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Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality

Gender and education in Costa Rica

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Gender and education in Costa Rica

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Introduction

Costa Rica has one of the highest education levels in Latin America. The Political Constitution recognizes education as a human right to be enjoyed by all citizens and guarantees freedom of education, as well as compulsory education up to the third cycle, equalling nine years of basic education. Basic general, pre-school and diversified education is free of charge and government funded.

Costa Rica's political system values education as an effective means for closing the gap between social classes, because it creates new opportunities for social advancement. Education is therefore considered to be the basis of social democracy.

The crisis in the eighties slowed down public investment, with serious repercussions on educational coverage, infrastructure and quality, as well as on access to services and resources, including grants, school meals and educational facilities (UNICEF, 2001). As a result, during the subsequent decade the government instigated major reforms to bridge the gaps that still exist in the education system between public and private education and between regions, in terms of coverage, continuance and exclusion.

Some of the main advances include new provision to improve the quality of state education (educational computing, foreign languages from primary school age, scientific and humanities secondary schools; greater coverage and compulsory pre-school education); the implementation of a Strategic Plan (1998-2002) to improve quality, coverage and continuance in the education system and an amendment to Article 78 of the Political Constitution assigning 6% of the gross domestic product to education, including higher education. In spite of these efforts, there are still challenges to overcome, such as coverage, exclusion from the education system, and educational quality, in order to guarantee girls and boys the opportunity to fully enjoy this right (UNICEF, 2001)).

When it ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1984, the country instigated the first initiatives aimed at eliminating sexist stereotypes and practices that legitimize gender inequalities in the education system. The 1990 Act for promoting the Social Equality of Women made the central government and educational institutions responsible for guaranteeing equal opportunities for men and women, not only in terms of access to education, including technical education, but also in terms of the quality of such education. Under this legal framework, a set of gender equity policies was instigated and institutional mechanisms were set up to promote and implement these policies and to ensure that they are complied with. This led to the creation of the Gender Equity Office in the Ministry of Public Education in 2000 and a Strategic Plan was defined containing measures to

speed up gender equality and equity between men and women throughout the system.

The educational status of women has improved markedly in the past twenty years compared with that of men. Women have secured equal access to education and perform better for a number of indicators. The principal obstacles to gender equity in education have been successfully identified and strategic and innovative policy measures drawn up. Significant progress has been made in the use of non-sexist language in texts and illustrations in primary school textbooks, in educational legislation and in incorporating the gender approach into a number of educational and administrative processes. However, it has been extremely difficult to eliminate teaching practices that reproduce the prevailing gender domination system, and segregation in the choice of careers, professions and trades, as well as in the courses provided by educational institutions.

There are multiple and complex challenges to be faced in order to guarantee gender equality and equity in educational access and the quality of education offered to women and men. Costa Rica's experience in this area teaches important lessons that can be shared with other countries as part of a debate which we could use as a basis to critically analyze any structural barriers that need to be eliminated and possible alternatives involving the government and organized civil society, including women's organizations.

1. Advances in the educational status of women: “*We’re halfway there”.

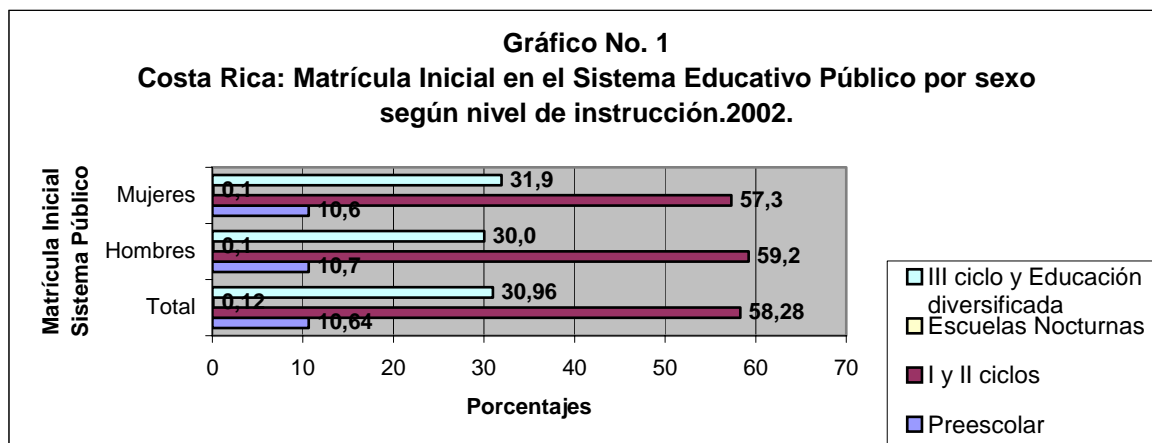
1.1 Equal access to education and outstanding performance

The equal participation of women in education is an essential prerequisite for promoting gender equity and equality in access, control and enjoyment of the benefits of the country's development. Furthermore, it promotes substantive changes in family health, nutrition and development, as well as access for families to decision-making in various spheres of society (Ministry of Public Education, 2000- 2002).

The efforts of Costa Rica's government led to a gradual improvement in the educational status of women, until they achieved parity with men in access to education. Indeed, the Seventh Report on the State of the Nation 2002 stated that the country was “*halfway there” in gender equity terms. Let us take a look at the behaviour of the chief indicators.

