

EL SALVADOR

**REPLIES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE TO GOVERNMENTS
ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR
ACTION (1995)
AND THE OUTCOME OF THE TWENTY-THIRD SPECIAL
SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2000)**

San Salvador, April 2004

PART ONE

Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment

(a) Article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic states that all persons are equal before the law without distinction as to nationality, race, sex or religion. This is the basic premise on which gender equality is predicated and it has been the central idea behind various Government plans over the last ten years¹.

More specifically, in 1997, equal opportunities for men and women formed the cornerstone for the elaboration of the National Policy on Women, which embraced three fundamental principles, to wit: equal opportunities, sustainability of opportunities and the encouragement of participation. Two Plans of Action (1997-1999 and 2000-2004) flowing from this policy pinpointed ten areas of crucial importance² for improving the status and enhancing the position of women.

The Salvadoran Institute for the Advancement of Women (ISDEMU) was set up to oversee the implementation of gender equality at Government level. This national mechanism is responsible for coordinating the monitoring and execution of schemes. A three-level supervisory and executive mechanism has been established in order to ensure the substantive realization of the initiatives. The Commission for the Evaluation and Monitoring of the National Policy on Women, comprising the ministers on the Institute's governing body, constitutes the first level. The second level consists of the Institute's Unit for Monitoring the National Policy on Women and Training, while the third level is formed by the institutions which carry out the national Plans of Action.

(b) Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, a National Policy on Women has been devised and two Plans of Action have been carried out. They have involved a gradual process of institutional adaptation which has resulted, *inter alia*, in an improvement in women's social and economic indicators.

The governing body of ISDEMU receives an annual report on the headway being made with the fulfilment of the Plan of Action and thus areas where implementation has fallen short of expectations are spotlighted.

In this context, the main challenge lies in heightening the awareness and securing the commitment of successive Government administrations to these Plans of Action.

(c) The Government of El Salvador endorsed the Millennium Declaration and it is undertaking the requisite action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. To this end, it has appointed a Presidential Commission for Social Affairs which coordinates national efforts to

¹ In 1993, the first public policy instrument, entitled "National Plan for Salvadoran Women", was presented with the support of the National Secretariat for the Family.

² Legislation; education; health; labour; civic and political participation; family; violence; agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing and food; environment, and communications and culture.

monitor and carry out schemes aimed at their attainment. As part of these efforts, the Salvadoran Government is taking the appropriate steps to cover the substance of the Fourth World Conference on Women and what was agreed at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. For example, the purpose of poverty, hunger, health and education indicators linked to gender is to reveal real disparities between men and women in various social risk sectors. This makes it possible to guarantee comprehensive, consistent action to devise, or improve on, substantive measures.

Millennium Development Goal 3, referring to gender equality, has called for efforts on the part of the Ministry of Education in order to achieve significant progress towards the complete elimination of any sexual stereotyping throughout the education system. This has been done by introducing gender mainstreaming in schools (changes in the curriculum, revision of textbooks and teacher training).

(d) After the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981, some big debates took place on how to incorporate gender perspective and take women's interests into account in legislation. These debates have led to substantial amendments to national legislation in order to implement the Convention. It should be emphasized that the fact that CEDAW is in force in our country has facilitated the ratification and implementation of conventions like the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará) and conventions of international bodies, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), which further women's interests.

Our country has submitted six reports on compliance with CEDAW and, at present, the requisite action is being taken to carry out the recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in the report CEDAW/C/2003/I/CRP.3/Add.3/Rev.1.

(e) The successes obtained with the National Policy on Women and its respective Plans of Action have produced results which go beyond changes in national legislation and which seek to promote greater gender equality and to empower women. Some of the chief achievements in the legislative field are:

- Approval of the Domestic Violence Act (1996) and amendments thereto (2002), in which appropriate mechanisms were put in place to prevent, penalize and end family violence;

- Amendment of article 1 of the Constitution so as to recognize any human being as a human person from the moment of conception (February 1999);

- Revision of the Civil Code (1999), derogation from article 107, paragraph 1, to remove women's legal incapacity to act as witnesses to a solemn will, which was held in El Salvador to be a discriminatory provision;

- Ratification in 2000 of the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) of the ILO, which refer to equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value and to equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women workers, respectively;
- Revision of the Family Code (2004), so as to limit access to loans, driving licences and passports for persons who fail to meet their obligations to their children (maintenance);
- Revision of the Family Procedural Code (2004), with respect to the format of the sworn declaration of paternity, the latter being one of the factors taken into consideration when determining maintenance;
- Issuing of the provisional decree amending the Family Property Act, which laid down in respect of the reconstruction of family homes destroyed by the earthquake in 2001 that, by operation of law, they remained family property in that the whole family had to approve the title deed;
- Reform of the Labour Code (2004) to extend the ban prohibiting employers from demanding that women seeking employment must furnish proof that they are not pregnant as a precondition of being hired;
- Establishment of the Mutual Fund for Salvadoran Family Micro Businesses Act (FOSOFAMILIA), which provides for credit lines to micro business set-ups, with a view to generating opportunities and contributing to the integration of women in the world of productive work.

