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Women's formal *education:* achievements *and obstacles*

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An examination of women's education in the region leads to apparently contradictory conclusions: on the one hand, genuine progress has been made in terms of coverage and performance, justifying the assertion that the region is making headway towards achieving equal opportunities of access where they do not already exist and that the situation will continue to improve. On the other hand, however, an analysis of the data also brings out less positive factors that warrant continued concern about this issue. In addition to persistent structural problems in most of the region's formal educational systems (which limit the expansion of educational coverage for both men and women), for nearly two decades now various studies and other analyses have been pointing out that the educational process for women is closely linked to the gender discrimination with regard to educational content and professional opportunities that is part of Latin America's cultural ethos. This article seeks to weigh the latest quantitative data on women's access to formal education against the obstacles to genuine equality of opportunity that women encounter in the educational system.

I

Introduction

For many years now, studies on formal education in Latin America have underscored the significant advances being made by the countries of the region in their fight against illiteracy and in their drive to boost school enrolment rates at all levels; indeed, the rates for women have been climbing so steadily (ECLAC 1984, 1988 and 1991b) that they have actually moved ahead of male enrolment rates in some countries. Despite this generally bright picture, however, the educational process continues to suffer from serious structural problems; the situation in the different countries varies a great deal and, within those countries, highly stratified socio-educational pyramids have taken shape on the basis of ethnic, regional and socioeconomic differences (Valdés and Gomariz, 1992 and 1993). For the women of the region, all this translates into the continuation of high illiteracy rates among the inhabitants of rural areas, indigenous women and older cohorts.¹

In the past, the types of gaps or shortcomings existing in the region's educational systems have been due to the global development strategies adopted by the countries and the differing oppor-

tunities open to the various social groups as they seek to find a place in those systems and, having done so, to hold on to that position (ECLAC, 1990). Since, given their traditionally subordinate position in society, women have been excluded from the circles of power that would have enabled them to exert an influence over these development strategies, their integration into the formal educational process has given rise to an array of complex situations created by the interplay of the different variables of gender, age, social class, ethnic identity and geographic area.

Although equality of access to the educational system appears to be a reality for men and women under the age of 25 today, discrimination against women persists in the qualitative aspects of education. In the 1980s people were already denouncing the limitations on women's integration into the educational process, which had led to their concentration (especially at the level of higher education) in spheres that have come to be thought of as "women's areas", such as education, the social sciences, fine arts and certain fields of medicine (ECLAC 1984, 1988 and 1991b). Today, the effects of sexual stereotypes on the content of instruction and the impact of discriminatory bias in vocational counselling on women's lifetime goals have also become recognized subjects for discussion and, increasingly, for analysis. In other words, as the obstacles that once prevented women from obtaining an education are overcome, the issue ceases to be "how many women are in school" and instead becomes one of "what are women studying and how good is the education they are receiving and the academic environment they are receiving it in?" (Bonilla Castro, 1991).

It is therefore necessary to look beyond the quantitative aspects of women's access to the formal educational system in order to examine the nature of the structural problems affecting the male/female enrolment ratio, the socio-cultural elements incorporated into teaching materials, the role played by teachers in constructing and reproducing gender identities, and the impact of the sexual division of labour on job opportunities.

□ The author is grateful for the assistance provided by María-Luisa Jáuregui (UNESCO) in compiling data on illiteracy, pre-school and primary education, intercultural bilingualism and technology. Invaluable comments were also made by Miriam Krawczyk, Irma Arriagada, Molly Pollack, Nieves Rico, Pauline van der Aa and María Rebecca Yañez, colleagues of the author who are closely involved in the work of the ECLAC Women and Development Unit.

¹ Mention should be made here of a widely-recognized problem in the region: the lack of comparability between data drawn from censuses conducted in different years, inasmuch as these data correspond to populations of differing ages and refer to a formal educational structure that divides up grade levels in different ways from one country to the next. In many cases it was necessary to make use of both national household surveys and census data; this limits the usefulness of the tables, since they thus provide no more than an approximate, descriptive context and cannot be used as a tool for "evaluation" in the strict sense of the term. However, even though the data are neither entirely comparable nor completely accurate in a statistical sense, they are none the less representative of the actual situation and afford a better understanding of the direction in which the educational status of women is heading, as well as of the social, political and cultural implications of the situation.

II

Exclusionary factors affecting women in the region

Within the above context of notable differences among the countries of the region and shortcomings in the quality of education, and with a view to arriving at a fuller understanding of the significance of the advances made by younger generations of women in gaining greater access to education, we will first consider the factors that work to exclude women in particular while at the same time posing formidable challenges to the educational system as a whole: the isolation of rural areas, the generation gap that exists in terms of education, discrimination based on ethnic identity, and the persistence of illiteracy.

1. The isolation of rural areas

The most recent *Social Panorama of Latin America* published by ECLAC (1993) reports that the educational levels of the rural population remain low and continue to be far below those found in urban areas. Illiteracy rates in rural areas also continue to be notably higher, as do differences between men and women, which are much greater than in urban areas (see table 1). Moreover, unlike the situation in most of the countries' urban areas, women in rural areas tend to share the high repetition and drop-out rates which, at the regional level, are recognized as being a typically male problem (Valdés and Gomariz, 1992 and 1993).

The differences are all the more striking when we take the quality of education into account; the "obligatory primary curriculum is designed in cities and is totally unadapted to rural children, especially those of indigenous origin with little or no knowledge of Spanish" (ECLAC/UNESCO-OREALC, 1992). This situation is compounded by the lack of correspondence between school vacations and the seasonal demand for labour and by the lack of qualified teachers.

Such shortcomings have additional implications for girls, since they are confronted with the discriminatory stereotypes which are incorporated in the instruction provided by teachers who have not been

properly prepared to transmit new educational models. Furthermore, their lifetime goals are also limited by the lack of job opportunities existing in societies such as those of rural Latin America, in which the traditional sexual division of labour is deeply ingrained, and by the shortage of job opportunities in rural areas.

2. The generation gap

The wide generation gap to be observed today in terms of educational levels is the direct result of the growth of school enrolment in the region over the past few decades, which has primarily benefited younger generations. When enrolment figures are broken down and analysed by gender, geographic area and income level, it turns out that the "greatest differences are between age groups" (UNICEF/Chile, MIDEPLAN, 1993).

