

Progress report on the Beijing Platform for Action

1. Introduction

1. In the past five years, Ecuador has experienced greater political instability than other countries of the Andean region (it has had five different presidents during the period 1995-1999), and this has had a detrimental effect on the formulation and implementation of policy by the executive branch. The other democratic and administrative institutions, notably the judiciary, have been more stable, but have lacked sufficient vitality to respond effectively when there have been attempts to modernize the State and fight corruption.

2. Nonetheless, there have been some positive developments in the last five years. One of the most important was the convening of the democratically elected National Constituent Assembly,¹ composed of 70 representatives covering the full spectrum of political opinion,² which wrote a new Constitution. The new Constitution incorporates the demands of some citizens' groups, particularly those of women, thanks to the negotiating skills and able presentation of issues by the National Council for Women (CONAMU),³ pressure from the women's movement and the support of women serving as regular and alternate representatives to the Assembly, who helped with their votes at crucial points to determine the shape of this new legal framework.

3. This forum for political consensus achieved some major advances in human rights, including the recognition that the international conventions and agreements to which Ecuador is a party should be taken as a source of law and might be invoked by the defence in judicial proceedings within the country, even in the absence of specific domestic laws on the matter.

4. The Constitution provides for the existence of an agency to guide public policy on gender (presently the Council). It also provides for an Office of Ombudsman, under which an Office of Deputy Ombudsman for Women has been set up. The Constitution also creates a Citizen's Anti-Corruption Commission composed of representatives of civil society to combat what is considered one of the nation's gravest problems. The Constitution identifies various vulnerable segments of the population requiring special attention, and it establishes special rules and guarantees relating to indigenous, black and Afro-Ecuadorian groups. The National Congress has made the congressional Committee for Women a standing committee. The executive branch has instituted the National Human Rights Plan, elaborated jointly by the Government and civil society. These new institutions constitute useful mechanisms for enforcing the social, economic and

¹ December 1997 to June 1998.

² Including representatives of indigenous movements, environmentalists and advocates of women's issues or of human rights in general.

³ The National Council for Women was established under that name in 1997; within the general legal framework, it corresponds to the entity created by the Constitution to guide public policy on gender. An explanation of how it functions will be given later.

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cultural rights set forth in international conventions, which provide the legal framework for progress in gender equality.

5. The border conflict between Ecuador and Peru in recent years hampered national growth and development. The hostilities that broke out in 1995 might have become full declared war had it not been for the mediation efforts of friendly countries who constituted themselves guarantors of the peace. The hostilities occurred chiefly in the Amazonian jungle region, an area with low population density.

6. On 26 October 1998, through the action of a body created for the purpose, which had worked tirelessly since the close of hostilities, and thanks to the mobilization of a groundswell of social support for the process, the efforts of the foreign ministries of the two countries and the political will of the Ecuadorian and Peruvian presidents at that time, a peace agreement and boundary treaty were signed in Brasilia, putting an end to a territorial dispute that had lasted 56 years and consumed vast resources in the purchase of war material that could have gone to development. A significant role in the peace process was played by women's peace groups, who did not hesitate to issue joint statements with their Peruvian counterparts.

7. Now that its boundaries are set, many feel that Ecuador must turn its face inward and reallocate its resources from combat in defence of its frontiers to the struggle against poverty, one of the great challenges for the next millennium. In fact, many of the advances made possible by political consensus as expressed in national and local agreements on issues of democracy and development, both on the governmental level and within civil society, have been limited by the lack of funds or financing to carry out what was envisioned.

8. External debt servicing consumes around 45 per cent of the Government's general budget. This means that in order to meet its commitments to the international banking system, the country must neglect its commitment to address its domestic social arrears.

9. Nor has Ecuador been exempt during this period from natural disasters, including the effects of the El Niño phenomenon, two earthquakes and heavy landslides due to the instability of mountain soils. The fragile ecosystem has been threatened by unsustainable use and management of both the natural and man-made environment, on an ever-increasing scale.

10. More and more citizens' groups have formed to negotiate and apply pressure in regard to specific issues. Women's groups have been chiefly concerned with the following themes: combating violence against women, enhancing women's political participation, and establishing legal and administrative mechanisms and earmarked funding to achieve gender equity on both the central government and local administrative levels.

11. The appointment of four women cabinet ministers in the last Government with responsibility for education, finance, tourism and the environment, an increase in women judges from 6 per cent to 18 per cent at the highest levels of the judiciary and the election of women to 13 per cent of the legislative seats are

unprecedented achievements in this country and should help to ensure that a gender perspective will be incorporated across the board in public policy.

Part One

2. Overview of trends in achieving gender equality and women's advancement

2.1 Creation of the National Council for Women

12. The National Council for Women (CONAMU) was created on 24 October 1997 by presidential decree^{*} published in the Official Register No. 182 for 28 October 1997. Its activities are based on the Equal Opportunity Plan for 1996-2000, which was developed by the former National Directorate for Women (DINAMU) and sets forth objectives covering 11 of the 12 areas of critical concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action.

