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State of the art of gender equality in Basic education in Latin America (1999-2000)

Presentation:

**Key themes for follow-up of World
Forum of Dakar (Education For All).**

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STATE OF THE ART OF GENDER EQUALITY IN BASIC EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA (1999-2000)

(Summary)

Graciela Messina

This document was made at the request of UNESCO in order to contribute, from the Latin American perspective, to the Strategic Framework of Gender Equality in Basic Education.

The document covers the following areas: (1) gender categories, basic education and gender equality; (2) the situation of gender in basic education in Latin America; (3) policies, strategies and programmes developed by the Governments and NGO's; (4) Dakar's objectives and strategies with relation to gender equality in basic education and (5) reflections and recommendations.

In the first section, the document refers to the way the gender category was constructed, as a relational category, and to the way equality refers to the principles of justice and liberty, being gender equality a new relational category. Since gender inequality compromises the ensemble of the educational areas such as learning relations, institutional relations, pedagogical practice, management and curriculum, the approach we take has to be holistic. Mention is also made of the fact that in recent years, the United Nations has made a shift of "integrating women into development" towards "the integration of the gender perspective into development".

In section two, the author presents information on basic education in Latin America and refers to global indicators about school attendance, concluding that gender differences have been reduced throughout the years. In the 90's, girls participate in basic education in similar proportions as boys and in some countries even surpassed them. It is only in the countries having the higher illiteracy rates, or significant numbers of indigenous populations, where inequalities exist in the access of girls, which go from 4 to 8 points. As there is no statistical data in all countries, divided by sex, information can only be provided for those countries which do have it: In 1990, in Bolivia, there were less girls in primary education (boys: 81 %, girls: 73 %), while in Colombia, Venezuela and Nicaragua, there were less boys than girls, differences which in 1990 were between 5 and 8 points and in 1995, from 4 to 5 points. Also in 1990, in Guatemala and Brazil there were differences of 5 points to the detriment of girls, for the age group 6 to 11 years old.

The difference also has to do with the socio-economic status as we can see in Honduras, El Salvador and Dominican Republic where in 1997, of the age group 7 to 12 years old, there were more girls than boys, in the poorest sectors of the urban areas. At the regional level, in the poorest populations, there are more differences in the coverage of basic education, according to income than according to gender.

Indigenous girls and women have been identified as being specially affected by gender inequality. In countries such as Guatemala, girls reach 0.9 year of schooling, while indigenous boys reach 1.8 years. In the group of women having 20 to 24, 7 out of 10 do not have any schooling. One of the principal obstacles has been the lack of

adequate curriculum to the cultural reality in which they live, and the problem of language.

Gender inequality coexists with other inequalities such as early desertion from school of girls living in the rural areas, strong desertion of girls between 10 and 14 years old and of urban boys in poor sectors (Brazil), and a growing tendency to repeat, thus requiring more than the normal time to complete the basic education cycle.

There are no important differences to mention at the pre-school level of education. The differences are stronger when examining urban and rural setting, public or private schools. Gender differences appear when we also take into consideration the socio-economic level. Here again, there is lack of information of educational indicators by gender and socio-economic levels.

Global statistics of the access of the school population to pre-school and basic education do not consider gender differences combined with urban-rural setting, ethnic group and/or social class. We must also consider that in 1996, basic education was below 80 % in six countries of the region (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti and Nicaragua), where there was inequality in the access to basic education and problems of school coverage for the marginal urban areas, for the rural areas or among indigenous populations. There is persistent social discrimination, as well as the fact that social class continues being the most important element generating educational inequality in the majority of the countries. Furthermore, in Latin America, both in the pre-school level of education, as in basic education, 77% to 97% of the teachers are women.

The author considers the implications of the lack of basic education for young women and adult women, a problem in the region, as we know that the highest illiteracy rates in the region concern mainly poor rural or urban women, as well as indigenous women, thus compromising the future education of their children. Here again, poverty is one of the most important aspects affecting gender equality in the basic education of women, which requires special strategies linked to poverty reduction programmes and income-generating activities or links between education and the preparation for employment.

When referring to the programmes being implemented in the region, the author mentions the efforts recently being made through educational reforms with respect to curriculum, non-sexist language in the school textbooks, sexual education and specific teacher training on gender issues, to mention a few. Nonetheless, the author concludes that these programmes are not being implemented in all countries of the region.

The recommendations made in this document, can be summarised as follows:

- (1) The need to consider gender equality in basic education within the more general framework of the introduction of the gender perspective in other sectors of the society and at the Government level;
- (2) To consider gender equality in basic education for youth and adults, as well as for children, taking into consideration the UN efforts to reduce poverty, the UN Literacy Decade and the Latin American Framework for Action in the Education of Youth and Adults;
- (3) To introduce the gender perspective in teacher training; in the curriculum; in the school textbooks and in education practice at the basic level of education;

- (4) To improve the statistical data and create new educational indicators with a gender perspective;
- (5) To develop research and establish data banks of best practices in this field;
- (6) To introduce the gender perspective in all formal and non-formal educational programmes which provide basic education to all: children, youth and adults;
- (7) To guarantee gender equality in basic education as part of the democratisation of education in the region.