For women, this situation is the clearest indicator of the amount of progress made in terms of access to formal education. In fact, the differences between the educational status of young women between the ages of 15 and 24 and women aged 50 or over are so great that in describing them it may be appropriate to talk about different "social biographies" (ECLAC, 1994c). For example, the illiteracy rate in Bolivia as of 1988 was 3.5% for women between the ages of 15 and 19 but 66.8% for women over 50, and the latter rate rose to 85.9% in the case of rural areas (Bolivia, Coordinadora de la Mujer, 1990). In Chile, the average level of educational attainment for women over 64 years of age as of 1990 was six years of schooling in urban areas but less than three years in rural zones, while for those in the 15-24 age group, the average was 11 and eight years, respectively (UNICEF/Chile, MIDEPLAN, 1993).

Obviously, the problem is not the existence of such a gap *per se*, but rather the fact that these uneducated older women are living in a society that demands an ever-greater level of efficiency in terms of reading, writing and arithmetic. When their situation

TABLE I

**Latin America (13 countries): Illiteracy rates
in urban and rural zones, by gender^a**
(Percentages)

	Total	Women	Men	Urban zones		Rural zones	
				Women	Men	Women	Men
Bolivia							
1976	36.8	48.6	24.2	23.3	6.2	68.5	37.3
1992	20.0	27.7	11.8	15.5	3.8	49.9	23.1
Brazil							
1980	25.5	26.5	24.4	18.3	14.5	46.9	45.6
1988	18.5	18.6	18.4	13.6	11.5	34.7	37.5
Colombia							
1973	...	19.4	17.4	12.0 ^b	8.6 ^b	34.8 ^c	30.6 ^c
1985	...	12.0	11.5	7.8 ^b	6.2 ^b	23.2 ^c	22.2 ^c
Costa Rica							
1973	10.2	10.3	10.2	5.1	3.7	14.8	14.6
1984	7.3	7.4	7.3	3.8	3.7	11.0	10.9
Cuba							
1981	1.9	...	...	...	...	...	...
Chile							
1982	8.9	9.2	8.5	6.8	5.5	23.2	20.9
1989	5.9	6.1	5.7	4.4	3.6	17.5	16.3
Ecuador							
1982	16.5	19.6	13.2	7.9	4.3	33.4	22.4
1990	11.4	13.5	9.1	6.5	3.6	25.1	15.5
Guatemala							
1981	44.0	50.7	37.2	28.2	16.5	62.5	47.3
1989	40.7	47.8	34.2	27.0	16.5	60.0	45.6
Panama							
1980	13.2	13.7	12.7	5.0 ^d		26.8 ^d	
1990	10.7	11.1	10.3	4.1 ^d		23.6 ^d	
Paraguay							
1972	19.9	24.5	15.0	14.7	7.4	32.2	19.8
1982 ^c	21.2	23.7	18.6	9.1	13.6	26.4	33.5
Peru							
1981	18.1	26.1	9.9	12.5	3.6	55.8	23.2
1991	10.7	17.4	4.1	6.3	2.2	45.6	10.4
Dominican Republic							
1981	27.7	28.2	27.2	...	...	...	...
1991	17.7	17.9	17.5	10.8	8.7	31.4	29.7
Uruguay							
1975	5.6	5.2	6.1	...	...	...	...
1985	4.6	5.1	4.1	4.1	3.8	10.4	6.2
Venezuela							
1981	14.1	15.3	12.8	11.7	8.6	38.2	34.5
1990	9.3	9.9	8.7		(5.2)		(19.4)

Source: Valdés and Gomariz (1992 and 1993).

^a Refers to the population aged 15 and over, except in Brazil (10 years and over), Colombia in 1985 (12 and over), Costa Rica in 1973 (10 and over), Cuba (10 to 49 years of age) and Panama (10 and over).

^b District capitals.

^c Rest of country.

^d Men and women.

^e The general increase in illiteracy shown for this year is attributable to the use of a different recording procedure for the 1982 census. The increase in the rate for men may be due to a higher drop-out rate for boys and shortcomings in the educational system that prompt a large number of male migrants to seek work "on the agricultural frontier or in the construction of hydroelectric plants" (Valdés and Gomariz, 1993).

is compared with that of men, it becomes quite clear that the older generations of women have remained on the sidelines of the drive towards greater equality of opportunity from which younger women are benefiting today. If we look at the cases of Bolivia and Chile once again, we find that, in Bolivia, 40% of men over the age of 50 were illiterate in 1988 as compared to 66.8% of women in that age group; in Chile, as of 1990 men over the age of 65 had, on average, 6.9 years of schooling in urban areas and 3.2 years in rural zones, whereas the averages for women in those same groups were 6.0 and 2.7, respectively (see table 2).

3. Ethnic discrimination

(a) *The educational situation of indigenous women*

For obvious reasons having to do with communication and co-existence, the difficulties encountered by indigenous women in their daily lives are further exacerbated by language differences. For women,

this situation translates into illiteracy rates that in some cases reach dramatic proportions. In Bolivia as of 1988, for example, 95.6% of the women who spoke only Aymara and 94.7% of those who spoke only Quechua had received no formal education whatsoever; only 4.4% and 5.1% of them, respectively, had had access to primary education.

On the one hand, illiteracy is the major factor in indigenous women's isolation, since it sets them apart from the national culture and helps to keep them in a position of extreme poverty. On the other hand, it is thanks to their relative lack of integration into Latin American society and their absence from the educational system that they have been able to preserve some portion of their traditional culture. The dilemma with which these women are faced is made all the more difficult to resolve by their indigenous tradition itself, according to which the preservation of the culture is a task that falls within the sphere of women's powers and responsibilities (D'Emilio, 1989).

TABLE 2

Latin America (10 countries): Illiteracy rates among the population aged 15 and over, by age group and gender
(Percentages)

Country	Women			Men		
	Ages 15-19	Ages 20-24	65 and over	Ages 15-19	Ages 20-24	65 and over
Bolivia (1988)	3.5	7.7	66.5	1.5	2.0	43.2
Brazil (1989) ^a	8.0	9.4	50.1	13.2	12.1	40.4
Colombia (1985) ^b	5.5	5.4	34.4	7.8	7.0	26.9
Ecuador (1990)	3.5	5.0	40.6	3.0	3.9	29.3
Guatemala (1989)	29.2	38.9	74.9	16.9	20.3	64.6
Honduras (1988)	18.7	21.8	66.3	23.1	24.0	61.1
Mexico (1990)	4.1	6.2	43.2	3.7	4.4	30.6
Nicaragua (1985)	13.1	11.3	51.1	11.3	15.6	56.0
Panama (1990) ^c	3.9	4.2	26.3	2.7	3.0	25.3
Venezuela (1990) ^d	2.1	...	46.0	3.2	...	35.1