(f) In El Salvador, a gender perspective has gradually been included in national budgets over the last 10 years. Financial resources channelled to the institutions responsible for carrying out the National Policy on Women to sponsor activities fostering gender equality were estimated to account for some 20% of the national budget approved for 2003.

Efforts are currently under way to design and encourage the use of tools facilitating the elaboration of budgets and the monitoring of their gender focus. ISDEMU is developing a series of preliminary awareness-raising and capacity-building activities to create a propitious environment for the adoption of this instrument making for equitable public policy.

(g) The principal debates in the Salvadoran Parliament concerning gender perspective and women's interests revolve around the introduction of new or tougher punitive measures to protect women against various forms of violence. Rape³, sexual harassment⁴, sexual exploitation⁵ and commercialization and trafficking in persons have been considered and discussed at length. Different measures have been approved in order to do more to root out these practices which impair women's well-being.

³ Penal Code, article 163, rape of a person aged between 14 and 18, prison sentence of between 4 and 10 years.

⁴ Penal Code, article 165, imprisonment for 3 to 5 years.

⁵ Penal Code, article 170-A, imprisonment for 4 to 8 years.

(h) In El Salvador, the Peace Agreements signed in 1992 triggered a process of social reconstruction. Although women played an active role during the conflict, they still suffered from discrimination in a variety of situations (women soldiers, internally displaced women, refugee women and women heads of households). Compensation, forced migration, property rights and the economic and social re-integration of women are being discussed in the ongoing debate between the diverse sectors involved in the peace process.

At the time of demobilization, some 40 per cent of the approximately 15,000 members of the repatriated rebel forces were women. They have spoken of the lack of gender mainstreaming during the peace process⁶.

Before that, women's rights as citizens, their political participation and their leading role in economic and social development were widely debated and taken on board by various sectors of society. In 1993, the First National Plan for Salvadoran Women was proposed with the support of the National Secretariat for Women. It tasked various Government institutions with launching action to extend the benefits of development to women. The Salvadoran women's movement also suggested the Mujeres 94 initiative as a means of drawing up a joint platform of demands.

These and other components were elements of an institutionalization process that was reflected in the Government National Development Plan (1994-1999), which in turn spawned the National Policy on Women and its framework for the advancement of women.

(i) Globalization has offered an opportunity for women to become more part of worldwide chains of production. The Salvadoran Government has particularly encouraged preparations for coping with this trend. Gaining access to information and knowledge has now become one of the priorities of the educational system, as have efforts to eliminate gender inequalities in primary and secondary schools. Job creation in export assembly plants (*maquiladoras*) and the adoption of ethical standards and codes are enabling women to find work providing them with a basic income that generates opportunities for them and their families. Special attention has likewise been devoted to technical training for non-traditional jobs and to vocational training at newly created Production and Training Centres for Women, which are sponsored by ISDEMU.

Salvadoran women in the informal sector have benefited from support programmes for micro businesses. This support includes, among other things, training, access to credit, handling negotiations, advice on export plans and the opening of marketing and sales channels. Institutions like the Salvadoran Vocational Training Institute, the National Commission for the Development of Small Businesses, the Social Investment Fund for Local Development and a network of agencies that promote local development (information centres and local development agencies) have backed programmes aimed at coping with globalization in various sectors where women predominate.

Similarly, the free-trade agreements, which have recently been signed, constitute a major opportunity for women to obtain access to new markets.

⁶ Camille Pampell Conaway and Salomé Martínez, Adding Value: Women's Contributions to Reintegration and Reconstruction in El Salvador, January 2004

(j) Some institutions have drawn up gender policies; they include the National Civil Police, CARITAS El Salvador (confederation of Catholic relief organizations), the Social Investment Fund, the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, the National Farming Technology Centre and projects run by the Ministry of Agriculture and Stockbreeding.

In some municipalities, the formulation of gender policies has had encouraging results like the creation of posts for women town councillors.

One of the main achievements of these policies has been the creation of gender units and the implementation of gender-focused plans, programmes and projects, which have helped to eliminate discriminatory practices and incorporate women's interests in development programmes.

(k) From the moment it was set up, ISDEMU has included representatives of civil society organizations on its governing body, in that it has four places for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (two full members and two alternates), which are democratically elected from among NGOs working for women's advancement.

The execution of the Plan of Action for the implementation of the National Policy on Women likewise required the coordination of efforts with NGOs and civil society groups through the signing of agreements and letters of understanding and through the implementation of programmes and projects entailing practical measures for the benefit of women.

Lastly, ISDEMU participates in a dialogue with organized women's groups from Salvadoran civil society on subjects related to the enhancement of women's status.

(l) In El Salvador, attempts to encourage men and boys to participate in the promotion of gender equality have centred on education. One of the very first steps has been to include gender focus in the curriculum for the first twelve years of schooling in order to break down sexist values, attitudes and practices which work to the detriment of Salvadoran women. Similarly, a series of measures has been adopted to incorporate gender focus in technical education so as to enable women to acquire technical proficiency. The educational process also encompasses values, attitudes and practices which foster gender equality, especially through the adoption of standards of fairness and mutual respect in all State schools.

