the cult of youth and indifference towards the elderly mean that there is little appreciation for the knowledge and experience that the elderly have acquired during their lives.

The ageing of the population is especially serious because poverty is widespread, inequality continues to prevail, the informal sector accounts for half of all employment and social-security institutions are inadequate. In addition, changes in family structures brought about as a result of the demographic shift mean that older adults will have fewer children, will have less income or no income at all, and will be more likely to live in poverty.

Today, the vast majority of Paraguayans, whatever their social status, age or sex, are altogether unaware of the International Plan of Action on Ageing adopted in Madrid in 2002. They continue to view older persons as an obstacle to development and a mere repository of memories, rather than seeing age and experience as resources that can contribute to development. But it will only be possible for older persons to make their contribution if radical cultural changes take place, and that is something which must be accomplished beginning with primary-school education and the family. Consequently, there are no planning processes under way that take older persons into account as a driving force in development. In a sense, the fact that everything young and new is held in high regard while everything old is looked down upon with disdain offers a parallel to the more extreme attitudes and behaviours towards women. The reality is that to be a woman, old and poor, is tantamount to being excluded from life, at least so far as the modern world is concerned.

Paraguay today is a country of children, as its population has seven people under 15 years of age for every person over 60 years of age, but in the next 15 to 20 years it will become a progressively more aged country, with only four children for every older adult. This demographic shift is a reality – inescapable, predictable and quantifiable. The future generations of Paraguay's elderly are already with us. This change is approaching steadily, but it is manageable if we start managing it right away.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Zulma Sosa and E. Barrios, "El envejecimiento de la población paraguaya está en plena marcha" ["The ageing of Paraguay's population is under way now"], in *Memorias, 1er. Congreso Paraguayo de Población* [Proceedings of the First Paraguayan Population Congress], UNFPA, ADEPO, Asunción, August 2003.