The gender breakdown of school enrolment in public and private institutions is similar for both sexes, with some differences according to the type of institution (public, private or state-assisted). Up to 1990, male enrolment in urban and rural educational institutions was slightly higher, decreasing slightly thereafter, when female enrolment started to rise steadily (MIDEPLAN, 1995). In 2002, female enrolment caught up with male enrolment in pre-school education and night schools and overtook male enrolment in secondary education, but lagged slightly behind in primary education (Graph 1). For every 12 women enrolled in

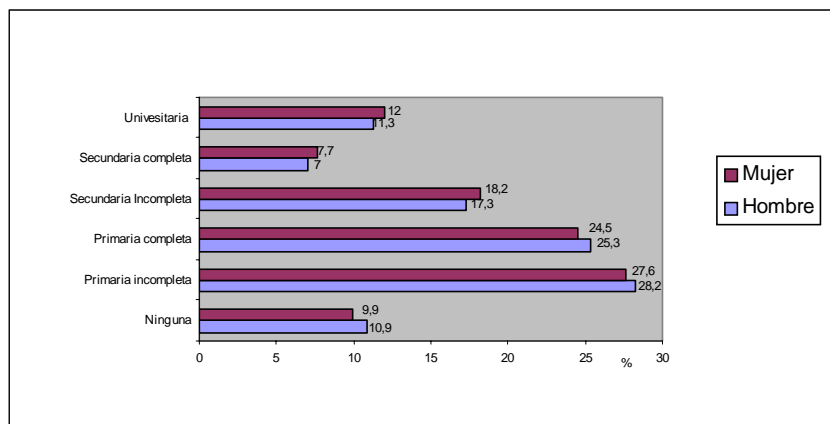
state university institutions, 10 men were admitted (State of the Nation Project, 2001).



Source: Ministry of Public Education. Repetition in Costa Rica's Education System, 2002. 2002.

There are low illiteracy rates for both sexes, although these fell faster among women. In 1984 women caught up with men, and in 1988 they overtook men (5.9 women compared with 6.3 men). This trend continued in 2000, as illustrated in Graph 2. That year, the literacy indicator showed no major differences between men and women, calculated on the basis of the number of years of schooling, which reflects equity for this indicator.

Graph No. 2
Costa Rica: Breakdown of the population by level of education according to gender. 2000



Source: National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, 2001.

On average, women achieved a similar participation in the formal education system as men (Graph 2), whereas in secondary and university education, they present higher net levels of coverage, continuance in the system and performance (State of the Nation Project, 2001). Even so, their participation rate varied according to the different types of educational institution (public, private and state-assisted) and the different study fields (CONARE, 2000).

Women performed better. In 1992, 50.03% of women completed primary education, rising slightly to 50.32% in 1994. By contrast, 49.97% of men completed primary schooling in 1992, falling to 48.68% two years later (UNFPA, MIDEPLAN [Ministry for National Planning and Economic Policy] and CMF [National Centre for Women and the Family], 1995).

The summary table of indicators in Appendix 1 shows that the gender gap in the net coverage rate in secondary education (difference between the percentage of women and the percentage of men) was 4.6 in favour of women in 1997, and 4.9 in their favour in 1999 and 2000. The gender gap in the percentage of school drop-out/exclusion¹ (difference between the percentage of men and women) was also in women's favour. In addition, more men dropped out of the first three levels in all years. The widest gender gaps occur in night schools, followed by the II and IV Academic Cycles, with differentials of 6.6 and 2.7 in 1999 (State of the Nation Project, 2001), as illustrated in Table 1 and Graph 3.

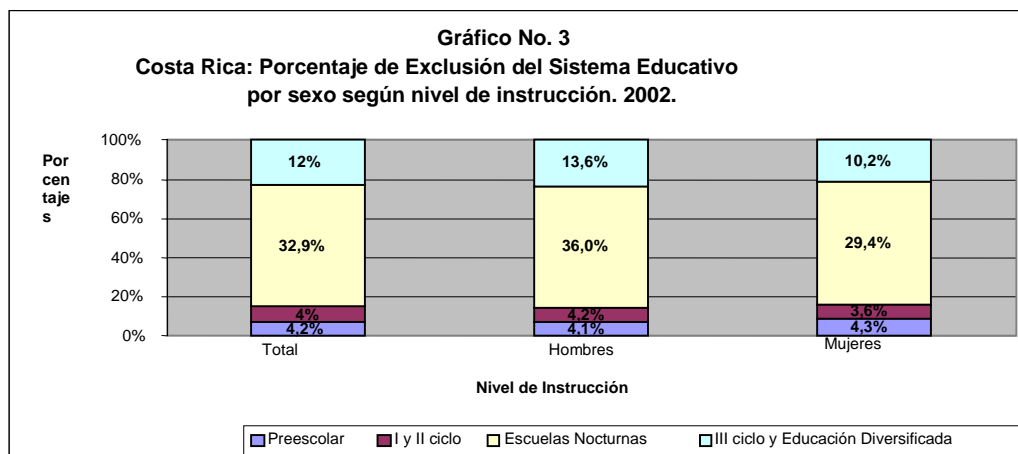
Table 1: Student passes
Table 1: Percentages of students passing
according to educational level. 2002.

	Total passes	Resits	Fails
Primary schools	85%	9%	6%
Men	83%	9.8%	7%
Women	87.1%	8.0%	4.9%
Night schools	82.9%	6.4%	10.8%
Men	80.5%	7.4%	5.2%
Women	85.4%	5.2%	9.4%
Secondary schools	54.6%	33.0%	12.4%
Men	51.2%	33.7%	15%
Women	57.7%	32.4%	9.9%

Source: Ministry of Public Education. Repetition in Costa Rica's Education System, 2002. 2002.