To consolidate this action, ISDEMU strives to institutionalize gender focus by holding awareness-raising conferences and seminars to train men to act responsibly and to be responsible fathers.

Academic centres conduct surveys and they regularly publish studies on fertility, sexual and reproductive health, responsible male behaviour and responsible fatherhood which fuel the debate and contribute new insights to these activities.

PART TWO

Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the further initiatives and actions identified in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

(a) In El Salvador, encouraging results have generally been achieved with regard to the critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action and to other essential questions relating to women. Below we list the fields to which special priority has been given.

Education

At national level, great headway has been made with the educational advancement of women.

The average schooling received by women has grown at an annual rate of 1.7 per cent over the last ten years, rising from 4.6 to 5.4 years in 2002. More girls are starting the educational process by going to nursery school. The gross rate of attendance went up from 22.3 per cent in 1992 to 47.7 per cent in 2002.

Girl's gross rate of attendance in secondary education climbed from 34.3 per cent to 47.8 per cent between 1992 and 2002. Women's gross rate of participation in higher education expanded from 9.6 per cent in 1995 to 15.9 per cent in 2002.

The improvement in the abovementioned indicators has been due to the Government's unremitting efforts in the field of State education policies, which particularly encourage the active participation of women. Mention should be made of the following initiatives.

In 2003, the Basic Literacy Education for Adults Programme (whose acronym in Spanish is PAEBA), which is being run by the Ministry of Education of El Salvador, was attended by 23,291 persons, 52 per cent of whom were women. Illiteracy among women has been reduced through radio campaigns backing the programme's adult literacy circles. In addition, training programmes on the application of gender focus in education have been started for the literacy tutors and outreach workers who teach the adult literacy circles.

In recent years, increasing numbers of women have opted for training in technical or technological careers which have not traditionally been their domain. For example, in 2002, 29.3 per cent of the 1,941 students graduating from higher technical education were women, whereas in previous years they accounted for barely 5 to 10 per cent (technical occupations include biomedical, civil, electrical, food, electronic, computer and industrial engineering).

In order to consolidate this trend, the reform of secondary technical education is being furthered by a project which sets out to improve the quality and fairness of the teaching system and, in particular to enhance its gender equity. To date, the following main activities have been carried out:

- Research into sexism by eight National Institutes of Educational Innovation in order to identify the contributory factors which lead to girls dropping out of school and in order to resolve this kind of problem;
- Production of equity education modules, research into fairness and standards of fairness and mutual respect in schools;
- Inclusion of a gender focus in nursery and primary school textbooks;
- Research into girls' education in technical colleges with a view to identifying obstacles to their progress and ways of encouraging them to take up non-traditional technical studies.

These efforts have been accompanied by moves to sharpen teachers' awareness of gender focus and equal opportunities and to give them the appropriate training. Education consultants in schools and the technical teaching staff of technological colleges in the central, western and eastern areas of the country have received training as "gender officers" so as to guarantee that, in practice, girls are included in educational processes without any discrimination.

As the Ministry of Education recognizes the importance of setting standards for non-discriminatory relations in the educational community, it has drawn up handbooks on social interaction that cover the aspects of gender perspective and human rights and that deal with special situations such as keeping pregnant teenagers and young mothers in the education system.

To ensure compliance with these rules, the Ministry of Education has set up a public complaints office to deal with reports of discrimination against pregnant students and young mothers in an attempt to prevent their stigmatization and to stop them abandoning their studies.

Moves have been made to heighten an awareness of the National Policy on Women among members of the Higher Education Board in order to encourage the revision of the curriculum and textbooks and to prompt more research. In fact, universities have started to hold specialized gender studies courses. In 1990, the José Simeón Cañas Central American University, which is pioneering specialized studies in gender and public policies, introduced a course on women and development. At present, eight universities provide courses where gender mainstreaming forms part of the range of educational topics covered.

Efforts to boost gender equality in educational processes have also been welcomed by various sectors of private enterprise and the media, as can be seen from the realization of the Girls' Education Project. The aim of this joint project of the Ministry of Education and the National Secretariat for the Family is to mount public information campaigns underscoring the importance of educating girls and giving them support, chiefly using the press, radio, posters, advertisements on public transport and videos. Furthermore, conscience-raising workshops will be held for community leaders, monks, nuns, adults and young people. The purpose of this action is to place girls' education high on the national agenda and to secure the commitment of various sectors of the country.

The Education for Life Programme, in which the Ministry of Education, the National Secretariat for the Family and the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare cooperate, has adopted a cross-cutting approach to gender perspective in all the activities carried out under the

programme, both in the field of formal education (curricular development and further training for teachers and education consultants) and in that of informal education (members of the Youth Brigade, parents and youngsters taking part in the Open Schools Programme)⁷.

The Youth of El Salvador Programme, which is masterminded by the National Secretariat for the Family and carried out by different Government bodies, NGOs and private enterprise, meets all the needs of young people and young adults by promoting equal opportunities in mental and physical health, education and values, art and culture, work, development of skills and proficiency, environmental protection and conservation, stimulation of talent and excellence, sport and healthy recreation.

