

Education, as a means of improvement, is the call to lead the process toward permanent spiritual and material growth among all people. From ancient times when teachers led Greek children along the paths to learning, formal education has been an essential part of human rights, our greatest aspiration and thirst for knowledge. This has been translated into academic formality and satisfied by the infinite source of knowledge that represents the greatest treasure human beings can hope to construct. Overthrowing the tyranny of ignorance implies promoting development for all people. This is indisputable.

When we stop to think about education in the Dominican Republic, we must look at all the limitations we have had to overcome, starting with Eugenio María de Hostos' educational reform, forging a rationalist and secular education at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From this cultural renaissance came the creation of the first teachers' training institute, constituting, as we know, a very important contribution to Dominican education.

With the investiture of the first six trained teachers in 1887 and the wisdom and orientation of the poet and renowned teacher Salomé Ureña, the irreversible path to education for Dominican women began. As worthy heiresses of their predecessors, females make up 62% of today's university population and 66% of college, and honors, graduates.

In the case of Dominican women, they are graduating from the universities and moving into positions of power, albeit with obstacles and difficulties to overcome, but better educated to continue moving forward, as can be seen in the data we will show here.

The Dominican education system has four levels:

1. The first level: for children under 6 years of age.

2. The basic or elementary level: for children between the ages of 6 to 14 years. It is obligatory and universally free of charge.
3. Medium level: for teens from 14 to 18 years, free but not obligatory.
4. Higher education or university level.

A study done by the Ministry of Women, "Dominican Women in Figures 2000-2012" reveals that the evolution of enrollment by gender between 2003-2011 shows minor gender differences, although the tendency leans toward gender parity. The rate of females was 0.99 at the beginning of the 2003-2004 academic year and 0.98 in 2010-2011, which implies the presence of 99 and 98 girls for every 100 boys, respectively. This slight gap, a disadvantage for females, tends to decline and switch over to the opposite sex as children go through school to the higher grades where gender parity is reached at 1.32, when they finish their last year of high school, which then implies the presence of 132 girls for every 100 boys.

In the public schools, which account for 73% of the total pre-university school population, there are no significant gender differences. The urban-rural distribution is very similar to the geographic distribution of the Dominican population, with 75.4% residing in urban areas and 24.6% in rural areas. According to the 2010 census, 25.6% of the population live in rural areas.

The largest rate of public education activity takes place in the elementary, obligatory elementary schools for the 6 to 13-year-olds, where the net enrollment rate was 92.1% in 2000 and 94.8% in 2011. In 2000, female enrollment was 92.8% while male enrollment was 91.3%. In 2011, female enrollment was 95% and male enrollment was 94.8%.

On the junior and high school level, females outnumbered males by 11 percentage points, with 66.5% females enrolled and 55.5% males, which implies that between 66 and 67 out of 100 females in this age range are in high school and for males, only 55 to

56 of every 100. Between 2000 and 2011, the total net high school enrollment rate rose by 20%, from 41.5% to 60.9%.

The gender gap in the percentage of graduates from elementary and high school significantly favors females. In 2011, 81.9% of the female population between 15 and 19 had completed elementary and middle school as opposed to 72.1% of males in the same age group. That same year, 63.7% of females between 20 and 24 had graduated from high school as compared to 47.9% of males.

In conclusion, the gender gap favoring females is also expressed in lower illiteracy rates among females and youth; higher average schooling for the female population; a higher proportion of girls and young women complete primary and secondary levels; they have lower repetition and dropout rates; and there is a trend toward gender parity in basic education coverage and a wide gap in favor of women in middle school education. As we stated earlier, the gender parity index increases with rising educational levels until a clear feminization of education is produced at the highest level.

Regarding vocational education, the study referenced reports that the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Training (INFOTEV), the guiding body of the National Technical-Vocational Training System that offers the largest number of programs in these fields with national coverage, accepted a nearly exclusive male population twenty years ago. In the period 2007-2011, gender parity was achieved. From 1982 to 2011, INFOTEV graduated more than 3.5 million workers of whom 50.2% were women and 49.8% men.

This behavior demonstrates that Dominican women, after more than thirty years of an ongoing process of social mobilization, are achieving more education than men, although they are still influenced by a cultural and sexist division of labor that ascribes the domestic sphere to them, while men are projected into public affairs, the

exercise of power, the job market and business. Although we should recognize that women have made advances in these areas, we still have many challenges ahead.

The results of several investigations conducted in the last twenty years in our country show that the feminization of higher education was already a reality by the mid-1980s. The Institute for Population and Development Studies (IEPD) studied the participation of women in the top five universities in 1984, showing that women were 56.6% of university graduates. The highest percentage was in the Pedro Henríquez Ureña National University (UNPHU) with 66.7%, followed by APEC University with 63.2%; the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD) with 54%, while the Technological Institute of Santo Domingo (INTEC) had the lowest proportion of female graduates at 44.1%.

The study “Dominican Women in Figures 2000-2012” reveals that from the 1990s to the early 2000s, there was slow but steady growth in the proportion of women in higher education. The proportion of women rose from 112 women for every 100 men enrolled in 2000 to 179 women per 100 men in 2009, a growth rate of 60%.

