

PARAGUAY

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

Paraguay has made major strides since 1995. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (ratified in 1986), together with articles 46, 47 and 48 of the Paraguayan Constitution of 1992, establish equality between women and men, prohibit discrimination, and require the State to remove the barriers that sustain it. Another very important step has been the creation of the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic (the State body responsible for coordinating policies on gender equality), and its close relationship with women's organizations that constitute a sector of social actors with an agenda to overcome the inequalities faced by women.

Nonetheless, the lack of legal regulation for article 46 of the National Constitution of 1992, prohibiting discrimination, means that there are no valid instruments to which recourse can be made when a specific instance of discrimination occurs. Accordingly, a non-discrimination bill has been submitted to the national parliament and is currently being debated for rejection or approval. A variety of discussion forums have arisen out of this work, along with two documents containing anti-discrimination measures.

In an important step for the promotion of equality between men and women, the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic has formulated two plans to strengthen public gender policies in Paraguay in the framework of the Beijing Platform for Action: the first National Plan for Equal Opportunities for Women 1997-2001, and the second National Plan for Equal Opportunities for Women (2003-2007), approved by the Government in Decree 1.958 of 8 March 2004. Although, the first equal opportunities plan was seen by other State institutions as pertaining exclusively to the Women's Bureau rather than the Paraguayan State as a whole, the institution has succeeded in bringing the gender problem to public attention. Nonetheless the need to mainstream gender throughout public institutions, and to enforce the current plan as the guiding instrument, need to be insisted upon. One factor that could be having a negative influence is the absence of a law to institutionalize this.

The first Plan for Equal Opportunities for Women (1997-2001) called for the creation of an advisory council and a monitoring committee, but this did not happen. The second National Plan for Equal Opportunities has a battery of indicators for the different domains, and establishes mechanisms for civil society coordination along programmatic lines.

The creation of other public bodies that have gender equity among their main aims is a sign of the consolidating institutionalization of gender in the State, which is also moving gradually towards decentralization. Such bodies include the Senate Commission on Equity, Gender and Development, the Gender and Social Equity Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, the Gender Office of the Supreme Court, and the Advisory Gender and Equity Commission in the Municipality of Asunción. There are also Women's Bureaus in the country's 17 departments; and, increasingly, municipios are establishing mechanisms of this type at the local level.

Lack of budget is a fundamental obstacle that undermines the effectiveness of public institutions in preparing, implementing and evaluating their projects.

There are also a number of factors that make it difficult to use the National Plan for Equal Opportunities between the genders as an effective tool: lack of a comprehensive view of public policies, association of the gender issue with vulnerability, and specifics that require a systemic approach.

The Paraguayan State has no system for evaluating policies, and no effective accountability mechanisms, so it is impossible to directly gauge the impact of existing gender initiatives on women and men.

Since the 1990s, equality and non-discrimination against women have been the main fronts of struggle and conquest among women's organizations in Paraguay. As a result, there is now a legal framework that guarantees protection of women's human rights in general; but cultural change has not kept pace with legislative progress. Discrimination against women persists in various walks of life; the high maternal mortality rate, acts of violence against women, low levels of political participation and female unemployment are the chief problems.

Policies have generally incorporated international commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals; nonetheless, assessments of their chances of achievement show that only four of them are "potentially likely" to be met, while the other four are rated "unlikely" to be achieved.

Some of the Millennium Goals have been drafted explicitly into public policies (e.g. on education and health); other goals are approached more generally.

Part II Progress achieved 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

Strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action

A. Women and poverty

Households living in poverty are predominantly headed by women.

Against this backdrop of economic deterioration that generates a persistent increase in poverty, the State designed a national strategy to overcome poverty and inequality, with assistance from numerous international organizations. The strategy included the gender perspective, and, if implemented correctly, the results are expected to be positive for poor households, particularly those headed by women.

In 2004, the Community Development Project (PRODECO) was initiated in the Social Action Secretariat, with the aim of “improving the quality of life and social inclusion of poor rural and marginal urban communities of the country’s three affected departments” ... “contribute by creating and strengthening capacities for local communities to implement their own development and poverty relief actions.” Although this project is not targeted especially on women, a possible condition for participating in its benefits is the “use of affirmative action criteria in favour of participation by youth, women and indigenous groups.”

B. Women’s education and training

In the educational domain, the situation of girls and young women is similar to that of their male counterparts, except in rural areas, where the ratio between girls and boys enrolled in basic and secondary education is 86 girls per 100 boys. Similarly, data on illiteracy show that while there are no significant differences between men and women nationwide, rates are lower among the latter in rural sector. There are also gender differences in reasons for not continuing to study, which calls for differentiated public sector responses to keep young people in school especially at secondary level.

The Women’s Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic has promoted numerous courses and training actions for men and women in order to raise gender awareness in various dimensions: public policies, human rights, violence and leadership, among others.

In 1996, the Ministry of Education and Culture published the Strategic Plan for Education Reform: “Paraguay 2020, Facing the Education Challenge”, which sets out national education policy guidelines. The plan explicitly includes the gender perspective by highlighting the need to prepare didactic materials and teacher training that take account of gender issues, the development of basic competencies in men and women free from discrimination of any kind, and inculcation of democratic values, including gender equality.

Changes in the language used by educational authorities, politicians and some journalists is one of the achievements gained in the struggle for non-sexist education; nonetheless, the teaching sector is very reluctant to alter its language.