Table 1 shows that socio-economic gaps have a greater impact on the status of women than men, since more women than men fail at night school. This is where women's double work burden, on account of their gender, becomes a major structural barrier.

¹ It is neither appropriate nor accurate to refer to "dropping out" when taking a rights standpoint, but of exclusion from the education system, since it is not the girl or boy who drop out of school and the education system, but rather the latter abandoning or expelling the girl or boy (UNICEF (2001). Exclusion is an expression of the education system's inability to retain male and female students or to guarantee the appropriate conditions and opportunities for them to continue and perform satisfactorily in school.



Source: Ministry of Public Education. Intra-annual dropout rate in the education system, 2001. 2002.

1.2 What factors explain this progress in the educational status of Costa Rican women?

The CEDAW and the Act for promoting the Social Equality of Women gave the women's movement and other sectors of civil society a working platform for their efforts to achieve and promote gender equality and equity in a number of fields, including education. In parallel, they provided minimum guidelines for the Costa Rican government to instigate legal and political reforms, and to create various institutions and mechanisms for ensuring that they are implemented. This united effort helped to alter public awareness, legislation, policies and institutions.

The women's social movement has been a central bastion in the struggle to ensure compliance with the Costa Rican government's commitments under international treaties and world action plans stemming from various world conferences. They have established strategic alliances with the Government Mechanism to facilitate a range of processes based on civil society, carry out citizen monitoring and promote strategic initiatives based on the Women's Forum of the National Women's Institute [INAMU]².

Since 1996, there have been policies to eradicate concepts and practices that create gender or any other type of discrimination from the education system. These relate to teaching methods and materials, the decision-making structure and administration of the education system, as well as educational access and continuance for women from rural areas and marginalized urban areas, teenage mothers, and teenagers with disabilities and technical-vocational and occupational provision. Even though structural barriers still persist, the measures adopted in these fields, under the leadership of the National Centre for Women and the Family since 1986, and of the National Women's Institute

² The Forum is an advisory body of the INAMU's Governing Board and Executive Presidency, created by a Law of the Republic. It comprises around 30 women's and joint organizations working for equality and equity in Costa Rica from the basis of diversity.

since 1998, have succeeded in securing social recognition for women's entitlement to education.

Women have equal access to a variety of grants and financial subsidies, which promotes their inclusion and continuance in the education system. Gender socialization has developed greater discipline and responsibility in women, which results in a better school performance. This factor, combined with the value that mothers place on education as a means of entering the labour market under better conditions where required, encourages women to continue in the system for longer than men. In addition, men are more likely to be employed at an earlier age in rural areas and in construction, which does not apply to girls and young women. Furthermore, the changes in the labour market have called for an increasingly well-trained female workforce.

1.3 Impact of progress on the educational status of women

Education is a development factor that promotes people's knowledge, experience, skills, expertise and values. A country with better educated women has a potential resource to generate development. A better educational level has led to major changes in a number of areas.

One of the areas where the educational advancement of women has had the greatest impact is on the female occupational structure. In the past decade, the percentage of women professionals and technicians has increased compared with men, as well as in management positions. Women's share of these occupations rose from 23.3% in 1990 to 29.9% in 2000. Their participation also increased in commerce, in hotels and catering, as a result of the development of the tourism sector, and also as employers, albeit primarily as managers of micro- and small businesses under conditions of inequality. The highest growth occurred in industrial and commercial activities in rural areas, associated with the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (State of the Nation Project, 2001).

Better education among women has promoted other processes resulting in better health for women and their families and communities, active involvement in political processes and greater demands for recognition of their human rights. The Costa Rican government has had fair success in conducting many preventive health programmes, as well as child health and sexual and reproductive health programmes, providing women with more information and schooling, enabling them to access and process useful knowledge.

The increased presence of Costa Rican women at decision-making levels and in the three powers [executive, legislative and judicial], in the public and private sectors, as well as in a wide range of social organizations, is partially due to their enhanced status.

However, it has to be recognized that these changes are also accompanied by deep concerns and by persistent disparities in the education system and in society.

2. Seeking to go the rest of the way... Gender gaps and inequalities that still exist in education

In spite of the fact that women and men enjoy similar opportunities for access to and continuance in the education system, gender inequalities are still being conveyed through cultural concepts passed on either openly or covertly through the formal or 'hidden' curriculum. In many cases, these advances have not led to more and better integration of women into the social, political and economic life of the country, and still less to a major impact on women's living conditions and quality of life.

These gaps and inequalities must be overcome in order to go the rest of the way, and until this unfinished task is complete, real equality between men and women cannot be guaranteed. It means sweeping away complex obstacles deeply rooted in a patriarchal culture which still relegates women to the sphere of social reproduction, and which denigrates women's knowledge, know-how and skills and undervalues their work. The first step in eliminating these obstacles is to recognize them.

