

# E L S A L V A D O R

R E P O R T

## THE POOR... ARE THEY SAVED?

El Salvador, situated in Central America, is one of the most densely populated countries on the continent, with 260 inhabitants per square kilometer. Despite its smallness (21,040 km<sup>2</sup>), the country is characterized by its population's low level of well-being. In the 1996 Report on Human Development prepared by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), El Salvador holds place 115, out of 174 countries. At the level of the Americas, El Salvador, Honduras (116) and Haiti (148) hold the last places in terms of their human development indexes.

El Salvador has been immersed in a process of transition from war to peace, as of signature of the agreements that put an end to the 12-year civil war (1992). This process has been hampered by a lack of democratic traditions and practices, worsened by the chronic problem of concentration of wealth, while poverty affects half the population. At the Social Development Summit (Copenhagen, 1995), the governments of the participating countries committed to implementing a National Plan for Eradication of Poverty, which in El Salvador is still not in place.

Similarly, due to the complexity of the transition and the aforesaid problems, civil society has played a weak role following execution of the Peace Agreements, although some initiatives began appearing on the public agenda over the course of the past year.

The government has disseminated a Social Development Plan whose chief objectives are «to systematically reduce poverty until it is eliminated, improve the quality of life of Salvadorans, promote comprehensive development of the individual and create a country of opportunities for everyone», defining education and culture, health, housing, water and sewage, and social welfare as priority areas.

At the international level, the government is promoting investment in El Salvador through a «National Competitiveness Program» that presents successful macroeconomic indicators as a guarantee for stability and development, and the country is shown as the most economically free and dynamic of Latin America, after Chile. Nevertheless, the perception of the majority of the population is different from the official indicators, a situation that is reflected in different public opinion polls.

There are doubts that the government can actually meet the deadlines established in the agreements coming out of the Copenhagen and Beijing Summits. The investment in social development in the nation's 1996 general budget was 24.02%, which compared

to the 1995 budget reflects a drop of 1.61%. This hinders the goal of a 50% investment in social spending agreed by the countries for 1999. In the projected budgets there is also a trend toward increasing spending outside the social area (Office of the President of the Republic, Ministry of Public Works), and also to classify development of infrastructure plans as «social investment.»

## POVERTY AND EMPLOYMENT

According to government research (Multi-Purpose Household Surveys or «EHPM» for their Spanish-language initials) during 1995 47.53% of homes were in a situation of poverty or extreme poverty, and the latter represent 18.23% of the total. In the rural area, the situation is worse, since 58.2% of households live in a situation of poverty or extreme poverty.

The aforesaid survey indicates that total poverty has dropped from 59.7% (1990) to 47.5% (1995), i.e., a percentage reduction of 12.2% in a five-year period. This situation, which is apparently positive, is not coherent with the perception of the vast majority of the population, or with the reality, and can be explained based on a change in methodology for calculating poverty in the latest surveys. Family remittances have been included in the income, with the intention of reducing the poverty figures. Family remittances are some 1.2 billion dollars per year sent by approximately one million Salvadorans living abroad, primarily in the United States. The problem with family remittances, and their apparent impact on reducing poverty indexes, is that they lack real sustainability, since they are beyond governmental control and can be affected by changes in United States immigration policies. Thus we are dealing with a phenomenon that, based on other countries' experiences, could have an average duration of one generation, i.e., that remittances will start falling off as of the year 2005, taking into account that the mass migration of Salvadorans began at the outset of the 1980s.

The microeconomic reality in El Salvador indicates an increase in poverty with falling wages and real income and major increases in food prices. Non-governmental surveys carried out during 1995 reveal 72% of Salvadorans consider that poverty increased in general terms during 1995, and only 2.4% consider that it had fallen,

while 23% consider that poverty did not vary.

Women, because of their gender subordination, are undoubtedly the most affected by poverty; on the one hand there is the cultural factor, which holds them exclusively responsible for domestic activities, where they are affected by restrictions on family income and a lack of basic services. Moreover, when they gain access to paid jobs, they do so under unequal conditions. Unfortunately there is a lack of updated information deaggregated by sex regarding the impact of public policies on women.

The feminization of poverty has been a growing trend over the past decade, both at quantitative level –there are more poor women than poor men– and qualitative level –poor women are more needy than poor men. So that the figures for male and female heads of households differ: while women heads of households are over-represented in the extreme poverty category (36%), men heads of households are over-represented in the non-poor category (40.4%).