In 1995 the National Programme for Equal Opportunities and Outcomes in Education (PRIOME) was created, with a view to mainstreaming gender at all levels and in all types of education supply, as well as in curricular reform, educational materials, teacher training and among the educational community at large. This has led to issues being included in teacher training programmes such as: gender roles and equal treatment in the structure and functions of the family, sexually transmitted diseases, and respect for cultural, religious and other diversity. Work is also ongoing to review and adapt the analytical matrices of textbooks and other educational materials to ensure effective gender mainstreaming. Guidelines for the analysis and preparation of educational materials and texts from a gender-equity perspective have been designed, to be provided as a working tool to teachers of both sexes when preparing such materials.

Initiatives were also undertaken with the private sector in the PRIOME framework, in order to mainstream gender in their activities.

The start of classes in 2004 was marked by an event that debate re-ignited controversy stemming from earlier years. The National College of the Capital (boys only) and the National Girls' College (only girls) were turned into coeducational schools by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC). This gave rise to minor disturbances in the National College of the Capital, and the girls who were admitted suffered acts of aggression; the student centre denied girls the right to vote in elections for authorities, causing the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic to intervene to guarantee equal voting opportunities for girls. The Ministry is currently working to normalize the situation in each of the schools concerned. This event demonstrates the need to persevere with awareness-raising actions among young people and adults on equality between the sexes. There is still a long way to go in terms of teacher attitudes towards sexual harassment, student pregnancies, single mothers and sexual education.

There are pending issues also in technical and university education. Gender-sensitive data on university enrolment reveal the persistence of male careers (e.g. engineering) and female ones (obstetrics and nursing), even though more women are entering university especially in areas outside the capital Asunción.

A major development has been the inauguration of a masters degree course on gender and development, and the incorporation of specific gender modules in other masters and specialization courses at the National University of Asunción. This masters course received support from the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic, the Ministry of Justice and Labour, and the municipality of Asunción.

C. Women and health

The National Policy for Comprehensive Health Care for Women, designed jointly by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare and the National Council for Reproductive Health, and approved in 1999, represents the most significant step forward in terms of ensuring actions

on behalf of women's health. The National Health Plan 1999-2003, prepared in accordance with the National Policy, incorporates the commitments assumed by Paraguay at world conferences and summits.

Despite the existence of a National Plan for Reproductive Health for 1997-2001, maternal mortality indicators highlight the disadvantageous situation facing women of childbearing age. Abortion is the third most frequent cause of maternal deaths in Paraguay, and if the data were appropriately recorded it could prove to be the leading cause. Statistics show that maternal and infant mortality rates in Paraguay are among the highest in Latin America, and in some departments the situation is even more serious.

In 2003, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) sanctioned the headmistress of a public school for allowing discriminatory attitudes to persist against a five-year old child suffering with HIV/AIDS who eventually stopped attending the school. The hope is that this punishment will send a clear message on behalf of non-discrimination in education. In addition, the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare approved the use of the manual on anti-retroviral treatment standards in the framework of HIV/AIDS treatment.

In 2002, at the request of the Senate Commission on Equity, Gender and Development, the National General Expenditure Budget included the programme of sexual and reproductive health as a national budget category for the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare. Until then, programmes relating mainly to family planning had been funded externally. Nonetheless, the inclusion of budget lines does not necessarily mean their execution; and in that year, execution only amounted to 8.6 per cent.

The issues of responsible maternity and paternity, sexual and reproductive rights, and family planning, have been the subjects of major awareness-raising campaigns, run both by the public sector and by non-governmental and international organizations.

The persistent spread of HIV/AIDS infection among women is a key unresolved challenge. In 2002, an NGO network was established to promote the formulation and implementation of public policies on this issue, and to carry out public awareness-raising actions.

Work done by the public sector and by NGOs is financially and technically supported by international organizations such as the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

D. Violence against women

Paraguay has made major progress in this area. In 1995 it ratified the Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, through Act No. 605; and later that year it adopted the Cairo and Beijing commitments, following the Conference on Population and Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Also in 1995, sexual harassment was incorporated as an offence as a result of the promulgation of the Labour Code, and in 1997 and 1998, respectively, promulgation of the Penal Code and the Code of Penal Procedures criminalized domestic physical violence and incest. The offences of “punishable acts against sexual autonomy” and “sexual coercion” have also been introduced, along with “trafficking in persons” and “sexual abuse”.

The Penal Code in particular has been criticized because it only considers physical domestic violence, to the exclusion of other forms of violence; and it only punishes the aggressor with a fine. Despite the progress made, Paraguayan legislation on this issue is thought to contain omissions or wordings that erode juridical equality for women.

Various awareness-raising campaigns have been implemented. In 1998, the campaign “Against sexual harassment” was initiated by the *Central Única de Trabajadores* [Single Labour Union Congress] with support from the Paraguayan Women’s Coordination Unit (CMP), the municipality of Asunción, and other citizen, religious and union organizations. The Women’s Bureau also carried out a radio campaign in Asunción and elsewhere in the country. Various informative materials were produced, such as manuals, triptychs and posters.

The Domestic Violence Act (No. 1.600/00), passed in 2000, is crucially important as legislation guaranteeing the right to a life free from physical, psychological and sexual violence.

The dissemination and training process in relation to this Act, included training on its interpretation and implementation by the Women’s Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic, the National Police Force, the Care Centre for Victims of Domestic Violence of the Medical Emergencies Centre, and the General State Prosecutor’s Office. Some of these events were held in both Spanish and Guaraní. The Women’s Bureau included this issue as a thematic area in its training activities, and held consultations to evaluate and design the practical manual on the care and treatment of this problem. The Tripartite Commission for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (consisting of the Women’s Bureau, the Paraguayan Women’s Coordination Unit, and United Nations system) has prepared a care manual for cases of domestic violence, consistent with the provisions of Act No. 1.600/00.