2.2.1 Gender social relations in the domestic and community sphere

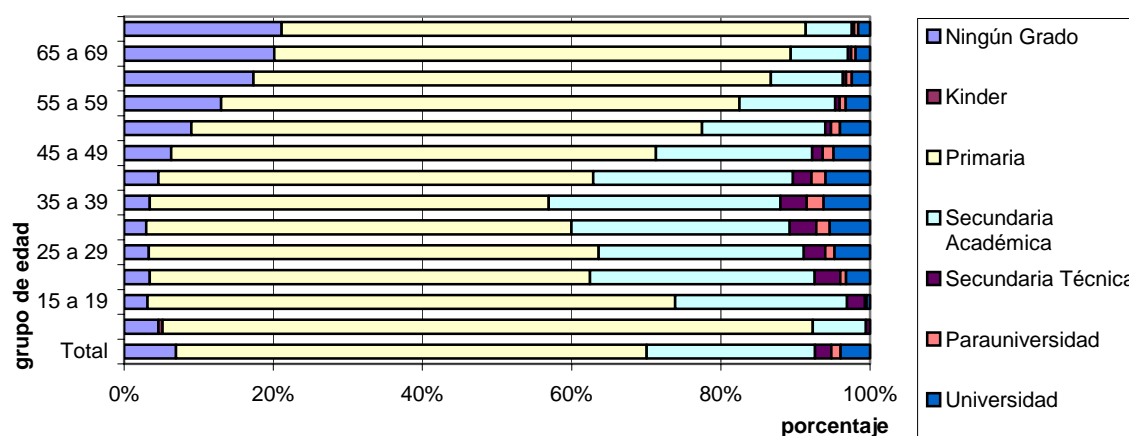
Socio-cultural gender patterns reproduce prejudice and sexist practices both inside and outside the classroom, since gender inequalities cannot be eliminated merely by giving women equal access to educational institutions. A 'hidden curriculum' still persists, which reproduces gender stereotypes, gender roles and social relations that foster female subordination and discrimination against women.

➤ Housework: a feminized task

Ramos (2001) found a marked gender gap between young 12 to 17-year-olds engaged exclusively in reproductive tasks. Independently of their socio-economic level, it was women who assumed reproductive tasks, even where they were teenagers, as finding also confirmed by the 2000 Population Census (National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, 2001). The widest gender gaps occurred in lower-income homes, where 22% of women carried out only domestic tasks, compared with 2% of men. In addition, this group is the one with the least schooling (Graph 4). By contrast, the differences were not as great in the top quintile.

Graph No. 4

Costa Rica: Women aged 12 years and over engaged in housework in the home by educational level and according to age group. 2000



Source: Méjivar, 2002, based on data from the Ninth Population Census. 2000. INEC.

Working solely on housework in the home damages the personal development and self-image of girls, because it keeps them out of the education system. Since housework is not valued socially, such girls run the risk of getting married and having babies at an early age.

➤ Choice of trades and professions

Teaching practices persist which reproduce the prevailing gender domination system. They encourage gender segregation in the choice of careers, professions and trades, including public and private universities. Segregation has been moderate in universities, although it is more pronounced in out-of-school technical specializations. In feminized specializations, female enrolment is 200% greater than male enrolment, whereas female enrolment in masculinized specialities is barely 60%. In spite of changes in segregation processes, in many careers considered as “male”, women are still poorly represented in science and technology (State of the Nation, 2001).

2.2.2 Occupational segregation, wage gaps and the invisibility of housework

The occupational structure is very far from being equal, since women continue to work in feminized activities with lower salaries. Men gained more ground in “female” occupations than women did in “male” occupations. Whereas 19% of men performed “female” activities, only 12.7% of women made inroads into masculinized areas (State of the Nation Project, 2001).

These inequalities were reflected in wider wage and income gaps between women and men in virtually all occupational groups and levels of education, especially in occupations with concentrations of women workers of up to 70% (personal service workers, shopkeepers and shop assistants) - all poorly paid jobs with less protection in terms of workers’ rights (National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, 2001).

Women's average hourly salaries as a ratio of men's, by educational level 1990, 1995, 1996- 1999

Educational level	1990	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
No schooling	67.6	73.3	94.1	92.3	68.2	73.7
Partial primary	71.3	79.5	79.6	77.6	80.7	82.0
Complete primary	77.1	78.1	83.5	82.0	81.8	80.4
Part. sec. (tech. and acad.)	74.4	78.8	86.1	87.8	87.2	81.6
Complete secondary	85.6	85.1	81.8	89.4	87.8	78.4
Compl. technical secondary	91.0	82.5	91.8	107.7	100.0	87.4
Para-university	91.2	84.6	64.9	97.4	86.6	77.1
University	76.4	84.5	81.4	91.7	91.3	85.4

Source: INEC-MTSS. Household Survey for Multiple Purposes. Several years.

Even though these gaps have narrowed, the improvement in women's education failed to result in average hourly pay rates equal to those of men with similar levels of education. The persistence of the belief that women are responsible for housework prevents them from becoming fully involved in the labour market, causes gender segregation in employment, widens gender-based wage gaps, and makes women's economic contribution to national production invisible.

The National Accounts System fails to take reproductive work into consideration because it is not considered to be a primary activity for own consumption. The State of the Nation Project estimated it as 14.07% of the gross domestic product (1997). In addition, it found that the hidden employment rates reflect gender disparity since, in 2000, this indicator was 2.3% for men, compared with 5.1% for women of working age. The majority of women do not succeed in securing jobs because of their family responsibilities and are classed as "inactive". This puts women at a disadvantage when they enter the labour market, since they continue to be burdened with their reproductive role and the gender-based limitations imposed upon them, and their participation in the occupational structure is lower.

2.2.3 Institutional barriers to mainstreaming gender equity into the education system

Curricular changes and the eradication of sexist teaching practices call for continuous and systematic processes of awareness-raising and training of teachers and educational authorities. In 2000, the Ministry of Public Education signed an agreement with the National Women's Institute (INAMU), creating a Gender Equity Office and promising to incorporate a gender perspective into its activities.