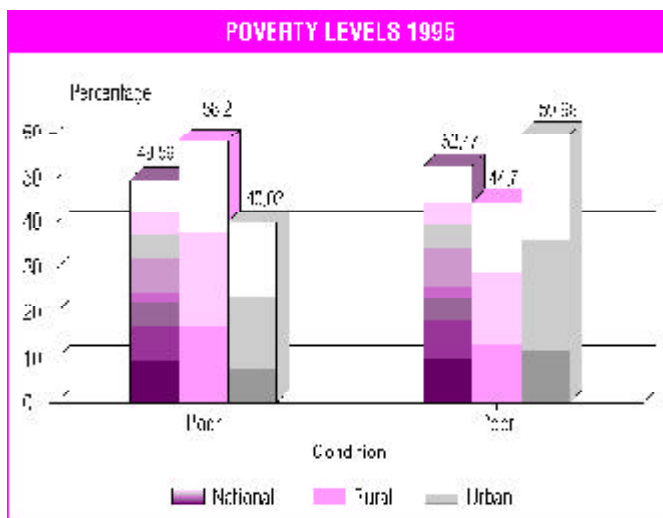
The difference in average salaries for women and men is very significant. At the urban level, women obtain salaries equivalent to 71.5% of those obtained by urban men.

curity system.

In general the perception of public opinion as to the country's economic situation is that it worsened during 1995. This opinion is shared by two out of every three persons surveyed; approximately half the persons surveyed considered that their own economic conditions did not change over the course of the year, and 25% believe that their family income fell during 1995.

The situation of margination and poverty that contributed greatly to the internal conflict that broke out during the 1980–1992 period persists and threatens the incipient process of democratization, along with economic stability, and likewise generates crime, which in turn has led to allocation over the last four years of over 14% of the national budget to Public Security and Defense spending, thus decreasing the state's possibilities to invest in social development.

There is a great danger of economic growth continuing to benefit a privileged minority and marginating a broad segment of the population. This, together with the pressures deriving from the process of globalization of capital, can generate more frustration, crisis and social and political instability.



Source: Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples, 1995.

As far as employment in El Salvador is concerned, according to the EHPM surveys, the unemployment rate, i.e., people who are not working but who are actively seeking a job, has dropped from 9.94% (1992) to 7.65% (1995), and under-employment is 32%. The survey would seem to fail to take population growth into account in connection with these indicators. But even taking these figures as valid, we cannot go without mentioning that approximately half the economically active population is employed in the informal sector of the economy, with a high presence of children and women (55.3% are women and 44.7% men, and there are 260,000 child workers in the country), where incomes are minimal, workdays are long, and there is a total lack of labor protection and non-inclusion in the national social se-

## ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

The disparities in access to basic services between rural and urban zones of the country are very noticeable and become even more important if we take into account that the rural population represents 56% of the total population (UNDP, 1993).

In its Social Development Plan the government recognizes that in 1994 only 16% of the rural population had access to drinking water service, and the percentage of the general population without access to the service is 53.53%, according to the 1992 census by the Ministry of Coordination of Economic and Social Development.

According to the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare (MSPAS) 53% of the population does not have drinking water supply in their homes, and use fountains and collection systems that do not provide security in terms of the potability of the water. We can say that more than 2,500,000 people continue to be deprived of access to satisfy such an elemental need.

The MSPAS reports that 81% of the total population has sanitation services, 39% of which is through sewage systems; in the rural area, 48% does not have sanitary service and deposits excreta outdoors.

Drinking water and sewage coverage in rural areas is low, with the aggravating factor of significant contamination of surface water throughout the territory, which provokes increasing dependence on underground water. El Salvador, after Haiti, is the most ecologically deteriorated country in the Americas. Research undertaken in 1993 on the quality of drinking water distributed by the government entity (ANDA) in the capital shows that 35% of the water analyzed was not appropriate for human consumption. In rural areas and small cities, with less-developed infrastructure and inadequate maintenance, water quality may be even worse.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 80% of all illnesses worldwide are associated with non-potable or poor-quality water. This is the factor which, together with the lack of a government program to oversee and monitor water quality and efficient policies for broadening service, contributes to the low quality of life and facilitates the propagation of epidemics in the country. The groups most affected are girls and boys, whose situation is reflected in the high infant mortality rates (45 per 1000 live births).