Source: Data from the following censuses: Bolivia, INE (1989), *Encuesta nacional de población y vivienda, 1988. Resultados finales*; Brazil, IBGE (1989), *Anuario estadístico do Brasil*; Colombia, DANE (1986), *Censo 1985*; Ecuador, INEC (1991), *V Censo de población y IV de vivienda, 1990. Resultados definitivos. Resumen nacional*; Guatemala, INE (1989), *Encuesta nacional sociodemográfica*; Honduras, Secretariat of Planning, Coordination and the Budget (1988), *Censo nacional de población*, vol. I; Mexico, INEGI (1990), *Resumen general. XI Censo general de población y vivienda*; Nicaragua, INEC (1989), *ESDENIC 85. Tabulaciones básicas, vol. I. Características generales de la población*; Panama, Department of Statistics and Censuses (1990), *Censos nacionales de población y vivienda. Resultados finales básicos*; Venezuela, Central Statistics and Information Office, Office of the President (1990), *Anuario estadístico*.

^a The data for the oldest age group refer to persons aged 60 or over.

^b In the case of Colombia, the age groups used were 12-17, 18-24 and 60 years or over.

^c These data correspond to the category of "No grade successfully completed" in the 1990 census.

^d Because other data are unavailable, the figures given for the 15-19 age group actually correspond to the age bracket of 15-24 years.

Although it is still too early to pass judgement on its actual impact, virtually all the countries with a significant percentage of indigenous peoples are in the process of institutionalizing intercultural, bilingual education in an effort to address this issue. There is a greater awareness of the complex and heterogeneous nature of linguistic and cultural realities, of the importance of the mother tongue and culture as tools of educational progress, and of the need to rescue the indigenous population from its current marginalization.

Despite all these efforts, however, because the majority of the indigenous population resides in rural areas, indigenous boys and girls often do not have access to complete schools, do not have teachers who are trained in intercultural bilingual education, lack bilingual textbooks and suffer from a shortage of resources in general. Nor is the integration of girls facilitated by the traditional role of women in rural areas or by the fact that their socialization as part of the labour supply begins very early on; within this environment, their parents resist their regular attendance at school because it distances them from that socialization process and prevents them from "contributing with their labour to the agricultural output and reproductive functions of their mother" (Zúñiga, 1989).

(b) *The educational situation of black women*

Here, a distinction needs to be made between countries having a black majority, such as many Caribbean nations, and those in which black women are a minority group. The position of Caribbean women is notable for the important role they play in their societies –as has been noted in many of the anthropological studies conducted in the Caribbean (Rivera, 1993)– and for the degree of their integration into the formal educational system. In 1990 –with the exception of Haiti, where the rate of illiteracy among women (52.6%) was second only to that of Guatemala (52.9%) (see table 3)– the majority of Caribbean countries had female enrolment rates near or above the regional average (see table 4),² and in

many cases they exceeded the rates for males at the secondary and higher-education levels (ECLAC, 1991a; United Nations, 1992).

According to reports presented at the first Meeting of Black Latin American and Caribbean Women, which was held in July 1992 in the Dominican Republic and attended by over 300 representatives from 32 countries (León, 1992), in the other countries of the region black women's access to formal education is limited by both ethnic discrimination and their socioeconomic position. The latter factor has this effect because the black population in these countries is concentrated in the poorer sectors that have the least access to services and to the power structure. According to data cited at that conference, the Haitian women living in the sugar mill camps of the Dominican Republic, for example, have no chance of obtaining an education because there are no schools and no funds to pay for any; in Honduras, 48.3% of black women have not finished elementary school; in Uruguay, their level of education is low and 75% of those who work are employed as domestic servants; and in Brazil, only 11% of these women go on to secondary school (León, 1992).

The foregoing corroborates the findings of a study conducted by the Carlos Chagas Foundation on race and educational opportunities in Brazil, which states that the percentage of black and mulatto children who have never had access to the school system is three times as great as the percentage of white children in that position; the study also found that a larger proportion of non-white children enter school late and have to repeat grades or fall behind once they are in school (Hasenbalg and Do Valle Silva, 1990). It is noteworthy that, even under these conditions of glaring inequality, non-white Brazilian women's levels of educational attainment are slightly higher than those of their male counterparts.³

² In 1988, according to data compiled by UNESCO and CELADE (ECLAC/UNESCO-OREALC, 1992), the net school enrolment rate was 87.6% for the population between 6 and 11 years of age (primary education), 71.6% for young people between the ages of 12 and 17 (secondary education), and 27.2% for those between the ages of 18 and 23 (higher education).

³ According to data from Brazil's 1982 national household survey, which was the last such survey in which the data are broken down by race and gender, the illiteracy rate among black and mulatto women was 38.3% versus a rate of 39.4% for men; 55.5% of these women had completed elementary school (as compared to 55.2% of the men) and 6.2% had a secondary education (5.4% of the men) (Valdés and Gomariz, 1992).

TABLE 3

Latin America and the Caribbean (22 countries): Illiteracy rates and number of illiterates, by gender, 1990^a
(Percentages and thousands)

Country	Illiteracy rates (%)			Number of illiterates	
	Total	Women	Men	Thousands (1990)	Variation (%) 1970-1990
Argentina	4.7	4.9	4.5	1 065	-12.6
Bolivia	22.5	29.3	15.3	923	-16.5
Brazil	18.9	20.2	17.5	18 407	6.6
Colombia	13.3	14.1	12.5	2 702	2.5
Costa Rica	7.2	6.9	7.4	139	15.8
Cuba	6.0	7.0	5.0	484	-36.3
Chile	6.6	6.8	6.5	603	-15.3
Ecuador	14.2	16.2	12.2	909	0.3
El Salvador	27.0	30.0	23.8	787	-6.4
Guatemala	44.9	52.9	36.9	2 253	39.3
Guyana	3.6	4.6	2.5	25	-34.7
Haiti	47.0	52.6	40.9	1 858	-9.9
Honduras	26.9	29.4	24.5	766	16.6
Jamaica	1.6	1.4	1.8	26	-31.6
Mexico	12.7	14.9	10.5	7 066	2.2
Panama	11.9	11.8	11.9	187	6.8
Paraguay	9.9	11.9	7.9	252	4.3
Peru	14.9	21.3	8.5	2 025	-8.0
Dominican Republic	16.7	18.2	15.2	744	0.1
Suriname	5.1	5.3	4.9	13	-45.3
Uruguay	3.8	4.1	3.4	88	-43.0
Venezuela	11.9	10.4	13.3	1 450	0.3

Source: UNESCO, *World Education Report 1991*, Paris.