Progress has been slow due to multiple obstacles that have interfered in the Office's activities and in the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Institutional commitment is limited, since the Plan was not included in the institutional agenda, coupled with limited funding and poor accountability by Ministry of Public Education departments for meeting these commitments, as they are not binding. In 2002, this prevented the implementation of some 21 measures in the Strategic Plan, some of which involved training to ensure that teachers recognize sexist language and practices and are able to teach from a gender equity perspective. The Ministry of Public Education does not grant travel allowances to enable teachers to attend workshops and they have a work overload, added to which they have to fit in extra hours of lessons around the workshops to comply with the requirement to work 200 actual teaching days.

In spite of the efforts in recent years to bring in changes, the school curriculum still fails to address the specific needs and interests of women and men with

regard to physical infrastructure and teaching aids. This 'hidden curriculum' exists in the classroom, in primary and secondary schools, as well as in the family and community, fostering and justifying differential treatment of people based on gender. These practices have serious implications in terms of personal development, as well as contravening constitutional and international rules to guarantee that women and men have equal and equitable access to education and the enjoyment of its benefits.

2.2.4 Ideological factors: an obstacle to non-sexist education

A serious obstacle to progress in curricular reform and the creation of more equitable and democratic study environment, has been interference from the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and from neo-conservative groups. The Church used its influence to block the implementation of sex education policies. It mobilized religious associations and neo-conservative groups to oppose contraception and the use of condoms in preventing the transmission of HIV/AIDS. They also opposed the contents and methods of sex education in state primary schools and in secondary schools because they threatened Christian morality. In the end the government negotiated major changes in the policy's philosophy and strategy with ecclesiastical authorities.

The latest example of intervention was in the 'Young Love Programme'. The programme began in 1999, demanding the right of boys, girls and teenagers to sex education. In addition it recognized that teenage boys and girls have the same fundamental rights as other age groups, but that they require social policies and programmes to satisfy their specific needs. In the two years that the programme was in operation in the Ministry of Public Education, with support from other state institutions and NGOs, it developed broad concepts, raised awareness of the issue and expanded the education system's opportunities to work in this field by taking a cross-disciplinary approach based on the day-to-day lives of girls, boys and teenagers.

This process confirmed how much intolerance there was of the matter and how hard it still is to speak publicly about it. It also shows how much influence the Catholic Church can exert on issues of vital concern to the population that assume the right to life education, despite the fact that the Political Constitution and the Code on Children and Adolescents protect their religious freedom and their right to personal integrity. Precedence is now given to providing information on sexual and reproductive health rather than on discussing our ideas on sexuality and the full and responsible exercise of sexuality from a human rights standpoint.

3. Some innovative measures for promoting gender equity in education

3.1 'Building a Gender Equity Culture in Leader Schools' Project

The project was coordinated by the Office of the First Lady between 1999 and 2002. A core activity was the administration of a diagnostic tool in the classroom to identify and analyze sexist practices. Judged to be a good practice, it led to more equitable distribution of space in the classroom and playground, to

identifying girls and boys by means of non-stereotyped differential characteristics, to lining girls and boys up alternately and to a better composition of study groups.

3.2 'Education is a Right' Programme:

The Ministry of Public Education's Programme to improve the Quality of Education and Life of Priority Urban Communities' (PROMECUM) was an initiative created to ensure the total inclusion of boys and girls by means of a comprehensive education. It does not take a gender equity perspective, but incorporates the principle of education as a right for all boys and girls. It was created in 1994 as part of the National Plan to fight Poverty, in order to provide students with scant resources with the basic conditions to succeed. Its aim is to boost school meals, support groups that include teachers and social science professionals, self-training and knowledge dissemination among teachers. Another of its aims is for those in charge of primary schools to promote socio-affective development.

The main achievements have been: more school infrastructure, greater teacher willingness and professionalization, a reduction in the drop-out rate (3.5%) in these primary schools, an increase in school graduation (78%), the creation of a Support Network of other institutions (INA, IMAS, CCSS, INAMU, PANI) and, lastly, boys and girls with more self-esteem because they have acquired a knowledge of computing and English and a life plan.

3.3 The Gender Equity Office of the Ministry of Public Education

The Office has promoted initiatives to overhaul curricula, produce educational aids for teachers and students and textbooks which are sensitive to gender differences, as well as initiatives to develop non-sexist teaching methodologies and educational legislation. The production of textbooks in the 'Towards the Twenty-First Century' series is a milestone in several decades of effort by the Costa Rican government to produce texts containing language and illustrations that do not reinforce gender roles and gender stereotypes.

The Office drew up a Strategic Action Plan for the Ministry containing 21 measures, which are being incorporated into the Operational Action Plans (PAO) and budgets of the departments responsible for implementing them. This strategy aims to create the minimum conditions to ensure that each department assumes operational and financial responsibility for those measures within its own remit. The most important ongoing measures in the Plan, which was internally validated with authorities and personnel responsible for implementing and monitoring the Plan, are: adapting educational legislation to meet gender equality and equity criteria; the equitable access of women to management positions in educational institutions; instructing staff and students in educational institutions on the Sexual Harassment in Employment and Teaching Act; a pilot experiment in five technical secondary schools for equitable entry into non-traditional careers; the development of gender equity indicators to measure the quality of education; the validation of strategies for mainstreaming the gender

approach into curricula; and the production and use of teaching resources with a gender approach³.

3.4 Programmes targeted at adolescents: 'Building Opportunities' and 'Young Love'

The 'Young Love' and 'Building Opportunities' Programmes were created in 1998, on the legal basis of the Code on Children and Adolescents (Act No. 7739) and the General Act for the Protection of Teenage Mothers (Act No. 7735). The principles and objectives guiding these programmes take a triple rights/gender/generational approach.