13. Subsequently, the National Constituent Assembly included in the Constitution article 41, which reads: "The State shall formulate and execute policies for achieving equality of opportunity between men and women through a specialized entity which shall function as shall be determined by law". The Constitution also stipulates that a gender perspective shall be incorporated in the Government's national planning system.

14. In keeping with the process of modernizing the State, the National Council for Women is a modern, participative technical institution headed by a Governing Board composed equally of government officials and women representing civil society. The composition of the Board constitutes a fundamental step forward in the functioning of the State and meets the need to ensure institutional continuity while fulfilling the Council's mandate to advance women.

15. The Council's general objectives are to formulate and promote public policies characterized by gender equity in order to guarantee women equal opportunities and rights, enhance their access to the spheres of public power and ensure that they are included in economic and social development programmes and benefits.

16. The Council has the ongoing task of articulating platforms for the formulation of policy together with the National Planning Office (ODEPLAN) of the Office of the President of the Republic and the Secretariat of State for Social Development (SEDES), made up of the Ministries of Education, Health, Social Welfare and Labour. It also coordinates with the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing and shares responsibility with the Ministry of the Interior for the management of special police stations for women and the family. The Council coordinates its representation at international forums with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It also works in conjunction with the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INEC) and the Emergency Social Investment Fund (FISE), the National Institute for Children and the Family (INNEFA) and the National Institute for Agrarian Development (INDA).

17. The adoption of the 1998 Constitution called for an enormous legislative effort to formulate new or amended codes and laws. At the time of writing, the Council was working with the congressional Committee for Women, Children, Youth

^{*} Executive Decree No. 764.

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and the Family to move the process forward. The method adopted was to form consultative committees and working groups with technical and political support and consensus groups involving the participation of civil society and the women's movement. For the first phase, the plan was to work on amending or creating some 24 pieces of legislation and repealing others as unconstitutional.

18. Under the decentralization process undertaken by the present Government, the Council takes part in meetings of the National Cabinet of Governors and will subsequently work with the provincial governments. The Council sees recent developments in political and administrative decentralization and deconcentration as an excellent opportunity for women to strengthen their exercise of citizenship; it is therefore working with the municipalities to support activities in the areas of education, health, human rights, development and political participation, with emphasis on gender equity.

19. Over the next few years, the Council has decided to give priority attention in its work to four areas compatible with national policy:

- Social integration and citizenship
- Social investment and productive development
- Overcoming poverty, and
- Modernizing the State.

2.2 Implementation of the Equal Opportunity Plan and other achievements

20. The commitment made by Ecuador at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing fell into two parts: (a) identifying critical areas of concern: poverty, violence against women, unequal access to the benefits of development, inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels; and (b) identifying strategic objectives, strategies and goals: reduce levels of poverty, eliminate violence against women, enable women to participate in the benefits of development, and overcome the inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels.

21. The Equal Opportunity Plan for 1996-2000³ is one of the chief political and technical tools for designing and implementing policies, whether general, sectoral or narrowly targeted, aimed at building more equitable relations between men and women. The plan, drawn up through a participative process involving regional workshops, identifies eleven priority areas for action: poverty, education and training, health, violence, the economy, participation in power and decision-making, human rights, the media, the environment, the girl child, and institutional mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the plan in each of the critical areas of concern. The issue of refugee and displaced women was not included, since it is not a problem at this time in Ecuador.

³ Ministerial Decision No. 0306, 1996.

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22. Once the decision was published, the National Directorate for Women began to coordinate implementation of the Plan. The Council subsequently took up the task of coordinating efforts and creating appropriate institutional mechanisms to ensure that, with the funds it had mobilized, the Plan's basic principles would be realized through annual target-setting and follow-up. The basis of work continued to be the Equal Opportunity Plan.

23. The impact of the Plan has been restricted by a lack of mechanisms to require the various government agencies to implement it, since the role of the Council is to create guidelines, rather than to execute. The Plan has nonetheless served as a benchmark for government agencies interested in gender equity and for women's movements.

2.3 Other progress

24. With the change of government in 1997, the Administration of Abdaló Bucaram blatantly supported machismo and made it impossible for the National Directorate for Women to act. Its director was removed and replaced by another unconditionally loyal to the Administration. It was obvious that the progress that had been made was threatened, and the international cooperation assistance that had been mobilized to implement the policies was in danger of being lost.

25. When Bucaram was removed from office, he was replaced by an interim President, Fabián Alarcón, who changed the status of the Directorate and restored the previous director to her position. She resumed the earlier work of the agency; she also revived political negotiations to solidify its legal and administrative status and succeeded in converting it from an office dependent on a low-ranking ministry to an autonomous, supra-ministerial body with the capacity to influence the key ministries.