Creation of the Women’s Bureau, and formulation of the two National Plans for Equal Opportunities for Women, which explicitly include the problem of violence, were significant events that made it possible to draw attention to the issue of violence against women and promote policies to improve the situation. To that end, in 1996 the Women’s Bureau began to implement a National Plan for the Prevention and Punishment of Violence against Women, in the framework of implementation of the Inter-American Convention of the same name, with goals that include upgrading quantitative data on violence. A sample of such data for 2003 shows that sexual, domestic and family violence in Paraguay is mainly directed against women: 93 per cent of rape cases, 100 per cent of sexual harassment and abduction cases, and 84 per cent of cases of physical abuse. Implementation of this plan also engages other institutions, such as the Ministries of Justice and Labour, Education and Culture, Public Health and Social Welfare, the General State Prosecutor’s Office, the National Police Force, the Office of the Governor of Asunción, and the Paraguayan Women’s Coordination Unit, all of them coordinated by the Women’s Bureau.

In 2004, several cases of sexual harassment in education have been reported and documented by the press, with participation from the Prosecutor's Office.

In addition to approval of Act No. 2.134/03, the State has promoted a variety of activities aimed at initiating a process to prepare a National Plan for Prevention and Elimination of the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents in Paraguay. This initiative has participation from the Children and Adolescent Rights Coordination Unit, the Social Action Secretariat, the Women's Bureau, and a number of international agencies such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

In the framework of the activities of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), the Programme for Prevention and Eradication of the Exploitation of Children and Young People is currently being implemented with ILO collaboration on Paraguay's triple border.

At the departmental and local levels, with collaboration from UNFPA, the Vice-Ministry for Youth and the Women's Programme of the municipality of Asunción promoted learning activities on reproductive health issues, including non-violence among young people and adolescents.

In 2002, a study programme on violence against women was introduced in the curriculum of the National Police College; and this institution published the programme materials, with support from the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President the Republic, and external cooperation.

Other major achievements include: the creation of a single violence register, established in 2003, whereby the various public institutions can access complaints of violence and exchange information; the commitment to set up Care Centres for Victims of Domestic Violence (CAVIF) in the institutions of the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, such as the Loma Pyta hospital and the Medical Emergencies Centre; and implementation of the 911 system in which, according to its public relations officers, calls to report domestic violence are one of the most recurrent categories.

In 2003, an inter-institutional agreement was signed between the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Public Health and the National Police Force, for the protection of human rights in cases of domestic violence; and another agreement with the programme for Assistance for the Prevention and Rehabilitation of Male Violence (APREVIM) in order to share services for dealing with perpetrators of domestic violence.

F. Women and the economy

A retrospective analysis of women's labour-market activity reveals rising participation rates and narrowing gaps with respect to men; but women continue to face difficulties arising from the sexual division of labour and insufficient infrastructure, in both the public and private sectors, to support their economic activity. Moreover, policies are still needed to reconcile family life and work, and to construct a fair division of roles in the private sphere, to enable women to become

involved in public life, and men in the domestic domain. Labour-market participation rates among rural women have also increased, although they remain below the indices displayed by their urban counterparts. This could partly be explained by shortcomings in measuring female labour activity in the rural sector, however.

The vast majority of women are concentrated in three occupational categories: own-account, domestic service and unpaid family work, which translates into vulnerable and precarious employment — no access to credit or social security, working days that are either very long or very short, and low rates of pay. Men are practically never employed in domestic service. The data also reveal wage discrimination, explained by the existence of segmented markets that place women in occupations of lower status and social recognition, and hence lower remuneration even when women have higher levels of schooling than men.

In relative terms, labour-market conditions are worse for women, since their unemployment and underemployment rates are higher than those for men. The higher female unemployment rate affects the quality of life of households, especially those headed by women, which in Paraguay account for 25.6 per cent of all households nationwide (in the urban sector, the figure is 29 per cent).

The Labour Code gives rise to major differences in the protection of domestic work compared to other occupations, which affects women particularly given their relative predominance in this type of activity. Working hours in domestic employment can be as long as 12 hours per day, and the wage may be up to 40 per cent less than the legal minimum. Moreover, in practice, a minimal proportion of workers of either sex has social security coverage.

The labour market is one of the areas least covered by national public policies on women and gender, with legislative and practical actions that are narrowly focused and few and far between.

Act No. 2.263 on the retirement and pensions regime was passed in 2003, equalizing social security benefits for male and female workers. This legislation amended Act No. 98/92 which prevented female workers affiliated to the Social Security Institute (IPS) from extending their social security benefits to their partners, whereas men could do this.

In 2003 the municipality of Asunción approved the issuance of category-A driver's licences for women (covering taxis, buses, radio taxis known as *remises*, and trucks). Meanwhile, the Office of the Governor of Asunción signed an agreement with the Professional Taxi Drivers Association of Asunción, and the Confederation of Transport Operators, to implement the *Mujeres al Volante* [Women at the wheel] programme, which aims to expand employment opportunities for women in this area.

The implementation of Childhood and Family Welfare Centres (CEBINFA), day-care centres for children between birth and five years of age whose parents work, could be a policy for facilitating women's incorporation into the labour market under better conditions; but the ideal, from a gender perspective, would also be to help change patterns in the sexual division of labour in the home by locating such institutions close to men's work places, so that men would be responsible for transport and contingency care while their children were being looked after.

There are several loan funds currently destined for women workers (BCP/IDB, the CIDEM network, World Bank). These aim to provide women with access to financial resources to improve their working conditions. Unfortunately, they still have very low geographic coverage, and the percentage of women with access to them is very small.