The Building Opportunities Programme is an inter-institutional and inter-sectorial measure aimed at providing personal and social training to pregnant girls and teenagers and to poor teenage mothers in a state of poverty. Since 2002 it has also included people in a situation of social risk. The programme defines a set of special measures to ensure that girls and teenage girls have equitable access and opportunities, using two components aimed at reintegrating this group and preventing them from dropping-out of the formal education system. The aim is to strengthen them personally and collectively, through processes of information and empowerment, to enable them to exercise their rights as human beings. It also provides technical training in non-traditional areas, as well as quality health care services, care for boys and girls, and has opened up new training options in non-traditional areas in demand on the labour market.

In its three years of operation, the Programme has succeeded in training around 10,000 girls in women's human rights, organization and leadership, gender-based violence, comprehensive health and forming an identity and life plan, developing their ability to demand services and resources, defend their rights and fight for their own space. The impact assessments indicate that the Programme has succeeded in boosting the girls' self-image and abilities to make themselves heard and respected. They feel more at ease with themselves and have managed to set themselves long-term goals. Approximately 60% have succeeded in returning to the education system or remaining there, as well as entering technical training programmes. The involvement of civil society organizations in the Programme as facilitators of these personal and collective strengthening processes, have enhanced the work methodology and guaranteed follow-up of the girls after their training.

The Young Love Programme was developed to comply with the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. Its aim was to incorporate sex education into the education process, taking a healthy, integrating, people-centred approach to sexuality, not restricted to reproduction alone. This meant breaking with the dominant

³ The past eight years have seen a proliferation of manuals and other teaching aids to guide teachers in implementing the gender approach in the classroom. However, teachers do not know how to use or adapt them, something which is now becoming a priority.

paradigm of sexuality in society and the education system. As a result, its implementation was met with resistance, controversy and back-tracking.

3.5 Innovative experiences in technical training and university institutions

3.5.1 Women's Committee on Technical Education

The National Technical Education System (SINETEC) has been in operation since 1998 and the Women's Committee on Technical Education was set up as part of the system. The members of this inter-institutional committee include government institutions responsible for technical education, such as the INAMU, the INA [National Training Service] and the Ministry of Public Education. One of SINETEC's objectives is to promote a training platform to facilitate the entry of women into innovative, high-profile careers.

3.5.2 State universities

Through their specialist Women's Studies and Gender Equity units, state universities promote a range of initiatives for mainstreaming the gender approach into university curricula and training; for committing academic communities – not only their authorities – to draw up and implement an institutional gender equality and equity policy; for setting up mechanisms to make the authorities accountable for the matter; and for helping to build study and work environments that are free from discrimination and gender-based violence.

One example of good practice was the Rector of the University of Costa Rica's presentation in 1998 of the First Report on the Status of Equality and Gender Equity in his university⁴. This initiative was the first time a report had ever been delivered by a Rector, as the supreme authority of a higher education institution and public institution, and it formed the basis for developing a policy to promote gender equity in all academic spheres. In addition to the analysis, a set of indicators was developed to facilitate future assessments for monitoring progress in fulfilling commitments. The Second Report and a monitoring system based on these indicators are now being prepared.

The Technology Institute of Costa Rica (ITCR), since 1999, and the National University (UNA), since 2001, have promoted innovative intermediate training in technical careers for teenagers participating in the Building Opportunities Programme⁵. This measure involved changing institutional policies and raising awareness about the gender needs, interests and requirements of teenage women in the most vulnerable areas of the country, whilst at the same time

⁴ The Women's Studies Research Centre promoted this initiative during the electoral campaign for the Rectorship. The election candidates signed a 'management undertaking' promising to report on compliance with their commitments on gender equality and equity.

⁵ The technical training process in the ITCR was coordinated and facilitated by the Gender Equity Unit, whilst in the UNA it was conducted by the Institute for Women's Studies (IEM).

meeting a demand that was not being satisfied by the state technical education system.

Since 2001, the University of Costa Rica has been conducting an initiative with a number of faculties, schools and departments, to promote pilot projects to test a variety of curricular schemes with a gender approach. These schemes promote changes in certain courses, as well as throughout the curriculum. The Women's Studies Research Centre and the Academic Assessment Centre are working to develop gender-sensitive indicators for evaluating the curriculum and its various components, in conjunction with setting up a monitoring system. Results have included successfully starting to implement a number of curricular schemes in nine academic units, carrying out an institutional diagnosis to serve as the starting point for an institutional policy in this field and producing a wide range of texts and teaching resources in conjunction with the State Open University.

4. What policy changes are required to close the gender gaps in education?

Multidimensional and cross-disciplinary teaching models are needed to establish a gender equity culture, which will influence the action of the gender equity principle in education. Changes in education policies are also needed. During the past decade there has been a proliferation of initiatives by the Costa Rican government to eliminate sexist and discriminatory language and contents from textbooks, as well as to overhaul curricula and develop appropriate methodologies for eradicating gender stereotypes. In spite of all these efforts, beliefs and practices still exist throughout the education system, families and the media, making it difficult to eradicate sexist stereotypes and social relations which promote the subordination of women and devalue the image of women.

Despite progress, there is still a gap between the language and practice of equity between men and women, and education is no exception. This has resulted in the adoption of policies, administrative practices and services to guarantee equal rights and access to economic, educational and basic health resources for girls, teenage girls and adult women who are poor, indigenous, of African extraction or have some kind of disability. Structural obstacles still persist in the form of macro-economic policies insensitive to the gender needs and interests of women, and particularly towards the above-mentioned sectors of the population. One task that still remains to be achieved, therefore, is to revise, adopt and strengthen macro-economic policies and development strategies that really address women's requirements, as established by the Beijing Platform for Action and the Dakar Goals. To empower women they must be given equal access to education, as well as participation in equal employment opportunities and in job training and technology training programmes. It also calls for access to and control of resources such as credit, production redeployment, land and scientific and technological knowledge.