26. Civil society has played an extremely significant role in the last five years; the various segments of the women's movement have come together as one body at crucial moments to press for common causes and have achieved their specific objectives. Human rights activists have succeeded in having a number of human rights violations by the State recognized as such and even punished in some cases. The indigenous movement has been solidifying its presence on the national scene as another interest to be reckoned with in decision-making. And the environmentalists, while not yet a large force, have by dint of persistence achieved some of their aims on the legislative and judicial fronts.

27. That these movements are so active is largely because of the stimulus provided by international conferences and conventions within the past decade. One of the most influential conferences has undoubtedly been the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the Platform for Action that emerged from it has impelled a major qualitative leap forward in the formulation of policies and general enforcement mechanisms relating to the human rights of women.

28. The civil society's demands with regard to public policy have been reflected in many plans, which have been implemented only in part as a result of the political instability discussed above. For example, a few months after taking office on 10 August 1998, the new Administration announced a national

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plan⁶ developed by the National Planning Office (ODEPLAN)⁷ with technical advisory assistance from the Council. This was the first time that these agencies had the opportunity to share in and directly influence central government planning; a gender perspective was introduced through the interaction of Government and civil society, in this instance the Council's Governing Council and representatives of the women's movement, who acted as consultants in the formulation of policy at the agency.

29. Between 1995 and 1998, other general policy strategies had been formulated, including the National Social Development Plan for 1996-2005, intended to comply with the aims of the World Summit for Social Development. Also during that period the Secretariat of State for Social Development (SEDES) was formed, composed of the Ministries of Education and Culture, Health, Labour, Human Resources, Social Welfare and other government agencies with responsibilities in the social area, such as the National Council for Women (CONAMU), the National Institute for Children and the Family (INNFA) and the Emergency Social Investment Fund (FISS), for the purpose of coordinating public social development policy, defining a social agenda and planning its implementation and subsequent evaluation.

30. The Secretariat has responsibility for developing an integrated planning system, in coordination with the National Planning Office, for efficient management of social indicators; its other functions are to harmonize social development policies; draw up the social agenda for approval by the President; and formulate the annual operational plan, the working plan, management indicators and priorities for spending and investment in the social area. Hence the influence of the National Council for Women within the executive branch is extensive. At the time of writing, the Chairwoman of the Secretariat was the Minister of Education, who expressed her desire to ensure that the body should incorporate a gender perspective in its work.

2.4 The country's priorities in relation to the critical areas of concern

31. A number of plans formulated in recent years reflect the nation's priorities and cover issues related to the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. These plans, such as the National Social Development Plan for 1996-2005 prepared by the National Directorate for Women and the Technical Secretariat for the Social Front (STFS) and the Ecuador 2025 Plan prepared by the National Development Council, place priority on such areas as vulnerable groups, socio-economic situation, women suffering discrimination, power-sharing, decision-making, and achieving equality.

32. The Ecuador Social Agenda for the Twenty-first Century, developed by the National Planning Office in 1998, with input by the National Council for Women, incorporated the most important gender-equity policies elaborated by the

⁶ The Ecuador 2000 Plan.

⁷ The present office answers directly to the Office of the President and replaces the previous body responsible for general State planning, the National Development Council (CONADE).

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Council, as described in more detail below. Through the Integrated Social Plan, the Secretariat of State for Social Development targeted these policies towards the poorest segments of the population. The central Government subsequently incorporated them in the broader Ecuador 2000 Plan.

33. The National Human Rights Plan for 1998-2002 developed jointly by the Government and civil society, with efforts on the two sides coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Latin American Institute for Social Science Research (ILDIS), respectively, places priority on the issues of civil and political rights; economic, social and cultural rights; collective rights; and human rights of particular segments of the population. The latter includes specifically the rights of women, young people, children, sexual minorities, older persons, prisoners, the disabled and aliens. In addition, a Deputy Ombudsman for Women has been designated under the Office of the Ombudsman, the latter a constitutionally mandated office to monitor and defend the human rights of men and women.

34. As a part of the Andean subregion and member State of the Andean Parliament, the common deliberative organ created under the Cartagena Agreement, Ecuador is a party to the Andean Social Charter adopted at the second Andean Social Summit held in 1999. This instrument places stress on democracy and human rights; social integration and poverty eradication; the family; women; youth, children and adolescents; older persons; indigenous, black and Afro-Andean groups; health and nutrition; environment and housing; education, science and culture; shared economic growth; labour and social security.