Health

Life expectancy is lengthening in the country. This indicator shows a notable increase to an average of 70.4 years for both sexes in 2002, or 67.5 years for men and 73.5 years for women.

The institutional maternal mortality rate, which was estimated to be 109 women per 100,000 live births between 1992 and 1995, had dropped to 51 per 100,000 live births by 2002.

The coverage in prenatal check-ups was estimated to be some 46 per cent in 1995, whereas in 2002 it had gone up to 71.2 per cent.

The overall fertility rate dropped sharply from 3.58 children per woman in 1998 to 2.10 children per woman in 2002.

The coverage in contraceptive use increased from 59.7 per cent of married or cohabiting women in 1998 to 67 per cent in 2000.

In the nineties, the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare started to plan and carry out a process of modernizing the health system, which was fundamentally aimed at providing all-round care for women throughout their lives. Gender-focused sexual and reproductive health forms one of the central areas of concern in community, industrial and educational health.

The Office for Integrated Women's Health Care, which coordinates and lends impetus to action by Government bodies and civil society, was set up in order to handle the practical arrangements. As a result of this process, five main modules have been defined: a woman-friendly care module which provides a framework of policies, laws and standards; a provision module which specifies the arrangements for delivering accessible, appropriate health services for women at different stages of their life; a management module encompassing indicators for monitoring and assessing health care; an administrative module centred on the decentralized management of resources and a financial module which allots funding in accordance with the needs of priority groups, especially women and children.

⁷ Open Schools is a programme of the Ministry of Education which promotes, gives impetus to and organizes youth groups, clubs, study circles, brigades and workshops in schools during the annual school holidays.

As from 1996, records of the health care received by women have made it possible to identify priority needs for the purposes of determining budgetary appropriations; consequently, as from 2001, 35 per cent of the health budget has been earmarked for preventive care for women.

The following more specific successes, among others, have been achieved in the health field:

- An awareness programme on gender mainstreaming mainly directed at male medical, paramedical and administrative staff;
- Establishment of networks and commissions tackling a wide range of women's health issues: Mental Health, Alliance for HIV/AIDS, Alliance for Sexual and Reproductive Health, National Maternal and Perinatal Mortality Monitoring Committee, National Cervical Cancer and Invasive Cancer Committee;
- Drawing up, testing and approval of a health checklist enabling women to record and identify their own health needs;
- Incorporation of gender focus in family planning guidelines;
- Health education programmes for the general public covering counselling on nutrition and breastfeeding, family planning, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS and educational sessions on healthy living and sexual and reproductive health;
- Family planning care differentiated according to age group;
- Implementation of the National Programme to Prevent and Control HIV/AIDS, which led to the passing of the Act on the Prevention and Control of AIDS-related Infection, whose provisions guarantee the individual social rights of persons living with HIV/AIDS; current media campaign to eliminate the stigma and discrimination associated with diagnosis of the condition; national campaign to curb HIV transmission from mother to child, which is continuing the drive to decentralize antiretroviral therapy; a free telephone hotline SIDATEL 800-7012 and an e-mail address sidatel@mspasp.gov.sv have been opened to enable people to obtain confidential advice;
- In response to a proposal from the President, a National Mental Health Council has been set up under the auspices of the National Secretariat for the Family and with the support of various ministries and governmental and non-governmental organizations. One of the Council's main achievements has been the formulation of the Strategic Mental Health Plan. The Council's technical committee, which puts the policy into practice, has worked out an operative mental health plan which has been endorsed and is now overseen by the National Council. This plan is coordinated by the National Secretariat for the Family, guided by a board appointed by the Ministry of Health and carried out by five interdepartmental committees (education, health, labour, legislation and disasters).

Labour

El Salvador has ratified the international conventions of the International Labour Organization on equal remuneration for men and women workers for equal work (No. 100), non-discrimination in employment and occupation (No. 111) and equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women workers with family responsibilities (No. 156). In the labour field,

the Government is directing its main spotlight at places where women account for most of the labour force, especially customs-free areas. The following action has been taken there:

- Creation of labour offices to safeguard women workers' rights and serve as a mediator between employers and women workers;
- Creation of systems to monitor and analyse labour relations by conducting periodic surveys of the behaviour of the labour market, in order to improve the management of labour policy.

The Ministry of Labour has drawn up the National Industrial Safety Policy, with the goal of uniting the public and private sectors in an effort to cultivate industrial safety consciousness as a means of guaranteeing the right to decent, safe working conditions and thereby improving labour standards.

At the initiative of the National Secretariat for the Family, national policy, law and rules on comparable opportunities for persons with disability have been formulated. Women with disabilities are protected by these instruments and benefit from the opportunities generated by them. The Ministry of Labour makes certain that these standards are respected.

A standard model incorporating gender perspective has been approved for the drafting of workplace regulations. A system of approval for workplace regulations has been instituted so as to ensure that their provisions do not include sexist passages which discriminate against women.

All labour inspectors are authorized to check on compliance with legal requirements and to investigate cases of discrimination against women.

There is an ongoing programme to publicize women's labour rights on the radio and through the distribution of information leaflets.