^a Refers to the population aged 15 or over.

Even in those countries of the region where the proportion of black women and men who have access to the educational system is larger, the women who gathered at the 1992 conference drew attention to the racist content of what is taught (in addition to the already acknowledged gender discrimination incorporated in the instruction given), which denies their ethnic and cultural identity and thus bars their access to an equitable education. This bias is reinforced by the stereotypes used in the media, which associate black women almost exclusively with servile or sexual roles. Thus, like indigenous women, black women are oppressed on the basis of three different attributes –their poverty, their race and their gender–

(León, 1992) and these various forms of oppression influence their educational process.

4. Illiteracy

Despite the substantial progress that has been made in raising literacy rates, sharp differences still exist in the region between countries and, within any given country, among women in different socio-occupational categories (Schiefelbein and Peruzzi, 1991). At the regional level, the rates range all the way from a level of absolute illiteracy among women of 1.4% in Jamaica to 52.9% in Guatemala (see table 3). At the country level, cases may be found

TABLE 4

**Latin America and the Caribbean (24 countries):
Enrolment rates, by age group and by gender, 1990**

Country	6-11 years			12-17 years			18-23 years		
	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
Argentina	97.2	97.0	97.3	79.4	82.5	76.4	56.9	61.5	52.3
Barbados	...	...	...	89.4	87.9	90.8	28.4	27.4	28.8
Bolivia	87.9	85.7	90.1	54.2	48.3	60.1	27.8	21.3	34.5
Brazil	77.9	75.8	79.9	74.9	72.6	77.1	22.8	24.9	20.6
Colombia	80.4	81.6	79.2	71.1	71.9	70.3	26.2	24.1	28.3
Costa Rica	87.1	87.6	86.7	47.7	47.7	47.8	20.5	18.4	22.6
Cuba	97.4	97.3	97.6	80.2	80.8	79.7	38.0	40.8	35.3
Chile	90.5	89.5	91.5	91.2	90.8	91.7	29.0	27.7	30.2
Ecuador	92.2	92.8	91.5	75.5	73.9	77.0	48.7	47.6	49.7
El Salvador	70.8	72.0	69.7	53.8	55.0	52.6	21.2	21.8	20.5
Guatemala	56.9	54.3	59.3	43.4	38.9	47.6	15.3	10.3	20.1
Guyana	86.1	85.0	87.2	54.2	55.9	52.4	7.0	7.1	6.9
Haiti	59.7	58.7	60.7	55.0	52.3	57.8	13.7	12.4	14.9
Honduras	82.3	83.7	80.9	55.2	57.2	53.2	21.3	23.4	19.2
Jamaica	100.0	100.0	100.0	82.7	83.3	82.2	7.2	7.0	7.4
Mexico	100.0	100.0	100.0	68.1	66.3	69.9	23.4	20.0	26.8
Nicaragua	72.0	74.2	69.8	51.8	60.8	43.0	27.8	36.7	19.0
Panama	91.6	91.4	91.8	66.3	66.3	66.4	35.4	38.9	32.1
Paraguay	80.1	80.4	79.8	50.2	47.3	53.0	15.3	14.3	16.2
Peru	98.9	97.5	100.0	81.0	78.3	83.6	31.6	25.5	37.6
Suriname	99.4	99.0	99.7	93.9	93.9	93.9	14.2	14.1	14.3
Trinidad and Tobago	100.0	100.0	100.0	63.8	65.2	62.5	5.3	5.1	5.6
Uruguay	94.6	93.7	95.5	80.0	81.9	78.2	61.6	65.6	57.7
Venezuela	91.0	91.3	90.7	64.8	68.6	61.1	26.4	27.6	25.2

Source: UNESCO estimates cited in ECLAC (1994b).

where illiteracy rates among women are twice as high as among men (e.g., the urban areas of Bolivia, Guatemala and Haiti); in other instances, they are nearly double or even higher than that (e.g., in the rural areas, populated mainly by indigenous peoples, of Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru) (see table 1). In addition to the above-mentioned effects of the generation gap in terms of illiteracy rates, the situation in these countries lends strength to the conclusion that female illiteracy tends to be greater among the lower strata of the population in both urban and rural areas (Letelier Gálvez, 1993).

Illiteracy has extremely serious consequences in terms of the status of women in society, not only because it prevents them from participating as active citizens in their groups and communities (which greatly restricts their access to development projects and renders women within such projects' target groups less able to take advantage of them) but also because their inability to read the laws and thus know their rights keeps them "trapped in the sexist canons" of the Latin American culture (Braslavsky, 1984).

III

The expansion of educational coverage

Despite the structural problems affecting education in Latin America and the Caribbean, women's educational status has improved significantly in recent decades thanks to both an overall improvement in their educational level and an increase in female enrolment in relation to male enrolment. In the 1980s population censuses were already showing up "not only the disappearance of the sharp differences in enrolment rates by gender that were seen in the 1950s, but also a reversal of the situation in half of the countries, where women have gained the advantage in access to primary and secondary education" (Schiefelbein and Peruzzi, 1991). Today, in the majority of the countries of the region, women are on an equal footing with men at the basic and secondary levels, and in a number of countries female enrolment rates in higher education are moving ahead of male enrolment rates (Valdés and Gomariz, 1992 and 1993; United Nations, 1992; ECLAC, 1994b).

1. Preschool education

According to figures compiled by UNESCO (1992b) and FLACSO (Valdés and Gomariz, 1992 and 1993), in the 1980s pre-primary schools were serving a broadly equal number of boys and girls, with variations from one country to the next of one or two percentage points on one side or the other. A study conducted in Chile on the basis of the 1990 household surveys found that "at this level, gender-based differences are not observed, but income-based differences are in evidence, with attendance rising as one moves up the scale from one income quintile to the next" (UNICEF/Chile, MIDEPLAN, 1993). In fact, the private sector has played an important part in the education of those sectors which can afford to pay for preschool instruction, and its contribution in rural zones has therefore been limited. Consequently, the supply of pre-primary education favours the middle- and upper-income segments of the population, although some headway has been made in marginal areas through non-formal programmes.

The proposal put forward by ECLAC and UNESCO for improving the region's educational systems

places emphasis on preschool education as a means of resolving many problems that may arise later on in a child's education (ECLAC/UNESCO-OREALC, 1992). In view of the importance of getting women and men off to an equal start in the formal educational system, it is to be hoped that instruction at this level will be promoted by the Governments and made available to all social sectors once their countries reach the point where they can begin to seek out means of consolidating national educational coverage.