35. The Standing Committee for Women, Youth, Children and the Family of the National Congress, in its strategic plan for the period 1998-2000, placed priority on the formulation and amendment of secondary laws to implement the principles set forth in the new Constitution in two areas: (a) new legislation in the form of codes regarding children and adolescents; a family code; an organization act for the National Council for Women; an equal opportunity act; an unpaid domestic labour act; a paid domestic labour act; a women heads of household act; a youth act; and (b) amendments to the acts concerning violence against women and the family, education, sex education, disability, the elderly, banking, creation of the National Development Bank, handicraft development, agricultural development, social security and the municipal civil registry system, and the health, labour, civil and penal codes.

2.5 Priority of equality goals in relation to other public policy goals

36. Input by the Council into the Ecuador Social Agenda for the Twenty-first Century developed by the National Planning Office is reflected in the inclusion of four priority areas considered strategically important at this point in time and compatible with national policies for ensuring women full citizenship through the exercise of their rights, improving their quality of life, realizing their capabilities and facilitating their access to resources and the benefits of development. These four areas are:

Social integration and citizenship, participation and security, an area that relates to legislative reform, with the aim of influencing (through the congressional Committee for Women, Children, Youth and the Family) 24 pieces of

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legislation to be enacted to give effect to the rights guaranteed by the 1998 Constitution.

Poverty reduction, an area that covers short- and medium-term programmes targeted at poor women, particularly women heads of household; it comprises initiatives in health, nutrition, education, support for generation of productive employment, local housing programmes and the exercise of rights.

Social investment and equity, an area that covers public policy on the urban and rural levels regarding access to resources and services, urban development and housing, land tenancy, food and nutrition policy, educational reform (especially curriculum reform), teacher training, vocational education and competitiveness, generation of productive employment and labour mediation, social security, health sector reform and decentralization. The area also covers policies for democratizing family roles and promoting cultural change, especially through the communications media and cultural activities.

Modernizing State institutions, an area that relates to mainstreaming the gender perspective into the planning process on the national, provincial and district levels and into decentralization policies. The latter policies are part of the strategy for modernizing the State and aim at bringing about broader social participation and new methods of managing resources and services.

Areas where mainstreaming a gender perspective has been most successful

Since 1995, Ecuador has made strides in formulating policies for women and recognizing women's rights under international law and has created administrative and judicial enforcement mechanisms, namely:

- Ratification and implementation of the Convention of Belém do Pará, 1995.
- Act Prohibiting Violence against Women and the Family, 1995.
- Creation and operation of 23 special police stations for women and training of administrative judicial personnel, examining magistrates and attorneys, of both sexes, 1995 to date.
- Creation of the Office for the Defence of the Rights of Women (ODMU) within the National Police, 1995.
- Training of judges and attorneys of both sexes regarding the human rights of women, 1995 to date.
- National awareness-raising campaign about the Act Prohibiting Violence against Women and the Family, using various written and audio-visual means of communication, 1995 to date.
- National Equal Opportunity Plan for 1996-2000.
- National Social Development Plan: Policies for Women, 1996-2005.

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- Ecuador 1998: Objectives, Policies and Strategic Guidelines.²
- National Human Rights Plan, Chapter on Women, 1998.
- Agenda for Development: Ecuador in the Twenty-first Century.³
- National Human Rights Operating Plan, Government-Civil Society, 1999.
- Andean Social Charter, 1999.
- Amendment of the Labour Code, Elections Act, Organization of the Judiciary Act, Labour Amparo Act, Free Maternity Reform Act, Juvenile Code and Penal Code (bills and amendments introduced during the period 1995-1998).
- Reform of the Constitution, Official Register No. 1 of 11 August 1996.
- Creation of working and coordination groups on the legal amendments relating to women between the National Council for Women, the congressional Committee for Women, the women's movement and civil society in general, 1999.
- Creation of bipartite technical committees to give effect to the mainstreaming of a gender perspective within the State apparatus, 1996-1999.
- Creation of the National Council for Women (CONAMU), 1997.
- System of social indicators with a gender perspective for Ecuador, 1997.
- Conversion of the congressional Committee for Women to a standing committee, 1998.

² This was an operating plan of the interim government for 1997-1998, formulated for the purpose of ensuring women's participation in decision-making bodies at all levels and in the benefits of development; it proposed as a policy the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the promotion of gender equity. Another stated policy objective was to reduce poverty levels through a gender-sensitive approach, particularly among marginal and Afro-Ecuadorian segments of the population.

³ The Agenda calls for the promotion of the constitutional rights of women, the passage of legislation against discrimination, violence and sexual harassment and abuse and the Free Maternity Reform Act; it also calls for the creation and monitoring of legal aid offices for women and police stations for women and the family in districts that meet the requirements; the installation of family courts in municipalities that meet the requirements of the National Council of the Judiciary in that regard; training to enhance women's capacity for leadership and the exercise of citizenship and increased representation at the local level; programmes to strengthen women's organizations, including training in obtaining legal status.

