

Population policy in Mexico and its relationship to development

Elena Zúñiga Herrera

Chair

Commission on Population and
Development

The launch of Mexico's population policy

- 1936: President Lázaro Cárdenas signed the first population law.
- The law promoted population growth by encouraging marriage, childbearing, maternal and child health, immigration and the repatriation of emigrants.

The demographic transition started in the 1930s in Mexico

- In the 1930s, mortality decline began to accelerate, contributing to accelerate population growth
- At the same time economic growth increased, leading authorities to argue that a larger population was needed to sustain growth

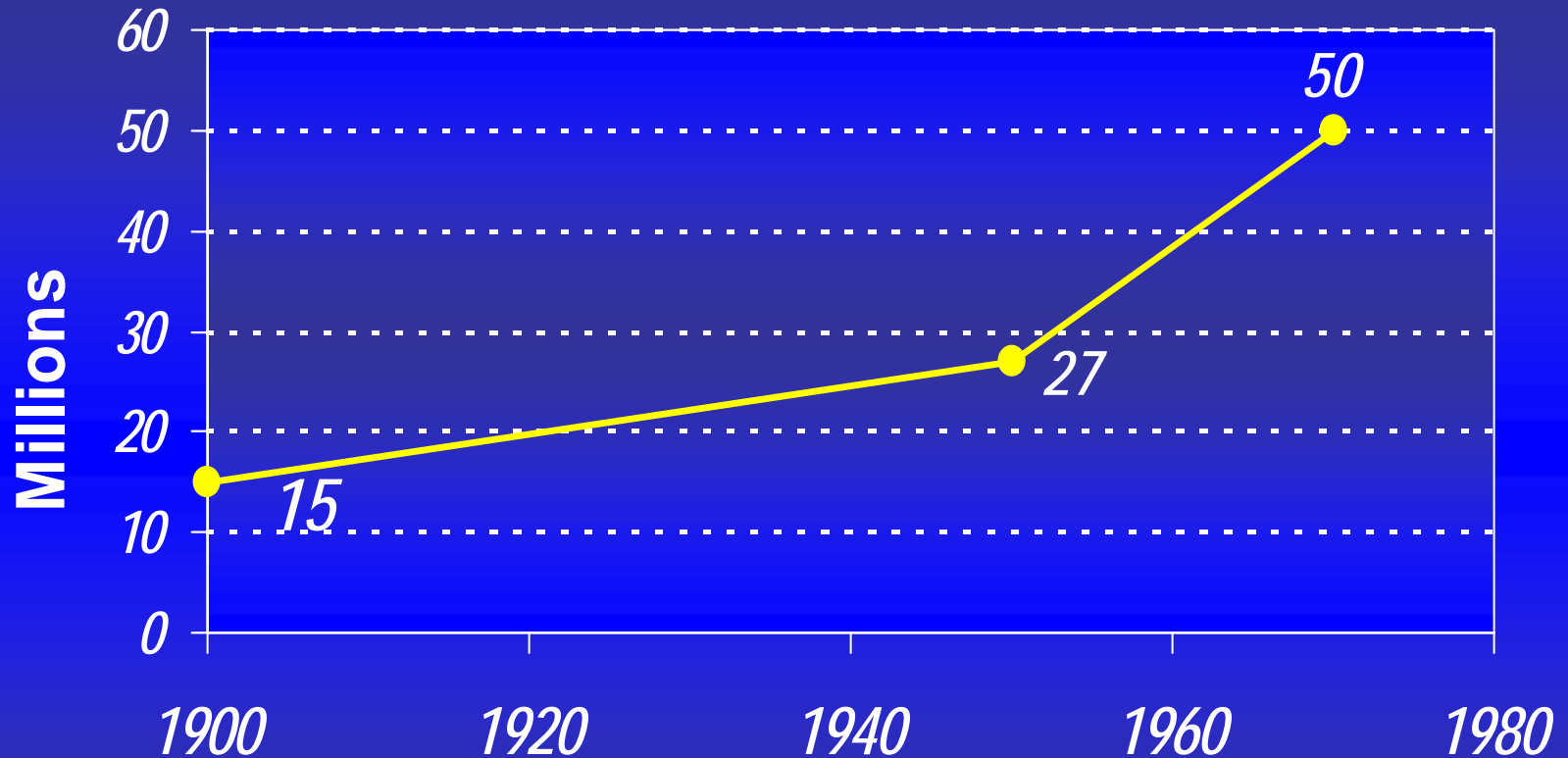
The first amendment of the population law

- In 1947, the population law was amended to promote higher immigration (Mexico was an important country of asylum for European migrants, especially from Spain)
- At that time, the population was increasing by about half a million people annually