Social organizations have also promoted legislative initiatives. The National Coordination Unit of Rural and Indigenous Women Workers Organizations (CONAMURI) submitted a proposal to Parliament for financing rural development projects by eliminating superfluous State expenditure.

Members of the National Tripartite Commission for Equal Opportunities in Employment, comprising the government, employer and union sectors, are participating in Mercosur Sub-Group 10, to introduce the gender perspective in resolutions and acts submitted to the Common Market Group.

In 1997 an agreement was signed between the Ministry of Justice and Labour and the Women's Bureau with the specific objectives of raising gender-awareness among senior, managerial, technical staff and officials of both sexes in the Ministry; promote equal opportunities in women's access and permanency in employment, and promote women into decision-making posts.

The Agrarian Statute (Act No. 1.863/02) was passed in 2002, establishing measures to ensure equal access for women to resources such as land and credit, along with other benefits in the rural sector. At the present time, the Rural Development Project (PRODECO) is being implemented in the Social Action Secretariat, one of the components of which targets poor women heads of household.

The country also has a National Strategy for the Reduction of Poverty and Inequality, which, although not yet established as an institutionalized and implemented policy, represents a joint venture between the public sector and international organizations to produce guidelines for poverty reduction policies. The gender perspective was incorporated throughout the process of preparing this document, and in all of its guidelines.

Although there are legal instruments that grant women family benefit entitlements, institutional conditions such as lack of information, high management costs and State bureaucracy, hinder the effective exercise of these rights. In 2002, the largest number of civil lawsuits filed by women related to paternity and maintenance cases.

In the same year, the Senate Commission on Equity, Gender and Development submitted a draft bill on responsible parenthood, in order to facilitate paternity proceedings; this is currently under study for the legislative process.

In recent years significant progress has been made in the legislative domain in general; nonetheless, much remains to be done to improve the efficiency and efficacy of policies aimed at achieving economic equality for women with respect to men.

The empirical evidence reveals major difficulties in women's access to financial, natural, educational and information resources, and the State needs to promote structural changes in this regard.

G. Women in power and decision-making

Despite the existence of an electoral quota requiring women to have a minimum 20 per cent representation on all candidate lists, the results in the latest general election showed this regulation to be ineffective, although in some cases there has been a trend towards greater female participation in elective posts between 1998 and 2003. The number of female deputies increased from two to eight, thereby raising the proportion of women in the Chamber to 10 per cent. Women departmental councillors increased from 16 to 27, and a female Governor was elected for the first time since governorships were created. In the Senate there has been regression, however, with the number of women dropping from eight in 1998 to four in 2003, whereby their share fell from 18 per cent to 9 per cent.

In the most recent municipal elections (2001-2006), only 4.9 per cent of gubernatorial assemblies and 15.3 per cent of municipal councils are occupied by women. In the judiciary, 39 per cent of posts were held by women in 2003, concentrated in positions of least decision-making power and lowest pay: commissioners' offices (59 per cent) and courts of first instance (44 per cent). Women have 29 per cent representation in magistrates courts, and only 18 per cent in appeals courts. The most significant event in 2004 was the appointment of a woman to the Supreme Court, for the first time. There are no women on the Magistrates' Council, or in the Judicial Impeachment Jury.

In view of the incipient amendment of the Electoral Code, women's organizations have most recently been debating measures that could be incorporated to promote female access to decision-making posts. In addition to raising the percentage and enhancing the wording of the clause on quotas, incentive mechanisms were also proposed, such as making the rates of the State subsidy to political parties depend on the number of women elected; and a requirement for parties to invest in the training and advancement of women, among other things.

In 2003, the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic, in coordination with the Public Commissioner's Office, submitted a bill to the Chamber of Deputies to amend Act No. 834/96 on the Electoral Code, in relation to article 32 dealing with the women's participation quota. The bill proposes to raise the female quota from 20 per cent to at least 50 per cent in lists for elective posts, and in collegiate and administrative bodies.

H. Women's human rights

The main achievements in legislation and public policies are set out below.

The National Constitution approved in 1992 ranked equal rights between women and men at the highest level, and created a legal framework for upgrading laws and regulations that act against this right, by establishing in article 48 that: "Men and women have equal civil, political, social

and cultural rights. The State will create conditions conducive to, and will create adequate mechanisms for, making this equality true and effective by removing those obstacles that could prevent or curtail this equality as well as by promoting women's participation in every sector of national life.”

Eleven years have elapsed since then, during which time both women's organizations and the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic have worked—sometimes jointly—to ensure that legislation is adapted to the new Constitution. The most important legislation created or amended during this period includes the following:

- Act No. 1/92 partially modifying the Civil Code, mainly in articles relating to the rights of the family and equal rights for women in marriage.
- Act No. 34/92 which created the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic, with ministerial rank.
- Act No. 496/95 on the Labour Code, which incorporated equality and non-discrimination against women in the workplace.
- Act No. 834/96 on the Electoral Code which established the 20 per cent female participation quota in lists for elective posts.
- Act No. 1160/97 on the Penal Code, which incorporated the gender perspective in legal discourse, typifying sexual harassment and domestic violence as punishable acts, among other serious offences whose victims are mainly women.
- Act No. 1600/00 on Domestic Violence, which included urgent measures for victims in the family domain.
- Act No. 1680/01 on the Code for Children and Adolescents.
- Act No. 863/02 the Agrarian Statute, which established several measures promoting equality for women, in access to land and credit and other benefits in the rural sector.

Paraguay periodically prepares reports for the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), working in conjunction with the Women's Bureau, the International Organizations Office of the Ministry of Foreign Relations, and other State bodies.