Women's human rights

The Values Programme was launched in 2003 with the dual aims of promoting and disseminating rights in the family and of inculcating an ethical and moral appreciation of civic values and peaceful social interaction in children, young people, women and Salvadoran families in general.

Between 2002 and 2004, ISDEMU devised and implemented a training programme entitled "Human rights, women's rights" aimed at the heads and technical officers of governmental and non-governmental institutions in the four areas of the country.

Programmes entitled "Human rights and their relationship with indigenous rights" are being run in cooperation with indigenous organizations throughout the country in areas where indigenous peoples are settled.

Women in power and decision-making

In order to fulfil this aspiration, ISDEMU, together with the executive institutions – the Salvadoran Municipal Development Institute, the Association of Municipalities of the Republic of San Salvador (COMURES) and the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), formulated operative plans which have scored the following successes:

- An agreement on providing municipal councils with guidance on gender perspective has been signed with the Salvadoran Municipal Development Institute (ISDEM);
- A committee has been established within ISDEM, which comprises municipal advisers from all the different regions of the country. One of the purposes of the committee, which is coordinated by ISDEMU, is to alert all municipal advisers to gender focus and to train them in its application in municipal work plans, programmes and projects;
- A project to train municipal outreach workers in mainstreaming a gender focus into plans, programmes and projects for the reconstruction of municipalities affected by the earthquakes is under way in 21 municipalities;
- Technical assistance is being given with the drafting of the gender-focused local development policy of the Social Investment Fund for Local Development (FIDSL);
- The Supreme Electoral Tribunal is mounting publicity campaigns to persuade women to take part in elections, especially by voting;
- At the recent presidential elections in 2004 a woman was elected Vice-President of the Republic for the first time;
- A capacity-building programme is being held for the members of the technical staff of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal's Training Unit;
- The sex of persons on the electoral roll is specified so as to distinguish between men and women among the persons registered;
- The needs of women in various municipalities of the country have been ascertained with a view to offering specific responses and enhancing their status;
- The political parties have instituted a programme of civic and political training and participation for women, which has led to the organization of forums, study groups, training and an analysis of women's situation within parties;
- Electoral results have been studied with a view to making a combined institutional effort to increase the number of women elected to public office;
- The membership of women's committees and their work plan for their three-year stint in local government has been established in Santiago Nonualco and Santa María Ostuma

in the Department of La Paz and in Cantón San Cristóbal and Cujutepeque in the Department of Cuscatlán, while an indigenous women's group had been formed in Guatajiagua in the Department of Morazán, and

- COMURES has offered technical assistance on attitudes to gender policy with a view to establishing a gender focus in all institutional activities.

Family

The National Law, Rules and Policy on Integral Care for Elderly Women, which eliminate discrimination against women in this age group, have been approved. The National Council for Integral Care for Elderly Women, which responds to the National Secretariat for the Family, is responsible for securing compliance with the contents of the law, rules and policy.

A genetic forensic laboratory has been set up at the Supreme Court of Justice to determine paternity from DNA tests.

Conferences are held to publicize the services offered by the Procurator General's Office in order to assist women claiming maintenance for their children.

Environment

The Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources has incorporated gender perspective in the following sectoral policies stemming from the National Environmental Policy and Strategy for Environmental Management:

- General regulations issued under the Environment Act;
- Wildlife Conservation Act and amendments thereto;
- Policy for combating desertification and drought;
- Policy on natural protected areas;
- Policy on the sustainability of water resources;
- Workplace regulations against sexual discrimination and harassment of the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources.

(b) ISDEMU, under its President Ms. Lourdes Rodríguez de Flores, the First Lady of El Salvador, is aware of the renewed pledges given at the Beijing+5 special session of the General Assembly and has therefore enlarged its daily agenda in an effort to fulfil its mandate. These endeavours are reflected in the measures listed below.

Legal Commission

The Institute has established an Interdepartmental Legal Commission, whose activities it coordinates. Its members comprise representatives of the National Secretariat for the Family, the Supreme Court of Justice, family courts, the Procurator General's Office, the National Judicial Council, the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organisation of American States and ISDEMU. Its function is to review legal guidelines and to propose reforms promoting gender

equity and equality. In 2002, it reviewed a draft amendment of the Domestic Violence Act and submitted it for the approval of the Legislative Assembly. Article 6-A of the Act states that ISDEMU shall act as the **lead agency** for policies, programmes, plans and projects related to the prevention of, and protection against, violence within the family.

National Plan for Protection against and Prevention of Domestic Violence

November 2002 saw the official adoption of the National Plan for Protection against and Prevention of Domestic Violence. Its purpose is to ensure the continued coordination of action at the interdepartmental and local levels to combat all forms of violence within the family; to improve statistical data for the definition of a profile of violence and for the design of new agendas for combating and eliminating domestic violence, and to strengthen local and community networks in order to contend with this scourge. Extensive consultations were held on the plan and it received the consensus of governmental organizations, NGOs and international cooperation agencies.