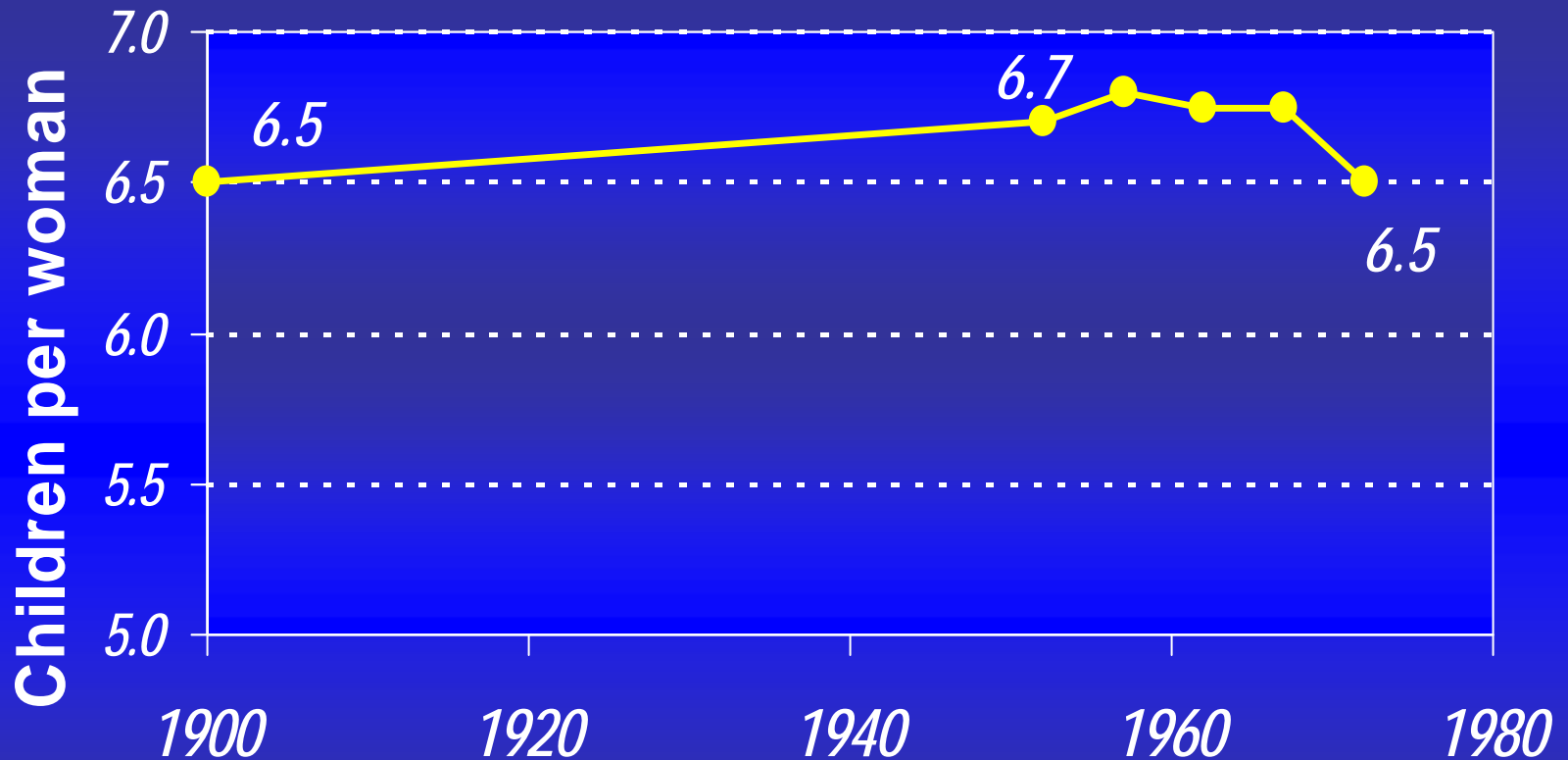
Pronatalism coincided with economic growth

- From 1935 to 1970 the Mexican economy grew at an average rate of 6 per cent per year
- Sustained economic growth maintained optimism about the prospects for a growing population, but as mortality continued to decrease, population growth accelerated markedly

Population growth in Mexico accelerated after 1950



Fertility in Mexico remained high



México 1970: A typical family



The benefits of Mexico's rapid population growth began to be questioned in the 1960s

- Mexican intellectuals and government officials started to debate whether rapid population growth was beneficial and considered whether government policy might be effective in changing desired family size
- Some argued that promoting family planning would not only have health and social benefits, but would also favour economic development
- Others argued that development itself was necessary for a policy to reduce family size to be successful

The debate led to a rethinking of population policy

- In 1974 the Constitution was amended to ensure the legal equality of men and women and to enshrine access to family planning as an individual right
- Mexico was the second country in the world to incorporate the right to decide the number and spacing of one's children in its Constitution