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- Creation of the Office of Deputy Ombudsman for Women, 1998.
- At the present time, Ecuador has women in high-level appointed or elected posts: one is Attorney-General, four are cabinet ministers, one is Vice-Chairman of the National Congress, one is a member of the Anti-Corruption Commission, one represents the Government as Ambassador to the United States, one is a governor, 13 per cent of regular or alternate deputies in the Congress are women, and there are a number of women mayors. During the period 1996 to 1998, a woman was Vice-President and Interim President of the Republic. Of the regular representatives to the National Constituent Assembly in 1997-1998 seven were women, and women chaired four of the nine committees.

Areas where mainstreaming a gender perspective has been least successful

37. Although the foundation has been laid for achieving some of the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action, implementation has been limited by the political and social instability the country has experienced since 1995. Rapid changes of government (the country has had five Presidents in as many years, three elected by popular vote and two chosen by political agreement), armed conflict and serious problems of internal unrest, among other matters already described, have made it hard to fund and implement adequately the actions identified as having high priority in the Equal Opportunity Plan for 1996-2000 and other national plans.

38. Reforms to the public sector have resulted in a reduction in the size of the State and cutbacks in public spending, primarily in social areas, evidence that they are considered secondary. The country's heavy burden of external debt payments has entailed constant adjustments and budget cuts, which have also depressed social investment. The process may result in a loss of jobs for women civil servants, who make up a large proportion of the State bureaucracy, and shrinking access to basic services for the poorest groups.

39. Social security coverage, which was not given the highest priority in the Equal Opportunity Plan, has been eroded considerably by cutbacks in services such as loans and the freeze on retirement pensions because of the vast arrears owed by the Government and private enterprise to the Ecuadorian Social Security Institute (IESS). The situation could be aggravated by the possible privatization of social security, a change that would be especially harmful to the interests of rural women and girls, who have unsatisfied claims on the Rural Social Security programme going back 18 years.

40. Although women's contribution to development is now given far more coverage in the media than prior to 1995, there is still much to be done with respect to the mass media: there has been a considerable increase in stereotyped and disparaging images of women presented in local television programmes, and messages combining sex and violence are spreading to the time slots directed towards children and adolescents.

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41. Limited access, funding delays and the absence of inter-agency coordination on programmes and projects for women have undermined their sustainability and efficacy. Evaluation of gender-based projects has shown that many have gone uncompleted for lack of funding or technical advice or have run for too short a period of time to yield conclusive results. This has happened in all spheres of action, in both government initiatives and private development programmes.

42. Bodies and agencies of the United Nations system and bilateral agencies tend not to accord priority to supporting the gender-equity policies promoted by government agencies, preferring rather to direct their resources and energies to the non-governmental sector. Moreover, not all international cooperation agencies have gender specialists or funding earmarked for programmes for women and girls or with a gender perspective; in consequence, the big projects put into effect, despite giving lip-service in their objectives to the need for a gender perspective, in practice pay little or no attention to it.

43. The withdrawal of some cooperation agencies from Ecuador and cutbacks in funds earmarked specifically for gender in development, as was the case with Netherlands cooperation, formerly one of the strongest sources of funding for women's programmes, have threatened the continuity of processes initiated in the country.

2.8 Changes in attitudes towards equality in the public and private sectors, the media and academic circles

44. In the public sector: The policies the Government has formulated related directly to women or with a gender perspective demonstrate that a radical change has come about in government attitudes in the last five years. There has been a shift in perspective from women's needs to women's rights, entailing a concept of a woman as a person with a right to the exercise of citizenship. That perspective is reflected, as will be discussed in more detail below, in some of the principles set forth in the new Constitution, principles that formally recognize the importance of gender-equity and affirmative action policies, thus providing legitimacy to the shift in focus from women to gender.

45. In the private sector: It is undoubtedly true that the leadership in various spheres of influence (unions, grass-roots organizations, the professions, to name a few) have gradually become more cognizant of women's contributions, and to ignore it has become "politically incorrect". In the social development area, for example, women head many of the country's non-governmental organizations, including those not specifically devoted to gender equality. It is significant, however, that 31.3 per cent of the non-governmental organizations are, in fact, specifically concerned with women's issues. Moreover, at this time the emphasis is shifting from "women's volunteer work" to making a social contribution through more organized actions.

46. The younger generation (more informed and enlightened than the generation of the 1980s) displays more liberal attitudes about men and women. The massive influx of women into the ranks of students and workers has contributed much to this change. Nevertheless, many of the mechanisms that keep women at a social, cultural and economic disadvantage are still being perpetuated. One indicator of this situation is the gap between men and women entering the labour market,

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despite the professional levels women have reached in both traditional and non-traditional fields.

47. In business, women are heavily under-represented in management levels. Business owners still entrust management jobs to men, even though there are already women in the country with sufficient training to fill them. The world of finance is still virtually closed to women, with one or two exceptions.

