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GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA DESPITE POVERTY

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, May 27, 1999

"Though school systems throughout Latin America and the Caribbean are in desperate need of repair and reform, they have one success story to boast about: Boys and girls now enjoy the same educational opportunity in nearly every country of the region. Unlike other developing areas, educational achievement in the region is fast becoming gender neutral.

Except for three nations - out of 33 - with large indigenous populations, there's no difference in literacy rates of men and women. Boys and girls enroll and graduate in equal numbers from primary and secondary schools. More women than men go to college. In many places, they now are the majority of students in such traditionally male fields as law and medicine.

Critical unresolved gender problems: Girls from rural areas and indigenous families get less education than boys with similar backgrounds. School texts largely present timeworn and demeaning stereotypes of women: sometimes they exclude women.

Within schools, women tend to occupy the lower rungs of status and income.

They are, overwhelmingly, primary and secondary school teachers. Men, in contrast, are the principals, superintendents, and university professors...

The quality of public schools throughout Latin America and the Caribbean has deteriorated the past generation and, in some countries, they are in crisis. A recent study by the Inter-American Dialogue's education program concluded that:

- Most children in Latin America and the Caribbean are today deprived of a decent, high-quality education.

- Instead of contributing to progress, schools hold back the region -reinforcing poverty, inequality and poor economic performance.

Both boys and girls are getting a dismal education in Latin America and the Caribbean. Raising the quality of education for girls and women in the region now means reforming the school system from top to bottom for all students. What is required is better trained and better paid teachers, more local control, clear standards of performance and more money...

Countries are investing half of their education budgets to train girls and women. To make sure that investment pays off, women must have the same opportunities as men for jobs and careers. This means taking account of the circumstances women face in the work force. Education is one investment no country can afford to waste."

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