The 1974 law made population policy an integral part of development policy

- The new law aimed to reduce population growth to promote development
- It explicitly called for measures to ensure a better spatial distribution of the population
- It emphasized the use of education, information and communication to build a demographic culture
- It promoted the participation of women in the development process in equality with men

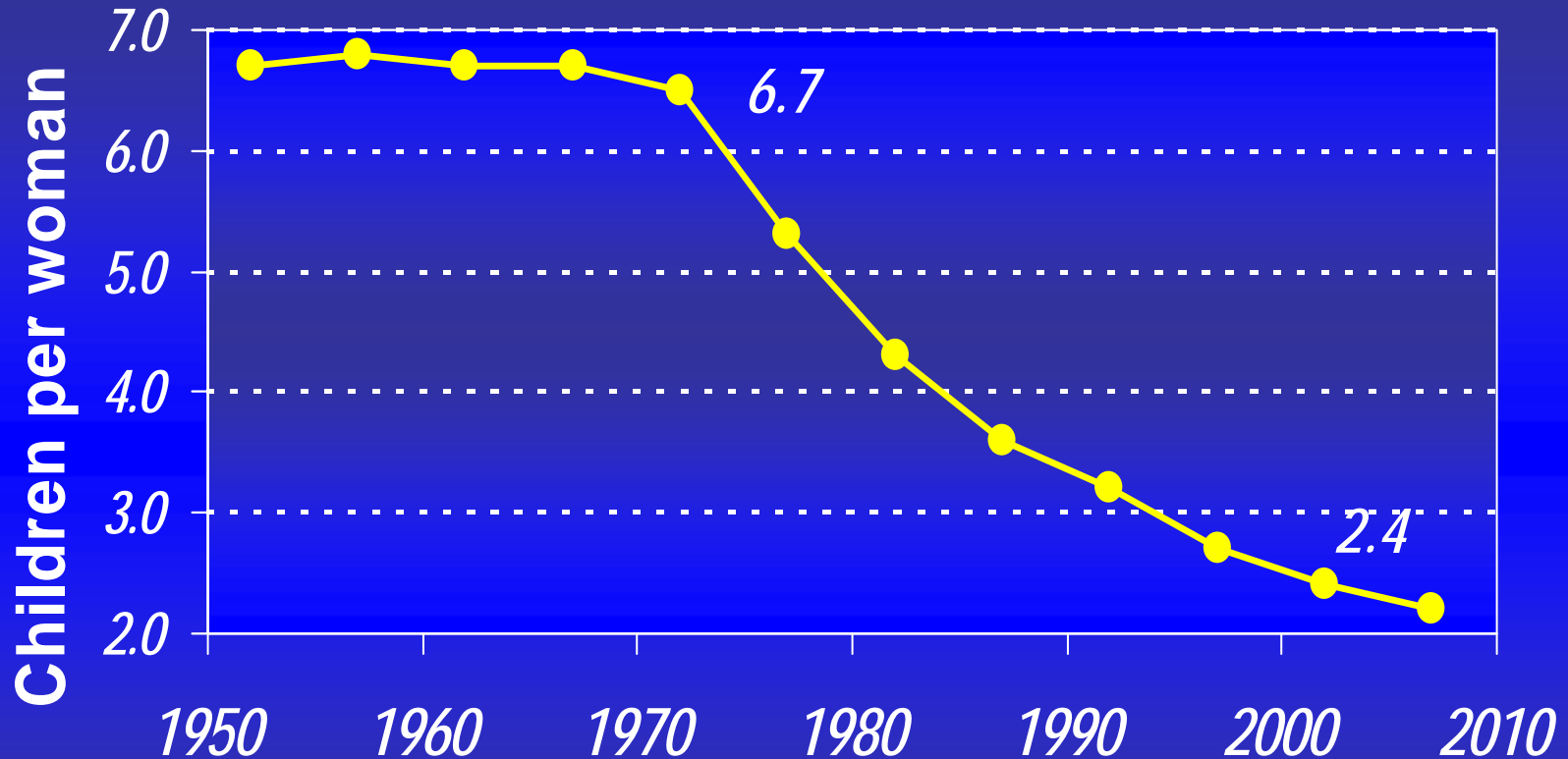
The 1974 law also set up a new institutional structure to ensure its implementation

- The National Population Council (CONAPO) was set up by the 1974 law as a multi-sectorial institution bringing together several Government entities to guide the implementation of population policy
- CONAPO was charged with designing the tools for the integration of population in development planning