48. Communications media: It is striking that since the issuance of the Beijing Platform for Action, most of the country's newspapers now give full coverage to commemorative days such as 8 March or 25 November¹⁰ and (at least those with wide circulation) have regular women's pages, which are no longer limited to topics that fit the traditional role perception but also discuss women's political and cultural activities.

49. Academic circles: One of the biggest achievements of Ecuadorian women is the massive increase in their enrolment and attendance at universities in all subjects, including programmes that were originally designed exclusively for men, chiefly in science and engineering. Some young men perceive their presence as a competitive threat (according to surveys done specifically for this report), particularly when the women produce innovative ideas. Student associations in the various faculties have women among their leadership, but in terms of leadership of the general student body of the university, the highest level women usually reach is vice-president. At the time of writing, there was only one instance of a woman occupying the top position in student government.

50. In recent years, institutions of higher learning, both public and private, have been incorporating a gender perspective in their courses, seminars and master's programmes on a central or local level. Central University, one of the largest institutions of higher learning in the country, in 1996 began the process of mainstreaming a gender perspective as a cross-cutting theme in the curricula of a number of faculties. The Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), in conjunction with the National Council for Women, has instituted a graduate programme in gender and public policy management, offered as part of its permanent curriculum, which should result in the creation of high-level national capacity in the subject.

2.9 Effects of structural adjustment, the global financial crisis and globalization of markets on women and girls

51. The external debt burden has reduced the potential for social investment and has required constant economic adjustment measures, especially in the areas of health and education. The global financial crisis and the economic problems of the Asian countries have had serious repercussions in Ecuador, aggravated by poor management of the domestic financial system. To meet the crisis, the Government of Ecuador in 1999 froze all funds in the national banking and financial system, and in so doing deepened the poverty of families who were depending on the yield on their small investments (such as retirees who had

¹⁰ International Women's Day and International Day to Stop Violence against Women.

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deposited their entire life savings in the banks). The measure did not even make exception for children's food allowances deposited in the accounts of children's courts; it also had the effect of freezing the funds of non-governmental organizations.

52. Figures for 1997 showed 52 per cent of Ecuador's population living in poverty; according to World Bank data, 15 per cent of the population was below the indigence line and another 35 per cent below the poverty line. At the time of the last census (1990), women made up 50.3 per cent of the population, a figure slightly higher than that recorded in the earlier censuses of 1962 and 1974. According to the 1990 census figures, 51.4 per cent of women were living in cities. Although the fertility rate has been declining, the national average dropping to 3.6 for the period 1989-1994, it is still higher than the average of 3.0 for Latin America and the Caribbean. Within the country, there is a striking difference between the rates for urban and rural areas, 3 and 4.6 respectively. The percentage of women of child-bearing age who use contraceptives is very low (46 per cent) compared with the figure for South America as a whole (61 per cent).

53. With respect to women's roles, an increasing proportion of women are taking on responsibility for the economic support of their households. According to the 1995 Living Conditions Survey (BCV-95), in 18 per cent of households a woman was acknowledged as head of household, and in 24 per cent a woman was the main breadwinner. Of households headed by women, 43.6 per cent were households without a male spouse and with minor children.

54. Women's labour force participation increased considerably during the adjustment period. During the period 1974 to 1982, while men's labour force participation increased by 19 per cent, women's participation increased by 47 per cent; during the period 1982-1990, men's participation increased by 31 per cent, women's by 81 per cent.

55. In the last census (1990), women's labour force participation rate (the economically active population out of the working age population) was 26 per cent; according to the 1995 Living Conditions Survey, it averaged 54.9 per cent, combining the figures of 54 per cent for urban women and 57 per cent for rural women; the corresponding rates for men were 77 per cent in the city and 88 per cent in the country. These figures show that, while women have increased their labour force participation more rapidly than men, there remains a gap.

56. There are also disparities in the occupation categories in which men and women are employed. For every 100 men employed in administrative and management posts, there are 46 women in such posts, whereas in services there are 174 women employed for every 100 men. A large percentage of the male labour force is employed in the formal urban sector; in 1997, that percentage was ten points higher than the corresponding figure for the female labour force. Moreover, unemployment affects women disproportionately. Unemployment among urban women is 12 per cent and among rural women 11 per cent, while male unemployment is 5 per cent in urban areas and 3 per cent in rural areas.

57. With respect to wages, the 1995 survey shows that women earn 27 per cent less than men for their labour, a figure similar to that for the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean. The pay disparity is even greater in the rural areas, where it reaches 37 per cent. In 1994, women received 18.4 per cent of total labour income, men 81.6 per cent.

58. Education is, of course, important in determining the type of job a woman can get. Nevertheless, despite attaining an average level of formal education higher than that of men (9.4 years versus 9 years in 1993), urban women are employed predominantly in domestic service and other low-paid occupations.