2. Primary education

In respect of the status of women in primary education, data made available by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women indicate that in 1990 there were 96 women enrolled for every 100 men in the region; this average is on a par with the figures for the countries of Western and Eastern Europe, which have yet to be surpassed by any world region.⁴ At the country level, this average reflects first-grade enrolment rates ranging from 54.3% of women between the ages of 6 and 11 (90 for every 100 men) in Guatemala up to 100% in Jamaica, Mexico and Trinidad and Tobago.

The problems that still stand in the way of efforts to make universal primary education a reality affect girls and boys alike. The main problems identified by UNESCO studies are the difficulty of serving boys and girls who live in the streets or in isolated zones (between 3% and 15% in most of the countries in the region); the absence of intercultural bilingual education programmes at the primary level in areas having large indigenous populations; delayed entry, which is particularly common among students from households at the lower socioeconomic levels; high temporary drop-out rates during harvest-time in rural areas; and the high rates of repetition resulting both from the above problems and from the poor quality of the education provided and the failure to gear the

⁴ According to calculations by the Division, based on tables 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 of the third version of the WISTAT database (indicators and statistics on women) maintained by the United Nations.

curriculum to the students' real-world environment (UNESCO, 1992a).

Although they may exhibit high repetition and drop-out rates in marginal urban and rural areas, women's academic performance is better than men's in all the countries for which figures that are broken down by gender can be obtained (Valdés and Gomariz, 1992 and 1993). The available data's lack of comparability does not permit the calculation of accurate regional rates, however. According to information compiled by ECLAC/UNESCO (1992), the rate of repetition is under 10% in only five countries, and it is only in another three countries that 80% of all students actually complete their primary schooling.

3. Secondary education

Women have greatly benefited from the expansion of secondary education in the region: not only have they reached enrolment rates similar to those of men, but they have actually surpassed those rates in 11 Latin American and several Caribbean countries, marking up a regional average of 109 women for every 100 men (see table 4). Although the coverage in rural areas is much lower for both sexes, the ratio between male and female enrolment rates at the secondary level has remained the same (see table 5). In other words, apart from indigenous populations—where the exclusion of women is an even more complex issue—women have held on to the progress they have made in secondary education in relative terms despite the structural problems existing within the educational system in the various countries. There is, however, one exception to this rule: the enrolment of women in technical secondary schools (especially in industrial subject areas) remains low “even in those countries which have opened up this type of instruction to women” (Schiefelbein and Peruzzi, 1991).

Although academic performance—measured in terms of drop-out and repeater rates, postponement of studies and the proportion of over-age students—is lower at the secondary level, women continue to outperform men in all the countries for which the relevant information is broken down by gender, regardless of the socioeconomic level or area of residence involved (Valdés and Gomariz, 1992 and 1993). It should be noted that the main reasons why women drop out of school appear to be economic demands and early pregnancy, but—partly because of the lack of data disaggregated by sex—the number of

young women who have dropped out of the formal school system in Latin America and the Caribbean is unknown. Another factor to be taken into consideration is that the serious deterioration in the social situation in the region has had numerous manifestations, including an increase in the percentage of young people who neither study nor work (ECLAC, 1994a).

4. Higher education

Although the expansion of higher education has been more limited than at the lower levels, higher education has also made considerable and quite rapid progress in the region,⁵ though the extent to which women have shared in these advances varies sharply from country to country.

Thus, the regional rate calculated by the United Nations of 106 women for every 100 men enrolled in institutions of higher learning as of 1990—the highest proportion in the world—masks widely differing rates, ranging from 50 women for every 100 men in Guatemala to 200 women or more per 100 men in some of the small Caribbean countries (United Nations, 1992; ECLAC, 1994b). The differences are all the more striking when they are cross-classified with the differences found from one country to the next in the level of post-secondary studies attained by the population and the differences between urban and rural zones in a given country (see table 6).

When we look at students' selections of their main subject or area of specialization, we find that the percentage of women choosing to specialize in what have traditionally been thought of as “masculine” fields has increased, especially in countries suffering from severe educational shortcomings (Valdés and Gomariz, 1992 and 1993). This shift has still not been extensive enough to do away with the segmentation of women's career choices, however. The real problem here is a form of sex-based discrimination, and the situation is quite similar to what occurs in industrialized countries, where a large percentage of women are concentrated in courses of study leading to careers that have more flexible working hours or that are more compatible with a greater commitment to domestic tasks, and in which

⁵ Gross enrolment rates at the tertiary level (higher education) climbed from an average of 3% in 1960 to 19% in 1990.

TABLE 5

**Latin America (12 countries): Levels of schooling
of rural population, by gender**

Country	None or less than 1 year		Primary level		Secondary level		Higher education	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Bolivia (1992)	40.0	18.1	44.7	61.4	5.4	12.2	0.3	0.8
Brazil (1988)	32.6	37.7	55.0	52.6	9.7	7.1	2.5	2.5
Colombia (1985)	21.3	21.1	62.8	64.1	11.9	10.7	0.4	0.5
Costa Rica (1992)	7.9	8.2	66.4	67.3	21.7	20.2	3.5	3.5
Cuba (1981)	5.9	5.1	67.5	61.2	25.9	32.8	0.7	1.0
Chile (1989)	0.6	0.8	63.5	66.6	17.0	14.8	0.9	1.1
Ecuador (1990)	24.0	16.2	51.2	56.2	15.0	17.2	2.9	3.6
Paraguay (1982)	18.7	11.4	71.7	76.7	6.4	9.3	1.0	0.8
Peru (1991-1992)	21.8	8.3	60.9	64.5	14.4	23.3	2.4	3.2
Dominican Republic (1991)	29.8	29.4	57.4	56.4	10.7	11.9	1.5	2.1
Uruguay (1985)	7.6	9.0	70.6	72.5	19.6	16.2	0.9	1.0
Venezuela (1981)	37.9	25.2	54.4	67.9	7.5	6.5	0.3	0.4

Source: Valdés and Gomariz (1992 and 1993).