The Programme to Improve Family Relations offers **comprehensive services covering all kinds of** domestic violence, cruelty to children and sexual abuse. They take the form of guidance, crisis management, follow-up, group therapy and self-help groups (differentiated according to the type of violence and characteristics of the victims and aggressors), social welfare, legal advice and temporary shelter when the victim or aggressor's life is in danger. The action taken may be broken down as follows:

Prevention:

224,931 persons benefited directly from preventive action;

Protection:

25, 827 cases related to family violence, sexual assault and cruelty to children, or threatening behaviour towards members of their family;

17, 940 cases of social work which included face-to-face or telephone counselling and follow-up visits to homes or institutions to provide further assistance with solving problems;

16,528 women and children were assisted in support groups and **5,114** aggressors attended group therapy;

35,652 telephone counselling calls on the "family friend telephone";

The shelter took in **1,723** victims of domestic violence, sexual assault or cruelty to children.

At present it is the only **shelter equipped to offer specialized care** for victims of family violence, sexual assault or cruelty to children **which has managed to keep going.**

It has **different sections** for teenage girls, young adult women and children.

It has a **professional staff** of psychologists, social workers, lawyers and policewomen.

There are plans to open two further shelters in May 2004 to meet local demand in the north and east of the country.

Community response

At national level we have set up and/or expanded **38 municipal networks** for preventing or offering protection from family violence.

As the coordinating body, we have strengthened **14 interdepartmental committees** for the prevention of violence - one in each department of the country - with the participation of 11 governmental, non-governmental and private bodies. The main governmental bodies are: the judiciary (family courts, magistrates courts and the Forensic Medicine Institute), the Ministry of the Interior (through the National Civil Police), the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Education, the Procurator General's Office, the Attorney General's Office, the Salvadoran Institute for the Full Development of Children and Young People, the Salvadoran Institute for the Advancement of Women, the Salvadoran Municipal Development Institute, the Salvadoran Social Security Institute and the military hospital.

Single registration form for cases of domestic violence

Interdepartmental consensus has been reached on the use of a single registration form to provide statistical information for ISDEMU. The form has a simplified, practical format which matches the changes brought in by the Domestic Violence Act and which makes it possible to link up with the relevant institutions. It is now appended to the National Guidelines on Comprehensive Services for Women issued by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare.

New methods of creating greater awareness of domestic violence

In 2002, new ISDEMU offices were opened in the Departments of Chalatenango, Cabañas and La Paz and in 2003 in La Unión, in order to expand the cover of the care and services offered under the Programme to Improve Family Relations, to extend training and to amplify the follow-up to the National Policy on Women.

The Comprehensive Programme of Fairs for Preventing Domestic Violence is touring every municipality in an effort to lay the foundations for equality between women, men, children and young people by creating an awareness of the problem of domestic violence, so as to prevent and eradicate this type of behaviour in Salvadoran families by encouraging the reporting of instances of brutality. **161** municipal fairs have been held. They were attended by **151,385** people on 195 working days (in 2003). They are organized with the cooperation of the municipality and the support of institutions which offer their services to each town visited. They include:

- ISDEMU, which handles cases of family violence, offers guidance and talks to prevent violence and supplies a safety plan in the event of someone becoming a victim of violence;
- The Ministry of Health, which offers prenatal check-ups, family planning, child health, vaccination and delousing;
- The Attorney General's Office, which handles investigations into cases of family violence;
- The National Civil Police, which explains how to lodge a complaint;
- The Ministry of Labour, which supplies information about women's labour rights;
- The Salvadoran Social Security Institute, which conducts prenatal examinations and checks blood pressure, provides general vaccinations and vaccinates dogs;
- Private enterprise, which promotes products and supplies the sites for holding the fairs.

Access to decision-making and productive development

Gender-focused instruments have been designed to help municipalities determine what action they should take to include rural and indigenous women in the decision-making process and to increase their participation in local politics. This has been done in 22 municipalities.

Gender-focus has been incorporated in the teaching materials produced by the Ministry of Education for use in schools from nursery to secondary level.

An office has been set up in the Ministry of Education to deal with complaints of cases of discrimination against pregnant teenagers, cases of sexual harassment and other problems.

An Interdepartmental Programme for the Comprehensive Development of Rural and Indigenous Women has been devised and carried out. This programme, which was launched in 2003 and which is now in place in 8 municipalities, takes in education, health, integration in productive work and gender.

In order to improve the practical skills of rural women, centres of production and women's development have been set up and have started to operate within the country, in cooperation with municipalities and specialized institutions like the Social Investment Fund for Local Development and the Mutual Fund for Salvadoran Families for the Generation of Employment and Income. To date, more than 8,178 women have attended courses at training centres and an average of 5,000 credits worth a total US\$1.2 million have been granted annually.

Ministry of Labour inspectors who visit firms to prevent and/or punish any gender discrimination and/or violence have received further training in gender focus.

Studies and surveys have been conducted of the situation of families, services and care for elderly women, male attitudes and sexual and reproductive health.

21, 022 officials, two thirds of whom were women, have attended courses popularizing, heightening an awareness of and providing basic and specialized training in gender theory and in the design of instruments for the implementation of the National Policy on Women.