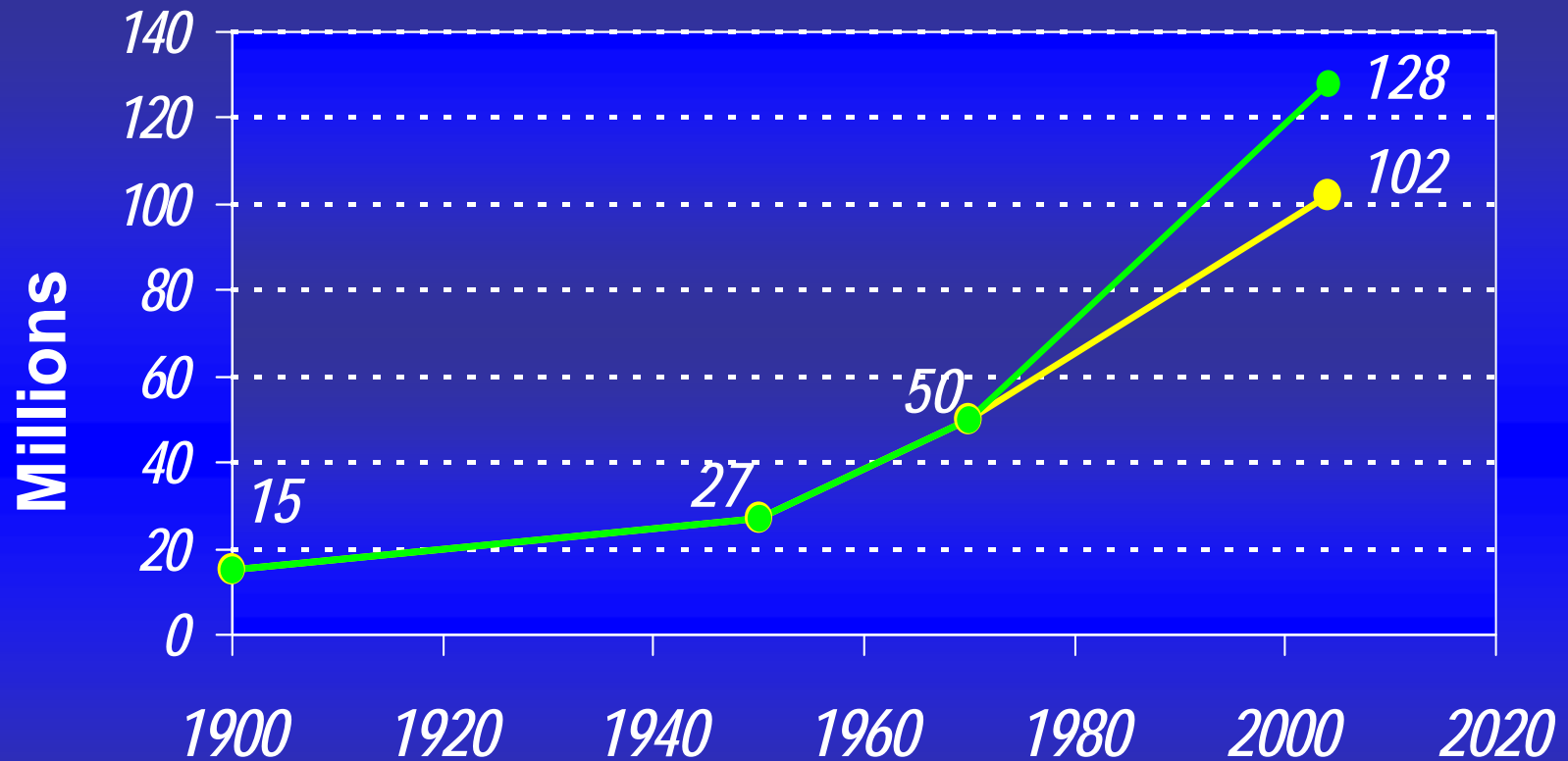
The role of CONAPO has expanded geographically and socially

- In 1984, Population Councils were established at the state level
- In 2003, a Citizens Consultative Council on Population Policy was established to link with civil society

The policy was successful in promoting fertility decline



If the 1974 policy had been delayed by a decade, Mexico would have had 128 million inhabitants in 2004



With a 10 year delay in implementing the 1974 policy Mexico would have faced greater challenges

- In 2004, annual population increase would have been 2.8 million persons instead of 1.6 million
- Vaccination costs would have increased by at least 60 per cent
- Education would have had to be provided to at least 40 per cent additional pupils

Despite a fairly successful population policy, Mexico still faces a number of challenges

- We need to combat inequalities in access to reproductive health care: today still, poorer people are not getting the services they need
- Marriage still takes place fairly early in a woman's life and childbearing also starts early (the mean age of mothers at the birth of first child is 21.9 years), implying that many women and men are curtailing their education
- We need to prepare for the expected ageing of the population



Thank you!