TABLE 6

**Latin America (12 countries): Level of schooling of
population in urban (U) and rural (R) zones of each country ^a**

Country	None or less than 1 year		Primary level		Secondary level		Higher education	
	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R
Bolivia	17.4	29.0	43.4	53.1	24.6	8.9	6.7	0.5
Brazil	12.3	35.1	66.9	53.7	13.3	8.5	7.4	2.5
Colombia	7.2	21.2	42.5	63.5	41.2	11.3	7.6	0.4
Costa Rica	5.8	8.1	55.0	66.8	29.1	20.9	9.3	3.5
Cuba	3.5	5.6	43.3	64.0	47.6	29.6	5.6	0.8
Chile	0.5	0.7	41.8	65.2	41.6	15.8	7.9	1.1
Ecuador	5.3	20.0	31.5	53.7	41.3	16.1	17.7	3.2
Paraguay	10.6	14.9	63.5	74.3	18.2	7.9	5.6	0.9
Peru	6.8	15.0	42.8	62.7	33.3	18.9	16.7	2.8
Dominican Republic	17.5	29.6	49.5	57.0	22.9	11.3	10.0	2.1
Uruguay	5.0	8.5	51.9	71.8	37.3	17.5	5.0	1.0
Venezuela	15.1	31.1	56.8	61.6	23.4	7.0	4.7	0.3

Source: Valdés and Gomariz (1992 and 1993).

^a Brazil: the urban population corresponds to the south-eastern region, while the rural population corresponds to the north-eastern region; Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela: total urban population.

there is less risk of sex-based wage discrimination (ECLAC/UNESCO-OREALC, 1992). Thus, the source of discrimination is not so much an effort on the part of the educational system to make distinctions as a means of openly putting women at a disadvantage,

but rather the fact that this system is part of a larger society, and the opportunities it offers are therefore used differently by women and men in accordance with the dominant values and beliefs of that society (Varela, 1991).

IV

Socio-cultural obstacles faced by women in the educational system

These sexist traits are connected with the tendency in Western thinking to divide up and classify people, capacities and activities by gender, as part of an attitude that "diminishes, excludes, under-represents and stereotypes people on the basis of their sex" (Abu Nasr, Lorfing and Mikati, 1983, cited by Michel, 1989). This is the source of the overvaluation of "masculine" views and outlooks and of the silencing of the "feminine" perspective in academia, and it is subsequently reproduced in the stereotypical content of instruction, in the failure to pay an equal amount of attention to girl students in the classroom, and in fewer job opportunities for women. In the following section we will see how sexual stereotypes, teachers' attitudes and gender segregation in labour-market orientation may help to distort girls' individual opportunities and to oblige them to internalize their subordinate position in society (Subirats, 1990).

1. Sexual stereotypes in education

A careful examination of the studies that have been carried out in the region on the content of teaching materials—textbooks, illustrations, films—used at the elementary and secondary levels of instruction in the vast majority of the Latin American and Caribbean countries confirms the existence of gender discrimination. The point of departure for a study focusing on this type of discrimination may be such indicators of sexism as the frequency of the presence of females and males, their participation in work-related activities and in domestic and household activities, the descriptive adjectives used to refer to one or the other sex, and leadership situations (Chile, National Women's Service (SERNAM), 1992). According to an analysis of school textbooks in Belize (Laaksonen, 1991), Chile (Chile, National Women's Service, 1992), Costa Rica (Costa Rica, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports/Ministry of Public Education, 1991), El Salvador, Guatemala and Panama (Caldera, 1990), Peru (Valdés and Gomariz, 1993) and Uruguay (Piotti Núñez, 1990; Valdés and Gomariz,

1992), the texts and other books that were examined referred to women in fewer than 30% of the leadership situations mentioned and depicted them as occupying socially inferior, weak or subordinate positions (Caldera, 1990). In Venezuela, a study of sexual stereotypes in school textbooks used at the preschool and basic levels classified such stereotypes as belonging to one of three categories: the exaggeration of behavioural traits, household or professional roles, and group relationships. Thus, a glaring mismatch was observed between Venezuelan society as it actually is and the models presented in the texts, which were constructs corresponding to "social situations of the past" (Montero, 1993).

This discrepancy between reality and models is precisely what stereotypes are—i.e., "rigid, anonymous models which serve as the basis for the reproduction, in a mechanical manner, of images and forms of behaviour" (Dunningan, cited by Michel, 1989). This may be expressed openly, as in the case of school curricula that guide boys and girls towards typically "masculine" or "feminine" disciplines, or in a veiled manner, as in the omission of certain qualities or roles from among the options presented to girls and boys (Michel, 1989). For example, the textbooks used in the various countries of the region primarily depict women as idealized versions of mothers and housewives (Piotti Núñez, 1990; Torres, 1993) and lead the reader to believe that men play the important roles in both the public and private spheres of life. When women are presented as taking public action, they are usually shown to be engaging in activities that have traditionally been regarded as feminine. Dynamic forms of action that demand effectiveness and productivity or that have to do with guidance or leadership are attributed almost exclusively to men (Valdés and Gomariz, 1992). These stereotypes do harm to girls' self-image and identity, and perpetuate the beliefs underlying gender discrimination (Rico, 1994).

In the wake of these studies on the content of teaching materials in the above-mentioned countries,

a number of Governments have begun to modify the textbooks now in use and to present models of women in the region that are more in line with reality. As a result, the types of images of women that are being presented are somewhat more numerous, although they are still in a minority. Greater flexibility is also beginning to be introduced in the characterization of traditional roles, and women may now be depicted as being more active in the public sphere, while men may be shown as participating in household chores and child-rearing. However, school curricula have yet to be reformulated in such a way as to acknowledge the value of the contributions made by each of the sexes and to present a balanced picture of both.

The problems involved in designing teaching materials that reflect what are as yet incomplete socio-cultural changes are certainly formidable, and it should therefore come as no surprise that educational authorities have difficulty in producing textbooks that are in keeping with the times. At present, this has led to the use of ambiguous materials in which contradictory models overlap one another and which do not help students to arrive at a clear idea of what direction they wish to take in life. In the place of the old stereotypes, there is an accumulation of "models, modes of behaviour and attitudes that do not necessarily provide a broader range of options or new horizons, since the assignment of priority to reproductive roles within the family still appears to be inevitable. At the same time, men's models are changing more slowly, and this means that the context for any innovations that arise will be an unbalanced process of change in gender images" (Rico, 1994).

One approach to the problem that has sparked a great deal of interest in the region is the integration of women's issues and the gender perspective into the teaching of history at all levels of the formal educational system. The incorporation of women's history into academic culture would reaffirm women's leadership roles in society and thereby help young girls to develop an identity and a feeling of self-worth. By promoting a more complex and modern view of history, it would also help to democratize the educational system and introduce the study of the black and indigenous cultures (León, 1992). In order to accomplish this, historical research will have to be undertaken and the cooperation of both educational authorities and academic institutions will be required. The challenge being confronted here is

how to go about shaping a common societal agenda in which all citizens –both women and men– can participate and which makes room for diversity and different identities.