One of the areas defined as a priority by the government in its Social Development Plan is housing, given the big dwelling deficit and the high degree of cramped living conditions in the country. The goals set by the government are construction of 150 thousand dwellings during the 1994–1999 period. The housing deficit in 1993, calculated by the government, was 233,400 dwelling units, to which an additional demand of at least 24,000 units per year must be added; meanwhile, the Economic and Social Rights Committee of the United Nations calculates a housing deficit for the country of 470 thousand dwellings.

Despite the acuteness of the problem, the minimal percentage of the national budget allocated to Housing has been constantly declining, going from 0.4% in 1993 to 0.3% in 1996, with falling projections for the future. There is an evident lack of appropriate government policy to resolve this problem, which together with the high interest rates charged by banks, along with the high cost of materials, makes it extremely difficult for the majority of the population to gain coverage of this basic need.

## EDUCATION

In El Salvador, the resources allocated to financing education decreased systematically during the years of the civil war (1980–1992); as a percentage of Gross National Product, education spending dropped progressively from 3.6% in 1980 to 1.6% in 1992, a situation which has been maintained, according to UNESCO data.

According to ECLAC, per capita spending on education in the country, during this decade, has been only US\$ 13 (at US\$ 1980 prices), and is the lowest in Latin America with the exception of Guatemala, and one of the lowest in the world; in other countries in the region investments are significantly higher, like in Costa Rica (US\$ 88) and Honduras (US\$ 29).

In relation to the overall national budget, the allocation to education went from 13.74% in 1992 to 14.81% in 1995, an increase of only 1.07%, four years following the end of the war and in the framework of educational reform. If we examine the education budget for 1995, we find that 72.41% goes for payment of salaries, and only 0.64% to investment, which obviously is reflected in the poor quality of education.

Official data indicate that for 1995, the basic schooling (first through sixth grade) rate was 50.33%. Average schooling at national level is 4.67 years, with an urban average of 6.25 grades and a rural average of 2.66 grades.

In El Salvador only 5.91% of the population over 6 years of age has completed more than 12 years of schooling, of which 50.68%

are men and 49.31% are women. Other indicators, for 1993, show a pupil–teacher ratio of 34 to 1.

As to illiteracy, we can say that it still stands that one out of every three adults does not know how to read or write, and that the ratio worsens in rural areas. According to UNESCO's annual statistical report (1995), adult illiteracy (individuals 15 years of age or older) at national level is 28.5%. The illiteracy level is higher in women than in men, and is 30.2% of the total population.

In general, adult education is low on the government's scale of priorities, and it is at the level of civil society organizations that priority is given to the education of adults.

Another huge gap in public education policy in El Salvador is the lack of coverage at the initial and pre-school level (0 to 4 years of age), which leaves 695,300 children, equivalent to 12.72% of the population, without attention. This situation directly affects children's development, and women's as well, whose possibilities for developing are curbed by their having to devote more hours to caring for their children. The pre-school population that has coverage obtains it in the private sector, to which only middle and upper levels have access. Civil organizations are making efforts to provide coverage to the lower income segments of the population.

The low investment made by the government in such a priority area for the training of human capital, as is education, represents an enormous impediment for improving the well-being of the least-advantaged sectors and for the country's development. The low investment in education also implies low quality education.

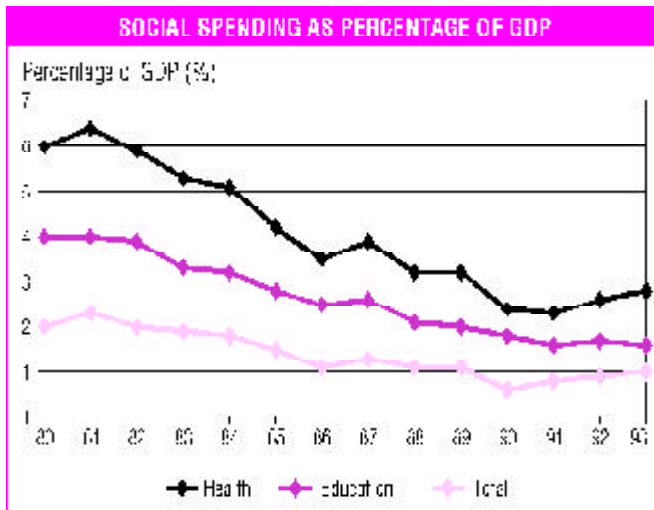
Elevated school failure rates in the Salvadoran school system are the product of the low quality of the education provided. Using the official figures for repetition and desertion, only one student in three finishes ninth grade. This low quality is also reflected in the lack of connection of school curricula with society, since the programs fail to take into account the reality and the context in which the children live.