The two equal opportunity plans promoted by the Women's Bureau take account of the need to overcome discriminatory tendencies in legal affairs, and encourage effective exercise of women's rights. The Women's Bureau also participated in the pre-commission for preparation of a National Plan for Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Paraguay; and it coordinated joint actions with the Public Prosecutor's Office and other public bodies. Publications issued by the Women's Bureau include major studies on legislation and highly specific situations involving women in various areas of their rights. These were produced in collaboration with experts from women's organizations, and took account of the need to extend accessible materials to people with low literacy levels and population groups that speak Paraguay's other language, Guaraní, which is an official language alongside Spanish.

The Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic operates a women's support service (SEDAMUR), which receives complaints of human rights violations, provides legal guidance and directs cases to other governmental and civil society mechanisms.

The prison situation is highly illustrative of the lack of efficiency of justice administration, since 22 per cent of women inmates in 2003 were still awaiting sentencing. One of the most critical issues is the justice regime's loss of credibility among the population.

In terms of record-keeping on human rights violations against women, there is a need for complete statistical data with a gender breakdown, including types of offence by gender, and relationships between the victim and the aggressor. Such data are very important for evaluating the justice system for women. The records and publications currently available on this issue make it impossible to precisely identify the number of women who die as a result of domestic violence, or to follow up the results of legal proceedings in offences against women's human rights.

Articles dealing with the criminalization of abortion in the 1914 Penal Code have not been amended in the current Penal Code, and are the chief motive for the practice of clandestine abortion. Criminalization does not prevent abortion but explains the lack of support in the health system for fear of punishment. Moreover, reduction of the penalty in cases where abortion has been carried out "to protect the honour of the wife, mother, daughter or sister" is overtly discriminatory. At the same time, free access to and use of contraceptives such as condoms is censured, based on the same thinking.

Abuse, exploitation and sexual trafficking in girls and adolescents are on the increase. Police and judicial procedures concentrate on rounding up women who are exploited or prostituted, but fail to punish the real guilty parties, namely the clients and pimps. National legislation in this area needs to be reviewed, since, contrary to the age ranges defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it discriminates against young girls and adolescents and excludes them from the child category, particularly in crimes relating to sexual autonomy in the Penal Code.

I. Women and the media

Although women are currently under-represented in this field, their participation is increasing. There are many fewer women than men directing press media, as presenters, reporters, photographers or camera operators, despite the fact that statistical data show that women employed in the press have higher levels of education. There is also wage discrimination in this sector. Nonetheless, in recent years the communications career has been undergoing a process of feminization. As many as 63 per cent of fully graduating students (those submitting theses) in the communications career at the Catholic University are women; of theses presented up to late 1999, two out of 73 address problems relating to women and the media. Recent figures on journalists who are members of the Paraguayan Association of Organizational Communicators (APCO) show that 61.1 per cent of the membership are women, and 39.9 per cent men.

Apart from the employment market, another aspect that needs to be considered in the communications sector is the image of women projected by the media. Two studies show that women are seldom presented as news protagonists, and they are invisible in important media segments. A study of newspaper front pages and the highest audience radio and television programmes found that information relating to women accounts for between 1 and 2 per cent per

week of radio broadcast time; television presents information on women for less than two minutes per week (news of general interest in which women are protagonists); and one out of every five newspaper front pages carries photographs of women, although not necessarily as protagonists of important events.

In the above-mentioned study, Duré and Duarte claim that "... television programmes focusing on women are still approached from the standpoint of traditional roles. Television continues to strengthen and nurture traditional roles and stereotyped images of men and women." In the case of the written press, "it is very hard to find news related to women on pages devoted to political, national or economic information; specific spaces for women still persist." Lastly, they claim that "... on radio there is more vigorous incorporation of programmes reflecting progress made by feminists. Nonetheless, programmes devoted to women in which traditional roles are reinforced, still persist."

The Tripartite Commission on implementation the Beijing Platform for Action, consisting of the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic, the Paraguayan Women's Coordination Unit (CMP), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in 1998 conducted a research project entitled "Women and the media", analysing the image of women being projected and the situation of female journalists employed by the media. The study also attempted to identify areas requiring attention, and to analyse current broadcasting policies with a view to integrating a gender perspective. Nonetheless the data obtained have not been exploited to create mechanisms to address these areas and act upon them.

The key conclusion of the research shows that the stereotypes presented in the media are discriminatory, degrading and offensive to women.

The Tripartite Commission organized a workshop on the Beijing 1995 Platform for Action for journalists from all sectors, with a view to introducing gender analysis in the news. Although this was not the first attempt to involve journalists in this type of analysis, it proved impossible to elicit participation by members of non-women's sections. Moreover, it is usually women journalists who cover a "women's activity".

The Women's Bureau and various NGOs carried out activities and held training workshops on a number of issues relating to women and communication: drawing attention to social problems such as domestic violence, sexual abuse of children and adolescents, the importance of communication for women; raising public awareness on violence against women (specifically, domestic violence), child abuse, human rights; activities relating to the International Day for Non-Sexist Education, and legislative achievements, among other things. The press, for its part, has helped to disseminate these campaigns, with journalists of both sexes contributing by making space in their programmes for discussion of the issues involved.

The Women's Bureau is taking steps to design information, education and communication strategies aimed at encouraging the presentation of a balanced image of women and young people in their multiple functions.

J. Women and the environment

There are a variety of environmental problems that particularly affect women in Paraguay: deforestation, lack of safe drinking water or access to polluted water, inappropriate disposal of solid wastes, and the use of chemical products in agriculture. Nonetheless, there are no figures available to evaluate the negative impacts.