2. The role of teachers

Another fundamental factor in the democratization of the formal educational system is the role played by teachers; this is because a student and his or her teacher form a power relationship involving pedagogic elements, social aspects, communication and the transmission of skills and knowledge, and this relationship constitutes the most decisive element in the learning process within the school (Labourdette, 1989). For these same reasons, teachers "may play a very important role either in the perpetuation of sexist stereotypes and prejudices or in their refutation and elimination" (Rico, 1994).

Thanks to the contributions made by a number of studies on the presence of gender discrimination in the educational system, there is a growing awareness in the region of just how important the teacher-student relationship is in the transmission of sexual stereotypes. Second only to the family, the classroom is where young girls and boys experience the hierarchization of the social roles and models which society is going to impose upon them in the form of attitudes and modes of behaviour. The way in which teachers support, encourage or ignore the demands for attention made upon them by the girls and boys in class sends implicit messages to those children about the norms of the society that surrounds them and prepares them to adapt to those norms. For example, a study conducted in Chile has demonstrated that both male and female teachers pay more attention to boys in class in terms of going over their homework, asking them questions and disciplining them. Because girls tend to be better students and to observe institutional rules more readily, their teachers perceive them as being less creative and less capable of acting as leaders than boys (Rossetti, 1988 and 1992). Another study on teachers of both sexes in Ecuador found that 72% of them felt that women had less of an aptitude for technology-related subjects and three out of ten of these teachers felt it was their obligation to guide students towards careers that were "appropriate for their sex" (Robalino, Villanueva and Isch, cited in Rico, 1994).

Training teachers –both men and women– in such a way as to sensitize them to the consequences

of their conduct and encourage them to transform their classrooms into a place where students can learn about the cultural changes occurring in the outside world is all the more important in view of the fact that the majority of the teachers in the educational systems of the region are women. According to figures gathered by FLACSO throughout the region for its statistical compendium *Mujeres latinoamericanas en cifras* (Valdés and Gomariz, 1992 and 1993), in the vast majority of the countries in the region, almost all the teachers at the preschool level, three-quarters of those at the elementary level and half of the teachers in secondary schools are women. Women are in the minority, however, in higher education.⁶ Teacher training colleges are the only exception, where women are in the majority in both the faculty and the student body. Women are not a major presence in senior executive or administrative posts either, and little effort has been made to train teachers to adopt a proper gender perspective; this situation tends to perpetuate a vicious circle between their own situation and the reproduction of a gender-based discriminatory bias within the educational process.

The implications of this state of affairs were discussed by women teachers in Paraguay in July 1991 when the Public Educators' Network organized a campaign "for non-sexist education". At seminars attended by teachers from both public and private schools, these educators stated quite clearly that "they felt they were not held in high regard and were not considered to be direct agents of educational reform" (ECLAC, 1992).

3. Gender segregation in vocational guidance

In order to do away with gender-based discrimination in the formal educational system, it is important not only to take action within the educational process as such but also to look at that system from the standpoint of labour and of the demands generated by production processes. Steps need to be taken to rectify the inequality of educational opportunities for women that stems from the role they are assigned in

the social development process, where they are regarded as factors of reproduction rather than social actors in full possession of their rights (Dasso and Montañó, cited in ECLAC, 1991b).

Given the ways in which production patterns are now changing in the region and the new types of demands that this process is generating in the labour market, women's participation in scientific and technological progress and in the production of knowledge in general needs to be significantly increased; this will, in turn, influence the definition of production, the sexual division of labour and the cultural values of society; in addition, a determined effort to increase the level of activity in the area of technical education is needed in all the countries. Furthermore, at a time when the region is beginning to address the urgent need to update the way in which management principles are being taught and adapt them to the requirements of modern-day enterprise, it is also important for women to be initiated into new forms of leadership, management and decision-making.

In many countries of the region, the advances made by women in the field of education in the past three decades have enabled the women in the economically active population (EAP) to attain a higher level of education than their male counterparts (see table 7). It has also been estimated that in most of the countries in the region, women who hold skilled jobs have an average of two more years of formal training than men who hold equivalent jobs (ECLAC, 1991b; Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos, 1992). Even though women make up about 50% of the student body in secondary schools and institutions of higher learning, however, "a clear difference exists in terms of the type of training selected by men and women, with a number of cases where the percentage of women is smaller in vocational schools than in normal schools" (Parada, 1991).

The resulting segmentation as between men and women affects the development potential of society as a whole as well as of women themselves. For example, at the close of the 1980s, fewer than 35% of engineering graduates were women in four countries in which the development of the production sector is a key factor of economic and social progress.⁷ This

⁶ 22.6% in Colombia, 34.2% in Costa Rica, 45.0% in Cuba, 17.8% in Ecuador, 19.0% in Guatemala, 33.9% in Panama, 15.2% in Paraguay, 21.7% in Peru, 34.0% in Uruguay and 37.4% in Venezuela.

⁷ Brazil: 15.2% in 1988; Colombia: 27.1% in 1986; Cuba: 34.8% in 1989; Venezuela: 34.6% in 1988 (Valdés and Gomariz, 1992 and 1993).

TABLE 7

**Latin America (12 countries): Economically active population,
by gender and by years of schooling**

Country	None or less than 1 year		Primary school		Secondary school		Higher education	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Brazil								
1988	14.1	18.8	56.5	61.3	29.1	19.7	...	...
Colombia								
1985	10.4	12.0	44.9	51.4	33.9	27.8	7.7	8.8
1989	2.8	1.8	32.8	32.4	49.2	46.9	15.1	18.9
Costa Rica								
1990	3.1	5.4	43.3	57.3	34.5	26.6	18.0	9.7
Cuba ^a								
1980	...	...	35.9	51.0	47.8	36.7	16.3	12.3
1986	...	...	18.6	26.5	57.1	55.4	24.3	18.1
Chile								
1989	0.3	0.4	35.7	45.9	45.3	38.1	13.2	9.1
Ecuador								
1982	13.8	15.1	35.2	53.1	28.6	16.7	14.1	7.1
1990	10.4	9.8	32.2	45.9	31.9	27.5	20.6	11.9
Panama								
1991	2.4	6.6	23.1	41.8	46.5	36.5	28.0	15.1
Paraguay								
1982	6.1	7.7	56.1	68.7	29.6	18.7	6.3	3.1
Peru								
1981	20.8	10.5	34.5	49.1	24.5	28.2	16.8	10.2
1987 ^b	3.3	0.8	25.9	19.7	51.8	55.4	19.0	24.1
Dominican Republic								
1991	10.5	16.9	42.9	48.4	25.5	19.3	18.1	9.6
Uruguay								
1985	1.9	3.3	40.5	52.9	47.7	37.5	9.0	5.9
Venezuela								
1987	6.4	10.9	34.8	46.7	44.7	33.4	14.1	8.8

Source: Valdés and Gomariz (1992 and 1993).