Another important aspect to underscore is the fact that education levels of the population are closely linked to income levels: the higher the income level, the higher the educational level; this leads to inequality of education opportunities for children from homes in different income groups. The results of the educational opportunity inequalities are dramatically reflected in comparing rural and urban zones: on the average, the population over 15 years of age and living in urban zones has completed 7 years of schooling, while those living in rural zones have completed only 2.8 grades.

The Salvadoran education system requires much more investment by the government, efficient techniques, and participation of grassroots organisations in public policy proposals.

## HEALTH

According to official indicators of the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare (MSPAS) and those reported by international organizations such as the UNDP, in our country the following health



conditions still prevail:

1. High mortality and morbidity rates associated with developing countries, such as contagious diseases directly related to the population's poverty conditions.  
The main causes of infant deaths (1994) are problems related to childbirth attention and infectocontagious illnesses, which could be prevented at the level of primary health care if the community resources devoted to this area were stepped up.
2. Deficiency in medical care coverage in rural areas, as reflected in mortality indexes; according to the 1992 census taken by the Office of Statistics and Census (DIGESTIC) only 66% of deaths were medically certified, which means that for the rest of deaths medical personnel was not in attendance at the time of death and there was probably no medical monitoring of illness.
3. According to the 1990–1995 data, maternal deaths directly related to pregnancy, childbirth and puerperium reached 85% of total in-hospital maternal deaths, which are preventable through appropriate care. It is important to note the existing under-recording of maternal mortality data, since only hospital deaths are reported, while deaths occurring at home are not taken into account.
4. According to MSPAS reports (1995) the chief cause of hospital death is intracranial traumatism, which speaks more to the increase in criminal violence in the country than to a decrease in communicable diseases.
5. The remainder of the causes of in-hospital mortality relate to infectocontagious diseases and chronic illnesses and intoxication, according to 1995 data. At-home death diagnoses are not available, since they generally do not involve medical care and the diagnosis of death is not made with technical criteria allowing for classification.

A framework document was recently presented, containing the basic principles for the reforms, but the health sector reforms proposed are very much long-term (15 years), and if they are car-

ried out without social participation it will be very difficult to achieve the impact hoped for to improve the country's health and, thereby, sustainable human development.

A minimum basic package has been established, to be supplied free of charge, which is defined as «essential Public Health services, which are eminently preventive, and which directly or indirectly must be developed by society to benefit itself and its surroundings, on the principles of equity, efficiency and effectiveness»; but there is no specific definition of what these services are or what the mechanisms or forms of access there will be to other health services not included in this package and which any person could need at a particular time (for example, surgery, treatment of chronic or degenerative diseases, etc.).

Upon comparing the percentages allocated to Health in the national budget, we note a percentage decrease of 0.66% between 1993 (9.59%) and 1996 (8.9%). This is more serious when we realize that 60% of that will be allocated to secondary and tertiary care levels (hospitals and health centers) and 40% to administrative aspects and execution of other programs, including those for primary health care.

The 1996 investment, as now defined, is insufficient to cover the commitments taken on at world summits, and is also ill-distributed for appropriate development of the health care sector and for satisfying the needs of the most disadvantaged population.

If we continue on the current path, the threat that one out every two children in future generations will suffer from poverty-linked illnesses will become a reality that will limit their development. And the country's development will likewise be limited.

## CITIZENS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The lack of democratic tradition in the country, reinforced by the repressive climate during the war, contributes to a limited exercise of citizenship and political participation. The 1992 Peace Agreements contained elements to foster the democratization process. Nevertheless, the first elections under peaceful conditions, in 1994, due to the limitations of the voting reforms, the lack of transparency and effectiveness of the institutions supervising the process, the problems of citizen identification, and the deficiencies and irregularities during the voting, led to high indexes of absenteeism: 51% in the first presidential round and 56% in the second. The alarming news is the absence of women at the polls: for one reason or another, including forced abstention, six out of every ten women of voting age did not cast their ballots.