On this point, Heikel (1996) argues that the handling of agro-toxins by women, is done with inadequate knowledge and with no possibility of measuring the consequences of their application. It also adds, citing UN (1980), that health problems arising from the excessive application of pesticides can produce at least three types of impact: (a) death; (b) secondary disorders in women, infertility and foetal malformation in during pregnancy; and (c) contamination of food, toxic alteration of the food chain, and the transmission of toxins through breast-feeding.

It is also important to mention that, given their traditional roles of housewife, mother and “environment manager”, women often use the environmental resources at their command in a haphazard and unsustainable manner. This is generally due to the fact that the training to which they have access does not consider specific measures enabling them to expand their field of action without degrading the environment. Environmental education programmes should not aim at restricting the use of resources which are necessary for life itself, but should promote sustainable use and provide inputs to make this possible.

Women have a very close relationship with water. In nearly all cultures, they are responsible for obtaining it and transporting it in the absence of a running water supply. By way of example, in August 1999 the environmentalist NGO *Alter Vida* held socio-environmental training workshops for leaders of campesino settlement organizations (the Concepción, Antebi-cué occupations). Women were unable to attend this training because of the absence of an infrastructure providing them with nearby sources of water; following 50 days of drought, women had to walk between five and seven kilometres to fetch water from the Apa River (*Alter Vida*, 1999).

The national equal opportunities plans formulated by the Women’s Bureau include components addressing sustainable development and the gender perspective. Although the Women’s Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic does not directly execute specific programmes that link gender to environmental issues, it has signed several agreements with national and binational organizations that promote sustainable development and women’s work, with EBI, the Environmental Bureau, the Offices of the Governors of Concepción and San Pedro, the NORMA Foundation, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Campesino Development Fund (FDC), the National Institute for Cooperativism (INCOOP) and the Human Development Programme (PDH). The document *Guía para la incorporación del enfoque de género en proyectos de Desarrollo Rural Sostenible* [Guidelines for incorporating the gender perspective in sustainable development projects] (Women’s Bureau/IICA) was presented in 1999; and in 2004, a document entitled *Guía de Incorporación de Género al Sistema Nacional del Ambiente* [Guidelines for gender mainstreaming in the national environment system] was published by the Women’s Bureau in conjunction with a consultancy.

The gender perspective has been incorporated into 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 programme to support the National Environmental System.

In September 1996, the Office of the Undersecretary for Natural Resources and the Environment (SSERNMA-MAG) launched the National Strategy for the Protection and Management of Natural Resources of Paraguay (ENAPRENA), in which Chapter IV contains a special section on “Gender perspective and development.” This secretariat is also developing the Sustainable Development Programme for the Chaco Region (PRODECHACO), which offers campesino and indigenous women courses in clothes-making, poultry farming, bee-keeping, food production, family horticulture, nursing for midwives, goat and sheep-breeding, and handicrafts. This programme also made a study of women’s interests in the Chaco region (creole and indigenous), and their priorities: safe drinking water, food security, land/housing, reproductive health, education, eradication of male violence, among others (quoted by E. Prieto, 1999).

The Agricultural Extension Office (DEA) is implementing two projects with funding from UNFPA “The role of women in rural development” and “Rural women, gender, development and reproductive health”. It has also published a variety of materials in the framework of its work with rural women, such as: Poultry Farming Manual; Reproductive Health; Social Organization; and Preparation and Conservation of Fruit Preserves. The first three of these were published in 1995, and the last in 1996.

In 1995, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock signed a five-year agreement with the Women’s Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic, to promote gender mainstreaming in existing policies, plans, programmes and projects; adopt measures to ensure the achievement of the targets and goals of the actions of projects to be implemented by the various institutions; and provide specific technical training for its professional staff (quoted by Rivarola, 1998). The agreement is being implemented through a gender mainstreaming team (ETIG) consisting of technical experts from several offices of the two institutions.

The Technical Planning Bureau is recompiling Agenda 21 (Earth Summit, Rio ’92), to highlight the contributions made by women to sustainable development and the importance of their participation at all decision-making levels. Other work that is ongoing includes a questionnaire entitled “Policy framework and recommendations for action”, developed in the context of the Inter-American Strategy for the Promotion of Public Participation in Decision-Making on Sustainable Development (ISP). The questionnaire does not contain gender specifics, however, which reduces its effectiveness.

The Rural Welfare Institute (IBR) has a project aimed at strengthening the campesino family economy (IBR/OAS), in which one of the components targets rural women producers. Actions being carried out include motivation courses, formation of committees, implementation of environmental sanitation measures to improve housing, and basic infrastructure. The programme is framed in a general way, and not directed specifically at women. There is also the ALA project — an agricultural colonization programme aimed at creating suitable conditions to resettle 4,000 campesino families in roughly 40,000 hectares spread across 10 settlements in San Pedro and

Caaguazú. The book *Mitos y Valores del Mundo Campesino* [Myths and values of the campesino world] (IBR and European Union, 1998) describes the work of women in ALA settlements.

The National Benefits Office is implementing the nationwide Human Development Programme (PDH); according to its 1996 annual report, this programme is working to improve the quality of life of campesino families through contributions from women and men organized in economic management groups, undertaking horticultural and environmental education activities. The greatest achievement mentioned in the report is the recognition gained for the productive role of women, together with equal, solidarity-based and equitable participation between men and women (PDH, 1996). Other projects undertaken by the Social Benefit and Welfare Office (DIBEN) include the North East Region Credit Programme, which has a subcomponent for the advancement of rural women.