The study also mentioned evidence that the feminization of higher education in the Dominican Republic encompasses the public and private sectors of education. The total femininity index for both sectors, calculated from enrollment in the first period of 2009, is 179. The private sector has an index of 169, while in the public university sector female enrollment is nearly double male enrollment, with a femininity index of 193.

What are women studying? According to a report by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (MESCyT) of the Dominican Republic, in the fifteen majors with the most students in the universities, in the first semester of 2009, women are prevailing in majors that thirty or more years ago were absolutely dominated by men, such as: Medicine, where twice as many women as men are enrolled; Architecture

with 138 women for every 100 men; and Law, also with 138 women for every 100 men.

In Engineering, women have been advancing steadily. According to data from MESCyT, in the first semester of 2009, 90 women were enrolled for every 100 men in Systems Engineering; in Industrial Engineering there were 61 women per 100 men; and in Civil Engineering, there were 43 women per 100 men. Meanwhile, women still dominate in the areas of Social Communication, Basic Education, Psychology, Marketing, Accounting and Business Administration.

Women have clearly made progress, but we reiterate, we still have the challenge of breaking the barriers stemming from the cultural division of labor and on the other hand, freeing ourselves from the weight imposed on us by care-giving tasks, which limit the time we can devote to our professional and personal development.

It is undeniable that education is the most effective way to prevent and combat violence against women. Accordingly, to the extent that we continue to make progress in the educational development of women, we will achieve empowerment and economic independence and to the same extent we can prevent and combat violence against women.

However, there is an important part of the Dominican population, male as well as female, which has not reached the educational levels required to live with dignity and free of violence; therefore the implementation of multiple and diverse educational programs is needed to ensure the prevention, detection, treatment and punishment of violence against women.

To that end, the Ministry of Women of the Dominican Republic, in partnership with the Public Ministry, the National Police, civil society organizations and other ministries and state institutions, is promoting important plans, programs and projects aimed at eradicating violence against women and girls.

For this purpose the Ministry of Women has 52 provincial and municipal offices throughout the country, in order to ensure the coordination and integration of the government's sectorial and gender equity policies with civil society organizations and local governments.

It is also developing training programs for youth and adults, through **lectures, workdays, seminars, conferences** and **workshops** on issues related to the problems that affect women, such as: **Preventing Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women, Self Esteem,** and **Sexual and Reproductive Rights**. Trainees include male and female teachers, students, nurses, health promoters, psychologists, community leaders and military personnel, among others.

We signed an inter-institutional cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Education (MINERD) to raise awareness and sensitize male and female students in the second year of junior high by promoting a change in attitudes, values and behaviors that would ensure a break with socially learned cultural patterns that sustain inequality, gender discrimination and violence against women. The intent is to have the young participants do sixty (60) hours of community service, established in the curriculum, to promote behavior changes for a culture of peace, promoting equality and gender equity, prevention of teen pregnancy, and combating violence against women.

In order to strengthen the mechanisms for preventing violence against women and domestic violence, the Ministry of Women and the Attorney General's Office signed an Inter-institutional Agreement for the implementation of a strategic plan, which includes assessment programs and education for the early detection of cases of violence, and the incorporation of social workers into the process of caring for victims.

The Ministry of Women also signed an inter-institutional agreement with the Ministry of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation in order to encourage and promote the development of women's leadership, providing equal access opportunities for girls, adolescents and women for the practice and conduct of sports as a means of promoting equality and gender equality and preventing violence against women and domestic violence.

For the purpose of advancing the economic empowerment of women through training programs in technical areas and enabling women to access credit programs sponsored by our government, the Ministry of Women is developing multiple technical training programs.

We have trained thousands of young people as healthcare multipliers in the Youth to Youth Program, with an emphasis on prevention of teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV-AIDS, prevention of violence against women and the exercise of human rights.

In this same vein, to prevent violence against women and female homicides, the Ministry is developing a **National Campaign YOU CAN DO IT! "JOIN NOW TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN"** as part of the **National Day of Mobilization for peace and the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence**, which includes:

- ✓ Production and distribution of one million (1,000,000) flyers and informative brochures.
- ✓ Visits to four hundred thousand (400,000) homes and businesses across the country to deliver informative material.
- ✓ Sending two hundred thousand (200,000) text messages to mobile phones and one million (1,000,000) mass e-mailings through social networks about the campaign.
- ✓ Production and placement of TV and radio spots for nationwide broadcast.
- ✓ Placement of downloadable items and print billboards about the campaign.

In order to provide effective and timely care to women and families at risk and prevent the death of domestic violence victims, the Ministry of Women has set up a **24 HOUR HELPLINE**, which has saved hundreds of women from a violent death from July 2011 to date.

In summary, in the Dominican Republic we have effectively consolidated the progress of women in the area of education, promoting their access to decent jobs so that they can progressively and sustainably build a culture of peace, free of violence, toward the achieving more egalitarian spaces for men and women in economic, social and political realms, that we may enjoy a Dominican society that is increasingly more just, humane, inclusive, developed and modern.

The words of Alejandrina Germán on the panel **"Education and other important tools for the empowerment of women and the prevention of violence."**