(c) A national mechanism has been set up for the purpose of following up conferences sponsored by the United Nations and regional bodies. Through it, the External Policy Unit and the Social Unit of the Ministry of External Relations, among others, lend impetus to this process by delegating monitoring and the drafting of progress reports to specialized governmental institutions. The Salvadoran Institute for the Advancement of Women has participated actively in the preparation of these reports in order to ensure that gender perspective is incorporated in these documents in such a way as to reflect the actual situation in the country,

(d) Obstacles, problems and shortcomings

Changes in Government make training and awareness-raising necessary in order to elicit support for gender equity.

The natural disasters of 1998 and 2001 meant that financial resources have had to be channelled as a matter of priority to the reconstruction process in order to meet immediate needs.

Budgetary monitoring, which should facilitate the inclusion of gender focus in budgetary variables, is limited.

New budgetary appropriations are needed for the fresh challenges ISDEMU has to meet as the lead agency for the National Policy on Women.

PART THREE

Institutional development

(a) The Salvadoran Institute for the Advancement of Women (ISDEMU) is the national mechanism that was set up and tasked by legislative decree with the formulation, management and execution of the National Policy on Women and with monitoring compliance with it. The fact that its governing body consists of representatives of the highest level of Government makes it possible to sponsor action to foster gender equality and to create national machinery to make sure that such action is efficacious. Mention should be made of the following bodies.

Commission for evaluating and following up the National Policy on Women

Its members are the President of ISDEMU, the Executive Director of ISDEMU, a representative of one of the State ministries and an NGO representative, both of whom are members of the governing body.

Interdepartmental Commission for monitoring the National Policy on Women

Its job is to ensure that action under this policy is actually carried out and to introduce gender focus into the plans, programmes and projects of each of the sectors covered by the policy.

Interdepartmental Legal Commission

This is the body that advises the governing body and its mandate is to review legal guidelines on the advancement of women. Its members come from National Secretariat for the Family, the Supreme Court of Justice, family courts, the Procurator General's Office, the National Judicial Council, the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organisation of American States and ISDEMU.

Communicators Commission

This comprises representatives of the institutions executing the National Policy on Women and its chief function is to help to eliminate sexist practices by including gender focus in information material.

Interdepartmental Commission for the Prevention of and Protection from Domestic Violence

This committee is chaired by an ISDEMU representative and its membership is drawn from the Supreme Court of Justice (family courts, magistrates court and the Forensic Medicine Institute), the Ministry of the Interior (National Civil Police officers and governors of departments), the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Education, the Procurator General's Office, the Attorney General's Office, the Salvadoran Institute for the Full Development of Children and Young People, the Salvadoran Institute for the Advancement of Women, the Salvadoran Municipal Development Institute, the Salvadoran Social Security Institute and the military hospital.

There are thirty-eight local networks for the prevention of and protection from family violence.

The Commission for the Family, Women and Children of the Legislative Assembly is chiefly responsible for analysing and approving laws guaranteeing gender equality. This commission is made up of deputies from various political parties.

The delegation of El Salvador to the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organisation of American States supports initiatives aimed at the implementation of the contents of the Convention of Belém do Pará.

The following networks supporting gender equity should be mentioned:

- Network of the Ministries of the Environment and Agriculture which, together with 14 NGOs (REDNA – National Network for Equity), is working to secure the inclusion of gender focus in their activities;
- Enlarged Dakar Committee for the Elaboration of an Education Plan for All, which is coordinated by the Ministry of Education and which includes NGOs and civil society bodies, monitors the honouring of undertakings given at the World Education Forum held in Dakar in 2000;
- The Interdepartmental Commission for following up the National Policy on Women in schemes forming part of local development plans is made up of representatives of the Salvadoran Municipal Development Institute, the Association of Municipalities of the Republic of El Salvador, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and the Social Investment Fund for Local Development.

(b) Focal points have been established for the ten areas covered by the National Policy on Women. Institutional development is also promoted through working parties in the Ministries of Health, Education, the Interior, Labour, Agriculture and Environment and Natural Resources. These working parties are coordinated by ISDEMU. Other governmental institutions, other than ministries, also have working parties responsible for incorporating gender equity in their respective public agendas. This is true of the National Secretariat for the Family, the Attorney General's Office, the Procurator General's Office, the Supreme Court of Justice, the Salvadoran Municipal Development Institute, the Salvadoran Vocational Training Institute, the Salvadoran Institute for the Full Development of Children and Young People and the Social Investment Fund for Local Development, among others. It is important to draw attention to the creation and operation of gender units or focal points in the Technical Committee for Institutional Planning which ensures that gender mainstreaming is included in management activities.

The work of these mechanisms chiefly consists in annually planning the implementation of action under the National Policy on Women by holding coordination and technical assistance meetings with each of the executive institutions. In addition, ISDEMU gives training and advice about the setting up of basic and specialized training modules on gender equity covering subjects

like basic gender concepts, women's human rights, civic participation and gender, health and gender and environment and gender. For its part, the Ministry of the Environment has introduced a systematic training programme for its technical staff, and for the governmental and non-governmental bodies involved in environmental management, so as to acquaint them with the application of gender perspective.