Part Two

3. Financial and institutional measures

3.1 institutional mechanisms put in place to follow up and implement the Platform for Action

59. Since the Conference in Beijing, in all three branches of government mechanisms have been instituted with the function of implementing and following up the agreements, directly or indirectly. These include the National Council for Women (CONAMU) itself, the executive branch agency with responsibility for guiding gender policy, the congressional Committee for Women, Children, Youth and the Family, the Office of the Deputy Ombudsman for Women, among the autonomous bodies, and the special police stations for women under the Ministry of the Interior, to mention the most important.

60. The institutional strengthening of the National Council for Women was based on the perceived need to proceed with the modernization of Ecuadorian society as a whole on a foundation of respect for individual liberty and to create the conditions for personal development and equal opportunity in all spheres.

61. One of the Council's key functions is to coordinate with all the other government entities to ensure that policies, programmes and projects benefiting women and promoting gender equity are put into effect. Essential to this function is political and governmental backing at the highest levels for public policies that address the needs and interests of women and have institutional and financial support at all levels of the public sector.

62. The Council's institutional mandate is to set guidelines for the incorporation of a gender perspective in plans, programmes and projects; to monitor their mandatory implementation by all public agencies; and to mainstream public policies that promote equal opportunity for women.

63. The basis for the Council's work, as mentioned earlier, is the Equal Opportunity Plan for 1996-2000. The Plan, which creates the framework for equal opportunity policy, outlines a number of strategic goals and actions in various areas for overcoming the limits and obstacles that prevent women from participating on equal terms with men in economic, political, social and cultural life, including participation in decision-making and power.

64. One of the Council's achievements was to influence the framers of the 1998 Constitution to provide constitutionally for an entity to guide public policy on gender; as a result, it is definitively established as an appropriate mechanism on the highest level for implementing the Platform for Action and other international agreements regarding the human rights of women and political, social, economic and cultural rights in general.

65. The Council has divided its work into the following technical areas:
(a) gender policies and studies: rights and violence, education, health, development, national statistics, political participation and leadership, strengthening participation in civil society, management of public policies and institution-building; and (b) training and communications: training,

communications, information centre. It is headed by an Executive Director, who is appointed directly by the President of the Republic, an Executive Office, which works in coordination with a Governing Board composed of representatives from other government bodies and agencies and three representatives from the women's movement. It also has an administrative-financial section and a legal section.

66. Since the Council also works on decentralization policy, it has to coordinate specific institutional support initiatives with various municipalities in the country, especially those headed by women or which have a special office for women's or gender issues.

67. At the time of writing, the Council had initiated a process of evaluating compliance with the Equal Opportunity Plan, which will provide precise data on progress in implementing Ecuador's commitments.

3.2 Financial mechanisms

68. Before the National Council for Women was created, the Government of Ecuador had established an allocation item for a National Directorate for Women in the budget of the Ministry of Social Welfare. Lacking sufficient autonomy, the Directorate could not negotiate for additional financing from international cooperation funds.

69. In the Government's general budget, some 4,280 billion sucres, out of a total budget of 26,252 billion sucres,¹¹ has been allocated for current expenditure to the National Council for Women, according to the preliminary annual budget. In other words, 1.61 per cent of the Government's general budget has been allocated to the Council. From 1998 to 1999, the budget allocated to the Council increased only by 280 billion sucres, although more was requested, since the depreciation of the currency by December could amount to an annualized 57 per cent.

¹¹ The average exchange for 1998 was 5,500 sucres to the dollar, according to Central Bank sources. As of this writing, the Bank was applying a reference rate of 8,700 sucres to the dollar. Early in 1999, the exchange rate of the sucre to the dollar passed the 18,000 mark.

70. As the following table shows, funding for equal opportunity has been on an upward trend:

Table 1

BUDGET OF THE FORMER NATIONAL DIRECTORATE FOR WOMEN

(In millions of sucres)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Source</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Government</u>	<u>Other sources</u>	
1994	632 100	367 020	999 120
1996*	609 999	741 440	1,359 419
1997*	744 199	702 240	1,456 619

Prepared by N. Reyes-Salazar. Source: National Council for Women.

* Funding from the Government and other sources (UNICEF) under the project, "Gender policies to the year 2000".

Table 2

BUDGET OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR WOMEN

(In billions of sucres)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Government</u>	<u>Other sources</u>	<u>Total</u>
1998	4 000	1 375	5 375
1999	4 280	0	4 280
	8 280	1 375*	9 655

Prepared by N. Reyes-Salazar. Source: National Council for Women.

* Corresponds to US\$ 250,000 from the Inter-American Development Bank for the biennium 1997-1998, figured at the rate of 5,500 sucres per dollar. The amounts remaining from the UNICEF Project 1996-2002 are not figured in.

71. If we compare budget allocations before and after the change of status from National Directorate (DINAMU) to National Council (CONAMU), we see that government funding increased by 474.6 per cent from 1997 to 1999. Despite the increase in the nominal amount, the sucre's loss of purchasing power due to inflation will keep undercutting this percentage unless the economy can be stabilized.