The disinterest in the elections, the disinterest in politics, the distrust as to the fairness of the electoral process, and the fear of the consequences of a possible victory of the left are attitudes that non-voting women share with men. Women encounter further obstacles that have to do with domesticity and a lack of citizen identification among the majority of Salvadoran women.

As regards the national mechanisms for the advancement of women, and the commitments emanating from the 4<sup>th</sup> Conference in Beijing, in March 1996 the Institute for the Development of



Women (ISDEMU) was established by law, which has a Board of Directors –likewise created by law– composed of the top authorities of the six ministries and three Public Ministry institutions, along with two representatives of women’s organizations.

The creation of ISDEMU, as oversight authority for government–state policies, and the process of preparation of the national Policy on Women with significant participation of women’s organizations, constitutes, in institutional terms, the most important political event for women in public administration.

The National Policy on Women operates in ten priority areas of activity, in which women’s organizations managed to include some of their most important demands. The government has the chief responsibility of complying over the next three years, although measures have also been established as the responsibility of other government institutions. A novel element is the participation of women’s organizations in the mechanisms for monitoring fulfillment of government actions.

Given that 1996 has been a pre–election year, the participation of women in political activities and in representative posts has been one of the points of national debate. Yet there has been no sight of any substantial modifications in terms of the presence of women in the coming March 1997 elections, where thus far they are not very present on the lists of candidates.

Only one party, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), has strategically established minimum quotas for 35% women’s participation on the lists of candidates, and although

there has been trouble trying to achieve that percentage, it should also be noted that the party managed to create mechanisms to make quantitative and qualitative achievement of that quota possible. The rest of the parties, including the governing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA), still are far from proposing minimum quotas for participation, although in their speeches they have defined women as one of the priority sectors of their electoral campaign and their future administration, should they win the election.

In terms of parliamentary participation, women represent 10.7% (9 out of 84 deputies) and at the municipal level, 29 mayors are women, representing 11.1% of the 262 municipalities in the country. In this context we should note that the municipalities where women have been elected are small jurisdictions, both territorially and politically. At the level of the judicial branch of government, two women magistrates were appointed –by parliamentary election– for the first time, representing 13.3% of the justices on the Supreme court of Justice. In the Public Ministry, the Government Attorney’s Office for the Defense of Human Rights has been in the hands of a woman who has been acclaimed for her performance in the post.

At the Executive level, the presence of women in social agencies for education and health has increased, and the Vice Ministries of Agriculture and Foreign Affairs are also headed up by women.

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*In our country for several years now, women’s organizations and feminist groups have broken the silence cloaking violent practices against women. We cannot seek to build a democratic society that does not include gender equity; justice must not ignore the problems that affect women; concepts and actions must be broadened to counteract impunity and ensure that no aggressor goes unpunished.*

*The indexes of gender violence in our country are alarming. The Assistant Government Attorney’s Office for Women is compiling data from official sources including the Institute of Legal Medicine, the Supreme Court of Justice, the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic, among others. The statistics reflect that this year 217 cases of intra–family violence and 528 rapes have been handled. The chief protagonist of intra–family violence is the living companion or husband of the victim (62.2%), while 25.33% of rapes are committed by women’s relatives and 63.88% by persons known by the victim. It should also be pointed out that there is significant under–reporting, and the foregoing figures would increase if there were a mechanism or form to compile the majority of cases handled not only by these agencies, but also by women’s organizations who provide assistance to victims of gender violence.*

*Gender violence is strengthened by Salvadoran legislation, which still provides no punishment for conjugal mistreatment, which has gaps and biases in terms of punishment for rape, and which considers rape more an attack on family dignity than an attack on liberties. The judicial system, in turn, doubts women’s word when they file rape complaints. For these and other reasons present in the State, the family and in much of society, many women still go without reporting violence, and suffer the consequences.*

*To break this silence, women’s organizations are supporting and working on proposals geared to putting an end to the unequal power relations between men and women, and are thus willing to monitor the Salvadoran government’s compliance with international commitments and the actions to be undertaken in keeping with the National Policy on Women.*

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