^a Civilians in State sector.

^b Population of the Lima metropolitan area.

state of affairs is even more ominous over the long term because the most conspicuous feature of the current occupational cycle is not a decline in the number of jobs, but rather the fact that the swift pace of technological innovation is rapidly outmoding certain skills and areas of expertise (ECLAC, 1994a), as a result of which women are being left further and further behind.

According to studies sponsored by the World Bank in 15 Latin American and Caribbean countries concerning the relationship between women's participation in the labour force and their level of education and pay rates, career choice is also a very influential factor in wage discrimination against women. These studies have found that women's participation in the labour market rises sharply as their number of years

of formal schooling increases, especially at the levels of technical secondary and post-secondary training, and that education is a factor of overriding importance in determining the income levels of women as well as men. Nevertheless, education's "rate of return" in terms of income has remained lower for women in all 15 of these countries. According to the authors of these studies, this fact cannot be accounted for by shortcomings in human resources development but is instead due primarily to discrimination in the labour market and to occupational choice (Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos, 1992).

Thus, career choice is not only a crucial element in terms of an individual's development; it also has a strong influence on people's opportunities for participating in society and, by determining their income level, on the quality of their living conditions. Taking these findings into consideration, an analysis of the segmentation characterizing women's enrolment in secondary and higher education indicates that women's increased presence at these levels does not necessarily mean that "a change is taking place in the social status of each sex, although there may be some redefinition of occupational roles together with a qualitative change which as yet is difficult to evaluate" (Rico, 1994).

Whether at the level of secondary-school vocational training or higher education, a large majority of women choose to study subjects that are an extension of their traditional roles and that "do not alter the sexual division of labour from a symbolic standpoint or have any real influence on inter-gender hierarchies" (Rico, 1994). For example, in such disparate countries as Cuba and Paraguay, in secondary vocational and technical schools, women are in the majority in those courses of study having to do with public health, economics and art; they are on a par with men in subjects dealing with the chemical and food industries; they are in the minority in traditionally masculine fields such as metallurgy, construction and agriculture; and they are entirely absent from others, such as mechanics, carpentry and graphic arts (Valdés and Gomariz, 1992 and 1993).

Research has also confirmed that in higher education, despite the changes that have taken place and the increasing redistribution of women students among a broader range of career possibilities, women tend to congregate in the fields of education, the humanities, the arts, social science and certain disci-

plines in the health sciences, such as nursing, obstetrics, nutrition and dentistry. There are promising signs that women may soon be on an equal footing with men in the fields of management, economics, architecture, urban planning, law and chemistry, which have until now been regarded as prestigious, traditionally masculine careers.⁸ Meanwhile, engineering and the natural and exact sciences continue to be a male preserve; this state of affairs, which is particularly notable when the percentages of women students in these fields are disaggregated by discipline,⁹ leads to the exclusion of women from activities involving technological innovation and the generation of knowledge.

The enrolment figures for vocational schools reveal a close correlation between the proportion of women students and the types of specializations offered, with the percentage of women falling to negligible levels in occupational fields traditionally associated with men. In view of these factors, a recent study on women's contributions to economic growth in Latin America and the Caribbean concluded that training in this field has not opened up new vistas or income-earning opportunities for women but has instead guided them towards traditional, low-income occupations, thereby perpetuating the differences in the opportunities open to men and women in the production sector (Buvinic and Lycette, 1994).

⁸ Recent studies suggest, however, that these careers are beginning to be thought of as "options for women" (Varela, 1991), which would seem to be leading to "a steady decline in their status based on impressions of what is going on in the labour market" (Rico, 1994).

⁹ If, for example, the figures on the women students specializing in these fields in the public and private universities of Peru are broken down by area of study, the situation was as follows in 1986: chemistry: 23.9%; fisheries: 22.8%; industrial engineering: 17.1%; civil engineering: 11.2%; geology: 4.4%; electronics: 2.8%; mining: 2.2%; and mechanical engineering: 0.9%. If the same sort of disaggregation is performed for the natural and exact sciences, the results indicate that there are clear-cut differences underlying the nearly equal proportions of men and women in these fields and that those differences correlate with the status of the various disciplines. Thus, in Peru, as of 1986 the percentages of female enrolment in each area of study were as follows: 53.1% in chemistry, 43.8% in biology, 31.4% in zoology, 15.6% in agronomy, and 8.8% in physics (Valdés and Gomariz, 1992 and 1993).

V

Some final thoughts

Just as the educational system permits the reproduction of traditional models, this system's structure can also spur the development of new models. In order for this to happen, however, a country must have the political will to question the cultural content of education and must be able to elicit the participation of all the social agents positioned within the system's structure: national and educational authorities; educators; textbook authors, illustrators and publishers; employers; society at large; and women's organizations. Along these same lines, in their proposal for upgrading the educational systems of Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC and UNESCO emphasize that a multi-faceted effort will be needed in order to change the pattern of education in the region (ECLAC/UNESCO-OREALC, 1992).

In practical terms, the aim is to modify a socialization process—which begins in the home, continues in the schools and is reaffirmed by the social environment—which currently defines gender identities that stress differences and breed subordination and asymmetrical power relationships. The objective is to overhaul these inter-gender referential and relational patterns with a view to fostering a different kind of

environment in which roles will be more flexible and both men and women can develop their potential as individuals and citizens. As applied to the design of a proposed curriculum, this would involve rectifying the androcentric biases underlying the theory and praxis of education and identifying their repercussions in terms of the living conditions, growth, personal development, integration into the workforce and social participation of students of both sexes.

In sum, public policies aimed at increasing the benefits of formal education for women should, first and foremost, be directed towards assisting women in all social sectors of the region to become fully-fledged citizens of modern society who enjoy equal opportunities in both education and the labour market. The strategies to be proposed should also lead to the elimination of sexual stereotypes from the educational process, improvement of the status of girls and women at all levels of formal and non-formal education, and the furtherance of research on the reciprocal relationships existing between culture and education, inasmuch as culture is both the matrix and the outcome of the educational process.

(Original: Spanish)

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