The Ministry of Health has implemented programmes to prevent physical abuse and to promote individual responsibility for health as well as programmes offering sexual, reproductive and nutritional education, programmes on disease prevention and rehabilitation, obstetrics and gynaecology, general disease prevention and on care for the victims of violence and sexual abuse. It has conducted operative studies and surveys of sexual and reproductive health, sexually transmitted diseases, VIH/AIDS, nutrition and oral health.

Other forms of cooperation encourage the inclusion of gender equality in action to promote rural women's participation in productive work, e.g. the departmental gender advisory networks consisting of NGOs which help to implement regional projects like those of the Ministry of Agriculture and Stockbreeding.

(c) ISDEMU, in order to supply a supervisory mechanism which evaluates progress towards gender equality, has entrusted the monitoring of compliance with the national Plan of Action to the Commission for the Evaluation and Monitoring of the National Policy on Women of the governing body of ISDEMU and to its operative body, the Unit for Monitoring the National Policy on Women and Training. The latter is responsible for establishing coordination and monitoring teams corresponding to the various ministries and institutions responsible for carrying out the contents of the National Policy on Women.

(d) In order to build capacity for promoting gender mainstreaming, ISDEMU has concentrated on training and technical assistance.

Training efforts have been mainly directed at civil and public servants and employees in the areas of:

- Promotion, dissemination and increasing awareness of the National Policy on Women and of all forms of discrimination against women (6,185 persons - 3,912 women, 2,693 men);
- Basic gender course (1,362 persons - 916 women, 446 men);
- Gender specialization and tools for applying it to sections of the National Policy on Women (12,178 persons - 8,323 women, 3,899 men).

Technical assistance consists in providing support for institutions in the form of counselling and the working out of methods for gender mainstreaming in institutions.

The main challenge lies in ensuring that successive Governments and their administrative authorities at various levels have an open-minded and therefore supportive attitude to the subject.

(e) In El Salvador, with respect to the Beijing Conference and the undertakings given at the twenty-third special session, reliance is placed on monitoring indicators established and agreed at regional meetings where it was recommended that statistical indicators be adopted which reflect progress in effecting shifts in gender equity. The General Directorate of Statistics and Censuses of El Salvador furnishes a wealth of sex-disaggregated data from its annual Multipurpose Household Survey, which make it possible to calculate highly specific indicators of progress in various areas.

Ministries' sectoral statistics are also sex-disaggregated and quantify a variety of situations related to gender equity.

There is also the National Survey of Fertility and Family Health which shows the principal results in terms of health, especially sexual and reproductive health and which contributes to the monitoring of medium-term indicators.

Monitoring indicators of the Plan of Action for the implementation of the National Policy on Women are reflected in the annual management reports presented to decision-making bodies.

One of the principal challenges is the further strengthening of the system for monitoring the indicators of the Plan of Action.

At present, the education and health sectors are displaying the greatest progress in statistics disaggregated according to sex and gender mainstreaming. This is due to a greater awareness of the need to find a better way of recording progress towards gender equity. Similarly, social and economic indicators are gathered and analysed by the Presidential Commission for Social Affairs, a high-level body entrusted with the promotion of public policies and programmes to foster sustainable human development.

(f) The Legislative Assembly is the Government body responsible for passing laws which contribute to improving harmonious relations and well-being for the population. To this end, one of its functions is to find out from each executive entity what progress has been made in different areas of public management. Within the Assembly, the Commission on Families, Women and Children sponsors laws in keeping with social reality and especially aimed at improving the status of Salvadoran women. One fundamental aspect of its work is to call for reports on the advancement of Salvadoran women so that the relevant action can be taken. Some of the subjects that are currently being considered by this legislative commission are related to gender-focused budgets. Some newly approved provisions of the Labour Code deal with discrimination against women, such as the elimination of the pregnancy test for women seeking employment.

PART FOUR

Main challenges and action to address them

One of the main challenges is to continue strengthening the leading role played by national machinery in improving effective compliance with the goals established at the Beijing Conference and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

Given the disparities between urban and rural women, it is necessary to press on with the process of rationalizing agriculture in a creative manner and with an eye to gender equity, so as to improve access to economic and social benefits.

Increasing the participation of women, especially those who are heads of households, in the production sector through the setting up of micro businesses generating self-employment would contribute to the advancement of their families and of the community.

The work begun by the Interdepartmental Legal Commission should be pursued so that, when laws and regulations are proposed or amended, their provisions are free from gender discrimination and disparities.

More and better resources should be channelled via international cooperation agencies and national budgets to enhancing the situation of women heads of households by improving their labour skills, helping them to find productive work, educating them in sexual and reproductive health and boosting their self-esteem and feeling of value.

Added momentum should be given to the inclusion of women's groups in local life with a view to promoting the emergence of leaders, increasing women's participation in local development, improving their skills and raising the number of women elected to public office.

Because life expectancy in the country has gone up over the last decade, it is necessary to consolidate existing programmes and implement new ones that are fully in keeping with policy on elderly women.

The Labour Code must remain in force and must be fully applied. In particular, there must be compliance with labour laws protecting women.