Part III Institutional development

The Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic has played a fundamental role in the design of public policies that particularly affect women — not only from a technical standpoint, but also in terms of achieving consensus and incorporating other institutions that previously have not had links to gender issues, such as the National University, the Police Force, and the Armed Forces.

In the education sector, the PRIOME programme is a joint initiative between the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Women's Bureau, which demonstrates the potential and synergy to be obtained from coordinated collaboration.

Similarly, in the health area, the Women's Bureau not only participated in preparing the National Plan for Comprehensive Health Care for Women, but also succeeded in incorporating the gender perspective in other plans and programmes concerning women and health. In this regard it is promoting joint actions with the Inter-Institutional Commission for the Control of Smoking, and the Inter-Institutional Commission on Food and Nutrition, in the framework of the Strategic Plan of the National Programme for Control of AIDS and the National Anti-Drugs Plan.

A major challenge for the Women's Bureau is to draw into its work entities other than those involved in social policy, which traditionally have not had links with gender issues — the Ministries of Finance, Defence, Foreign Relations, Public Works, Industry and Trade, etc., bearing in mind that all of them influence women's capacities and opportunities one way or another.

The various public institutions have been setting up mechanisms specifically dedicated to the gender issue, albeit without sufficient technical or financial resources. These include the following:

Executive branch

Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare	National Programme on Sexual and Reproductive Health, National Health Programme, Comprehensive Services for Adolescents.
Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	Gender and Rural Youth Office
Ministry of Education and Culture	PRIOME Programme (Women's Bureau/MEC)
Ministry of Justice and Labour	Office for the Social Advancement of Women Workers
Governors' Offices (the country's 17 departments)	Women's Bureaus in Governors' Offices
Municipality of Asunción	Gender Policies Office
Municipalities outside Asunción	Municipal Women's Bureaus (a total of 98 at the present time)
Legislative branch	
Senate	Commission on Equity, Gender and Social Development
Chamber of Deputies	Commission on Gender and Social Equity

Judiciary

Supreme Court	Gender Office of the Supreme Court
Public Prosecutor's Office	Women's Division

Other public institutions relate to the Women's Bureau through focal points consisting of individuals with gender training. Institutions with focal points are: the National Navigation and Ports Authority (ANNP), Banco Nacional de Fomento (BNF), the General Directorate of the Postal Service, DIBEN, the Livestock Fund (FG), EBI, the National Institute of Technology and Standardization (INTN), Petroleos Paraguayos (PETROPAR), the Paraguayan Sewerage Services (ESSAP), the General Directorate of Tourism, the national Civil Aviation Authority (DINAC), the development finance agency Crédito Agrícola de Habilitación (CAH), the State-owned shipping company (FLOMERES).

Most Governors' Offices have set up a centre for women's issues in the framework of decentralization through the project on Centres for Women's Development Initiatives (the CIDEM network). This project lasted for five years from 1998 to 2003 and was coordinated by the Women's Bureau with support from the European Economic Community; it aimed to improve women's living standards by reducing obstacles to their active participation in development and the coordination of effective measures to achieve equal opportunities.

Municipalities, especially the larger ones, have been incorporating an office for women's issues into their organizational structures, although support is particularly important in this case to enable them to mainstream gender in their actions.

It is essential to give greater momentum to initiatives that encompass areas of the country outside Asunción, not only through Governors' Offices and municipalities, but also through national institutions that have branches outside the capital.

Other important steps include the establishment of mixed mechanisms such as the Tripartite Mechanism to monitor implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the CAIRO Tripartite Follow-up Mechanism, which has representation from international organizations, the State and civil society; another is the Tripartite Commission for Equal Opportunities in Employment, and the National Network on Domestic Violence. At the present time, teams have been set up between the Women's Bureau and NGOs on an issues basis to implement the National Plan for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (2003-2007), based on their programmatic areas.

Partly as a reflection of government priorities, social spending is one of the areas in the General National Budget that has grown most in recent years, particularly in the education and health sectors. Improvements in social indicators do not match the increased budget, however; and in fact some situations such as maternal mortality have worsened. This should give rise to serious reflection and an exhaustive study on the allocation of expenditure and its impact on women. A major portion of public funds are destined for two areas: personal services (wages) and non-personal services (payment for public utilities). Although the first of these has positive effects on women, since many are hired by the public sector (teachers, nurses, civil servants), the empirical evidence shows that available resources need to be optimized for a more significant impact on women as a group.

A major problem in this area is that the way the public budget is currently organized and computerized makes it difficult to analyse in gender terms and assess the equity of its distribution. Such evaluations can only be made indirectly, which undermines the validity of the analysis.

Generally speaking, much remains to be done to improve policy efficiency and effectiveness in terms of achieving economic equality for women with respect to men. Mechanisms, measures and actions aimed at increasing women's labour-market participation, improving their material well-being and enhancing their bargaining capacity in the domestic domain in Paraguay have been limited, isolated and lacking in continuity because of a lack of specific policies.

Some progress has also been made on the availability of data with a gender breakdown issued by the General Directorate of Statistics, Surveys and Censuses. Nonetheless, this remains very limited with major fields neglected, such as budget analysis both nationally and at the level of Governors' Offices and other public bodies. Studies on women remain a pending task in the country, because without knowledge of their situation it is hard to implement effective policies.

Gender in public policies is one of the few, if not the only topic on which it has been possible to hold public debate with participation by all stakeholders involved: public sector, private sector,

civil society organizations and NGOs. The Women's Bureau has played a fundamental role in constructing a suitable context for debate, formulate proposals and carry out actions; and, political changes notwithstanding, it has succeeded in maintaining continuity and systemization in the tasks that have been begun, to embark upon a process to strengthen public policies on gender from a systemic and participatory standpoint.