There are many challenges to be faced, which call for the commitment of various sectors to ensure that the gender gaps still deeply rooted in the education system are reduced and ultimately abolished.

The progress achieved by these policies and in identifying obstacles underline the advantage of a state education policy to eradicate discriminatory practices from the classroom and of training citizens to have a gender equity culture. Efforts in this area should not rely solely on the good will of the competent authorities in the Ministry of Education, in educational institutions or in any particular government administration. A state policy would guarantee the continuity of measures and minimum funding for carrying them out, and at the same time it would be less prone to the pressure of secular and religious interest groups because it would be based on relative social consensus.

The opposition experienced to the Young Love Programme points to the fact that public policies are not devoid of ideological content, nor are they the result of unilateral decisions, but rather they express a government-led method of addressing the challenges of social development and ideological reproduction of the social order. This calls for strategies that promote a substantial change in this area, to ensure that public policies, in particular educational policies, are perceived as a special type of relationship between the state and society. The aim is to organize a cohesive social system based on consensus rather than imposition.

For this it is necessary to reinterpret the relationship between state and society and the state's function in education and socialization, giving precedence to the legal foundations underpinning Costa Rica's legal order. A fundamental step in eliminating discrimination against women in Costa Rica was the amendment of Article 75 of the Political Constitution, protecting the Roman Catholic apostolic religion as the nation's religion. The scope of this article is continually being undermined by ecclesiastical and governmental authorities and by the Ministry of Education, allowing the Catholic Church to be involved and interfere in decisions pertaining solely to the government and its democratically elected representatives. The Constitution itself guarantees freedom of religion and worship as a fundamental human right for all citizens, as well as non-denominational public institutions.

Turning gender equality and equity policies into government policy, in line with the international treaties signed by Costa Rica and to the commitments in the Beijing World Action Plan, is a first step in this effort to recognize the right of women to live as independent and free human beings with rights. However, the separation of the state and the Catholic Church by amending Article 75 of the Political Constitution is another key step in the recognition of these rights.

The INAMU, as the institution responsible for gender equity, will need to implement an aggressive plan together with the programmes specializing in women's studies and gender equity and in the teacher training colleges of the four state universities, to promote comprehensive curricular reform. This must be a comprehensive curricular reform that helps to eradicate from academic teaching, research and social measures any approaches, methodologies, contents and practices that promote gender inequality and inequity. This should be accompanied by in-service training programmes for teachers at all levels of

the education system, aimed at eliminating discriminatory approaches and practices both inside and outside the classroom.

Efforts must be boosted to overhaul primary and secondary school curricula to identify contents that promote sexist stereotypes and to create methodologies for eradicating them. Continuing or in-service training for female and male teachers is fundamental, but in order to make the required changes viable, the government has to guarantee the financial resources and incentives required to institutionalize such changes. This should be accompanied by gender equity criteria in assessing teacher performance at all levels of the formal education system.

Systematic and sustained measures are needed to raise awareness throughout the education system, the public sector and civil society, about the importance of the family and the media in educational and vocational guidance, as well as about the pressure which families and teachers tend to exert on the choice of trades and professions along prevailing gender lines. For this effort to succeed, there needs to be a public campaign involving national and local media, educational and other state institutions, churches, municipalities and leading civil society organizations. One of the components of this campaign should be to harmonize men's and women's responsibilities for domestic and reproductive work.

Various research studies confirm that there is discrimination in entry to technical and academic careers owing to gender segregation. It will be difficult to eradicate the obstacles that prevent women's entry and continuance in scientific and technical careers, in accordance with the Convention and the undertakings of the Beijing World Platform for Action. This can only be achieved in a relatively short time frame by establishing affirmative action mechanisms in the National Training Service [INA] and in state universities. This calls for the implementation of measures to attract women, apply minimum quotas and offer incentives to promote their entry, continuance, graduation and job performance in this field of study. The affirmative measures must also impact on the appointment, promotion and retention of women teachers serving as role models to both women and men. Once they are settled in jobs, there must be systematic follow-up to ensure that they have stimulating and violence-free work environments that respect their right to work.

Educational policies should therefore undertake to establish an educational model that mainstreams gender equity as a means of bringing about the kind of education that values the specific interests, needs and expectations of both sexes. This policy must provide the necessary foundations and tools for consolidating an educational model that facilitates relations which respect gender differences and solidarity, with the aim of gradually achieving a more just and democratic society offering equal opportunities for the full development of all (Ministry of Public Education, 2000-2002).