72. Since the Council is not an executing agency, the items in its budget relate only to current expenses (salaries, materials, supplies, travel expenses, communications and publications). There is no fund for investment costs (plant and equipment).

73. For operations, the Council has obtained international cooperation funding. The main donors are the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which donated US\$ 2,500,000 for the period 1996-2001, and the Inter-American Development Bank, which contributed US\$ 250,000 for the biennium 1997-1999. UNICEF in this case was acting as administrator of funds from the Kingdom of the Netherlands (under its cooperation programme). At the time of writing, additional international cooperation funds were being sought from the Governments of France and Spain and from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

74. The institution is well-known among its collaborators for its skill in optimizing resources. Its staff is highly qualified and is hired through a competitive process that takes into account not only technical skills but also the sensitivity required to fulfil the Council's functions.

3.3 Similar mechanisms for follow-up to other conferences

75. Mechanisms for follow-up of the various international conferences would be found within the central planning agency,¹² the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Congress. Since the issuance of the Platform for Action, all Ecuador's international commitments with regard to the human rights of women are coordinated through the National Council for Women and the Inter-American Commission of Women (IACW).

76. Among the main activities in this regard are:

- Preparation of the report of Ecuador for the seventh session of the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean; October 1997.
- Preparation of the report of Ecuador on a system of indicators for follow-up of item 18 of the Plan of Action adopted at the Summit of the Americas; August 1997.
- Publication of the platform adopted at Belém do Pará (various printings) and discussion in working groups.
- Publication of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (various printings) and discussion in working groups.
- Preparation of the report of Ecuador under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1998; Quito, 1999.

¹² Formerly the National Development Council (CONADE), now the National Planning Office (ODEPLAN).

- * System of indicators for follow-up of item 18 of the Plan of Action adopted at the Summit of the Americas; August 1997.
- * Preparation of Ecuador's comments on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; Quito, 1999.
- * Consultation Meeting of Women of the Andean Countries, 1996.
- * Dissemination and discussion of the Optional Protocol prior to its approval to build consensus between the Government and civil society with regard to Ecuador's comments; 1998.
- * Attended the forty-second and forty-third sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women in 1998 and 1999.
- * Special Meeting of Wives of Heads of State and Government in the Americas, 1998.
- * International affirmative action seminar, to discuss mechanisms for institutionalizing a gender perspective in government offices, Quito, 1999.
- * International seminar on the theme, "Our girls, entitled to equality from childhood"; and others.

77. Follow-up initiatives are official and coordinated by the National Council for Women and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the Office of Human Rights, after prior consultation with civil society and cooperation agencies, which are asked for recommendations and comments. For that purpose, the National Council for Women has a human rights section and an international affairs section to handle the consultation process.

3.4 Role of non-governmental organizations in follow-up activities

78. Non-governmental organizations have taken on a new role in recent years, particularly since 1993, in preparing for and following up on international conferences. A spokeswoman for the Ecuadorian women's movement has this to say: "The existence of the global Platform for Action and the regional Programme of Action¹³ has helped to strengthen the participation, influence and visibility of the women's movement in the country, particularly in terms of its involvement in the design and adoption of public policies. These instruments have also created a framework enabling the Government to move forward in setting up institutions, mechanisms and laws to meet its commitments to promote the full exercise of political rights by women. During this time, processes already set in motion by the women's movement have been reinforced and advanced; the fact that initiatives have been sustained and have borne fruit makes it possible to state that the movement's capacity to propose, negotiate and pressure has been maintained through economic vicissitudes; this capacity has been one of the keys

¹³ The Beijing Platform for Action and the Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean.

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to obtaining measures that contribute towards fulfilment of Ecuador's commitments".¹⁴ This statement indicates that organized civil society has been constantly involved in follow-up of the Platform.

79. Working groups on the issues have come up with recommendations or helped to coordinate follow-up events, such as: (a) a regional symposium on the contribution of non-governmental organizations to implementation of the Cairo and Beijing agreements on sexual and reproductive health rights, held in Quito in 1997 in coordination with the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); and (b) a symposium in preparation for the World Summit for Social Development, organized by the Citizenship Forum of the Esquel Foundation, Quito, 1996.

80. The main arms of the women's movement - the Political Coordinator for Women in Ecuador, the Permanent Forum of Ecuadorian Women, the Women's Movement for Autonomy - have incorporated in their agendas issues agreed upon by Ecuador in Beijing and some that were rejected by the Government. They have undertaken initiatives to implement and follow up on the themes of political participation, violence and human rights, and sexual and reproductive rights, to name the most important.

¹⁴ "Women's access to decision-making in the Andean countries", Magdalena León, Political Coalition of Andean Women, Quito, Ecuador, 1998.