Part IV Main problems and measures to deal with them

✓ Women, poverty and the economy:

This is one of the dimensions in which very little progress has been made in the last few years. There are no explicit policies guaranteeing women decent employment. Most female jobs (own-account and domestic work) do not have social security coverage, so it is essential to devise a system to satisfy that need. There are also no policies to achieve a more equal distribution of family responsibilities between men and women.

Labour training should not only focus on skills for a specific task, but also embrace development of creativity and self-esteem, to foster greater independence among women in managing resources.

The productive projects that are implemented still put men at the centre, which hinders women's access to resources.

The challenge here is to mainstream gender in other institutions responsible for aspects of women's economic performance with the same force as in the more "social" ministries, such as education and public health and social security — for example, in the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Paraguay, the National Development Bank, the Rural Welfare Institute, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Justice and Labour, among others.

✓ Women's education and training:

Education indicators with a gender breakdown do not display significant differences at the primary and secondary school levels; nonetheless, while the proportion of women has been increasing in technical colleges and universities, this has occurred in traditionally "female" courses, which in the end leads to a more restricted, segmented labour market and wage discrimination. There are also gender differences in reasons for abandoning studies, so persuading young people to stay longer in the education system necessarily requires gender-differentiated policies. Significant changes have been made in didactic materials and the explicit curriculum aimed at eliminating sexist patterns.

The main challenge for gender mainstreaming in education is among teachers, where traditional practices still persist, along with the transmission of patriarchal values and cases of sexual harassment. The hidden curriculum and the verbal language used in teaching need to be analysed, to identify potential biases relating to the biological characteristics of male and female students.

Optimizing MEC use of available resources is another outstanding challenge. Public expenditure on education is what has increased most in recent years, to the detriment of other key institutions for national development and particularly women's advancement. Yet, despite a major increase in spending, education indicators have not improved proportionately.

✓ Women and the environment:

Significant progress has been made in Paraguay in terms of formulating plans and programmes with a gender perspective, but this has been hindered by constant changes among the authorities

of the institution responsible for environmental policy and regulations, compounded by the lack of a national environmental policy. As a result no positive impact is yet visible.

Gender mainstreaming is recommended to expand the coverage of safe drinking water and collection of domestic waste matter, in compliance with regulations on the management of natural resources and chemical products.

The Women's Bureau of the Office of the President of the Republic clearly has a fundamental role to play in mainstreaming gender in government policies, plans and programmes; in addition, the institution enriches its practice by hiring experts on this issue, thereby giving greater legitimacy to its work. Nonetheless, active incorporation of the Environmental Bureau along with other public institutions concerned with the areas mentioned is essential: municipalities in the case of waste collection, and drinking water supply, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock in the use of chemical products in agriculture.

✓ **Violence against women:**

This is one of the dimensions of the Beijing Platform for Action and other international commitments on which efforts have mostly been targeted. Significant legal and institutional progress has been made in terms of the synergy generated between the public sector and NGOs, and also in greater public awareness, as mentioned in previous sections.

Nonetheless, outstanding tasks remain in terms of improving legislation, especially criminal law; training health and security professionals in procedures for dealing with victims and citizens in prevention; and greater coverage of victim care services. Achievements thus far in the provision of services are still largely confined to the country's capital.

The public sector has capacity installed in the judicial, security, health and education sectors, and in Governors' Offices and municipalities, which could be exploited and targeted on prevention and treatment in domestic violence cases, at no great cost other than that of providing sufficient and relevant information for the staff assigned.

✓ **Women and health**

As in the case of education, the country has destined a large part of its resources for the health sector, which thus receives a large budget. Nonetheless, Paraguay has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in Latin America, which is extremely serious.

Currently available resources need to be optimized to achieve greater efficiency and equity in the country's health policy.

✓ **Women's human rights**

Human rights challenges start from the need to create and reform the national legal framework to incorporate women and gender as a specific issue in all legislation. Institutionally, as in the other dimensions already mentioned, services relating to reception of complaints, psychological and legal support, and follow-up of demands need to be decentralized, since the few public, private and civil society institutions that address these issues are currently all in Asunción.

There is an urgent need to establish and promote a strategy to combat sexual violence: rape, sexual abuse and harassment, sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, pimping and trafficking in women. Priority should be given to implementation of health policies, plans and programmes that have incorporated the concept of sexual and reproductive rights, in order to guarantee the population, especially women and children, access to basic health services and thus reduce the high rates of maternal and infant mortality current prevailing in Paraguay.

The shortage of information, and the unsystematic nature of the information that exists, does not allow for effective public policies to be generated and documented; so institutional capacities also need strengthening for the management of relevant information, in order to target care, at least, on the most vulnerable and unprotected social sectors.

Lastly, technical and budgetary strengthening is needed for institutions performing legal or care functions in the case of human rights violations.

✓ **Women and the media**

The information obtained shows that here, as in other domains, female participation is inferior to that of men, both in terms of posts occupied and in terms of women's presence in information. Moreover, when women are part of the information, stereotypes are reproduced reflecting patriarchal attitudes.

The challenges in this area involve fostering greater awareness among journalists of both sexes, in order to show women from different points of view than those currently projected. This should also be extended to encompass publicity and producer agencies, which generate a large proportion of the female images transmitted, especially in relation to advertising and the sale of products or services.

✓ **Women in power and decision-making:**

Women's participation has been increasing gradually in this area, both in terms of political representation mechanisms and in social organizations. Female politicians and indigenous women have their own associations through which they formulate demands and obtain training.

Although legislation has collaborated through participation quotas, these do not guarantee equal representation. Continued awareness-building and legal progress are needed to promote greater participation.

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