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Appendix 1
Summary of indicators on the position and status of women.
1990-2000 period

Indicator	1990	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Human development							
Human development index (value)		0.883	0.884	0.889	0.889	0.801	0.797
Gender-related development (value)		0.763	0.813	0.825	0.818	0.795	0.789
Gender empowerment index (value)		0.474		0.494	0.503	0.550	0.553
Economy							
Poverty gap according to the sex of the head of household ^{a/}	-3.2	-6.7	-5.8	-6.0	-5.7	-9.9	-7.9
<i>Percentage of women employed by branch of activity (where women are concentrated)</i>							
Social, community and personal services	44.4	41.7	44.6	46.2	45.5	44.0	44.5
Trade, hotel and catering	20.9	25.3	24.8	23.7	23.3	26.7	26.1
Manufacturing industries	23.5	20.0	17.9	16.3	17.2	16.8	15.6
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fisheries	6.4	6.3	5.7	5.9	5.5	4.7	5.4
<i>Percentage of women employed by occupational category</i>							
Wage earners	77.6	75.6				74.9	76.6
Self-employed workers	14.2	16.0				16.7	17.2
Unpaid workers	6.4	5.1				4.3	3.3
Employers	1.8	3.3				4.3	2.9
<i>Gender ratio in average monthly salary^{b/}</i>							
Wage earners	84.0	84.4	92.1	97.1	93.3	90.3	91.7
Complete primary education	72.5	71.9	74.6	75.2	73.0	74.4	75.2
Complete academic secondary education	81.4	75.5	79.3	84.0	79.6	74.3	78.4
University education	65.6	74.3	74.5	82.0	79.1	76.4	73.0
<i>Occupational group</i>							
Professionals and technicians	68.6	80.4	77.5	89.6	85.9	80.4	80.3
Managers	75.6	83.1	85.3	88.3	95.2	84.3	82.5
Shopkeepers and shop assistants	66.9	66.7	76.0	73.1	76.7	75.8	71.6
Operatives and craftspeople	73.3	76.6	77.6	84.2	77.2	77.8	81.8
Personal service occupations	58.4	57.1	62.0	60.2	61.0	57.4	68.1
Value of housework as a percentage of GDP		9.4	10.5	10.5	10.1	9.2	9.8
Percentage of housing vouchers granted to women		28.0	29.4	31.5	37.2	40.2	41.5
Work							
Extended female participation rate ^{c/}	41.1	41.2	42.2	41.5	44.1	43.3	40.8
Gender gap in the total under-utilization rate ^{a/}	-2.5	-2.4	-2.5	-2.9	-4.5	-4.6	-2.7
<i>Percentage of women employed in specialized posts as a percentage of all such posts</i>							
As professionals and technicians	44.5	45.4	47.8	48.3	45.1	47.1	46.2
As managers	23.3	23.4	26.7	27.5	30.1	30.6	29.9
Index of gender segregation in occupations ^{d/}	24.9	23.0	23.6	24.7	25.5	25.8	24.8
Gender gap in the low productivity sector ^{a/}		-16.0	-13.0	-15.2	-16.4		-15.5

Education and training							
Gender gap in the net coverage rate in secondary education ^{e/}				4.6	4.9	4.9	
<i>Gender ratio in the average number of years of schooling of those aged 12 years and over^{b/}</i>							
Age 12 to 17					101.7	104.1	104.1
Age 18 to 29					106.2	104.9	105.9
Age 30 to 49					90.7	99.3	100.1
Age 50 and over					87.2	94.0	93.2
Gender segregation index in university graduation ^{d/}	16.2	16.7	15.6	15.7	15.3	14.5	15.5
Gender segregation index in INA training programmes ^{d/}	29.20	20.00	20.50	20.90	21.60	21.00	
Health							
Gender gap in life expectancy at birth ^{b/}	4.9	5.2	5.0	5.6	5.1	5.7	5.5
<i>Male mortality rate from the three most common malignant tumours (rate per 100,000 men)</i>							
Stomach	24.8	24.2	22.2	21.2	21.1	18.2	17.6
Prostate	7.7	13.4	12.80	10.70	12.60	13.53	14.1
Lung	9.1	8.0	10.0	8.1	7.4	8.8	8.1
<i>Female mortality rate from the three most common malignant tumours (rate per 100,000 women)</i>							
Stomach	10.9	14.0	13.7	10.3	12.1	10.9	10.6
Neck of the womb	8.7	10.1	10.2	8.7	9.4	9.7	9.3
Breast	7.2	9.0	8.5	8.1	7.7	7.0	6.3
Fertility ratio of women under the age of 20 and those aged 20 to 39	68.2	81.4	82.3	84.7	86.6	87.0	
Gender ratio in the economically active population covered by the Costa Rican Social Security Fund [EyM] ^{b/}	82.2	95.8	93	97.5	102.6	80.6	

Domestic violence							
Gender ratio in the percentage of murders due to domestic violence ^{b/}						550	
Complaints filed for domestic violence				15.3 36	20.9 96	26.4 37	32.6 43
Political participation^g		199 4					
Percentage of women MPs	12.3	15.8			19.3		
Women candidates running for MP as a percentage of all candidates	17.8	23.4			47.2		
Percentage of women councillors as a percentage of all elected councillors	12.4	14.2			34.4		
Masculinity ratio among popularly elected representatives							
Masculinity ratio in the electorate ^{f/}	105.7	105. 7			103. 4		

^{a/} Difference between the percentage of men and the percentage of women.

^{b/} Ratio between the value of the indicator for women working 40 hours or more and the same value for men, multiplied by 100.

^{c/} The workforce is considered to include those employed in primary activities for own consumption and those employed in marginal activities, in addition to the 'standard employed'. Unemployed people are considered to be 'standard open unemployed', still seeking work, who did not formerly carry out the above activities, plus the 'discouraged' unemployed and inactive people who have already found work.

^{d/} This reflects the total percentage of people who "ought to" change category (occupation, career) in order to obtain for each category the same distribution observed in the total population concerned (employed people, graduates, participants in schemes).

^{e/} This refers to the difference between the percentage of women and the percentage of men.

^{f/} Population registered to vote, updated in July 1999.

^{g/} In the 1990-1994, 1994-1998 and 1998-2000 elections.

Source: State of the Nation Project (2001). Seventh Report on the State of the Nation 2000. San José, Costa Rica: State of the Nation Project.