

# **LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

## **CARICOM**

*Anguilla, Antigua, Barbados, Dominica,  
Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica,  
Montserrat, St. Kitts/Nevis, St. Lucia, St.  
Vincent, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago*

## **Latin America, Spanish-speaking Caribbean**

*Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia,  
Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador,  
Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay,  
Venezuela, Costa Rica, El Salvador,  
Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua*

# THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)

## Advocates Remain Steadfast Despite Stiff Struggle for Survival

The UN Fourth World Conference on Women unified the women of the Caribbean region through a thorough preparatory process and joint actions at the conference itself. But developments since then threaten to undermine women's advocacy for implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

Most significantly, these include the negative impacts of trade liberalization; the U.S. Government's so-called war on terror; the severe national disasters that have swept the countries of the region in recent years; and the classification of the Caribbean as a middle-income region, which has led to the withdrawal of critical funding by donor agencies. For women, the resulting economic downturn has meant a greater struggle for survival and less time for political organizing and mobilization.

A year after the Beijing conference, the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA)—a regional network of fem-

inists, researchers, activists and women's organizations—convened a conference of major stakeholders to develop a regional non-governmental plan of action. The impact of global developments on the women's movement and the implementation of the Beijing Platform were the primary concerns. Conference participants agreed on four core strategies for NGO action: partnership building, institutional strengthening, resource mobilization and awareness building.

As for efforts by governments in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to implement the Beijing Platform, these have been piecemeal and ad hoc at best. There is an urgent need for the region's governments to take a structured approach to implementing national action plans, and to putting women's interests and concerns at center stage. Countries in CARICOM reporting are Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts/Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.

### HUMAN RIGHTS

#### CEDAW Compliance

All countries in the region are parties to CEDAW (see box), but only Belize has ratified CEDAW's Optional Protocol. In some countries, the process of reporting on compliance with CEDAW has resulted in increased advocacy and awareness.

In Guyana, gender equality has been considered among the essential components of constitutional and legal reform. The Government has implemented specific laws to meet CEDAW standards, among them the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (1995), the Domestic Violence Act (1996) and the Prevention of Discrimination Act (1997).

The Government of Grenada conducted a review of laws and policies on domestic violence and the family and introduced the Child Protection Act (1998) and the Domestic Violence Act (2001). Many formerly discriminatory laws have been modified in line with CEDAW recommendations, but no laws have been repealed to date.

The Government of Barbados has reviewed laws and policies in the context of CEDAW, and submitted four reports to the CEDAW Committee. The Bureau of Women's Affairs prepared a National Policy Statement, in collaboration with the National Advisory Council on Women. The Cabinet approved the statement, but implementation has stalled due to the lack of human and financial resources.

In St. Lucia, CEDAW compliance gets sustained government attention only when reports are due, but some women's groups use it for local advocacy.

Trinidad and Tobago submitted its initial, second and third reports to the CEDAW Committee in 2002. Given limited public awareness of the Convention, the Network of NGOs for the Advancement of Women has held awareness-raising activities, starting with a project to reach out to rural women and local governments.

Trinidad and Tobago has enacted or amended a number of laws to comply with CEDAW standards. Among them are the Domestic Violence Act (1999), the Legal Aid and Advice Act (amended in 1999), the Maternity Protection Act (1998), the Co-habitation Relations Act (1998), the Sexual Offences Act (amended in 2000), the Equal Opportunity Act (amended in 2001) and the Minimum Wage Order (2000).

In Dominica, several laws—including the Sexual Offences Act (1998), the Protection of Employment Act (1990) and the Labour Standards Act—have been revised since CEDAW ratification. More women are now aware of their human rights.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines has made obsolete statutes more gender responsive, and developed new labor legislation in compliance with CEDAW. It has also instituted a Family Court, developed a gender equity plan and set up a gender equity commission to monitor CEDAW implementation. However, negative cultural norms pose obstacles to the full implementation of these initiatives.

#### National Laws

In St. Lucia, two significant pieces of legislation enacted since the Beijing process began are the Domestic Violence Act (1994) and

the Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Employment Occupation Act (2000). But several discriminatory laws are still on the books. For example, women who marry foreign men are not permitted to acquire citizenship for their husbands, but men who marry foreign women receive automatic citizenship for their wives. Women are required to obtain permission from their husbands before they can have certain reproductive health procedures, and abortion is still a criminal offense (except in certain extremely limited circumstances with onerous requirements of proof).

Suriname's Constitution prohibits all forms of discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of sex. All laws and regulations apply equally to women and men. Suriname has also ratified a number of International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions that protect working women. There is no general law on maternity leave, but the civil service has a maternity leave regulation, and maternity leave is included in collective labor agreements in private companies.

On the initiative of the Women's Rights Centre, an NGO, and the Ministry of Justice and Police, a special act on domestic violence was formulated. Training on domestic violence was held for magistrates and judges.

In 2001, the Ministry of Home Affairs established a committee on gender regulations to study the Constitution and propose adjustments to discriminatory decrees. The committee has recommended introducing the word "gender." The committee has also proposed gender-sensitive improvements to the rules and regulations governing perma-

## Box 27. Caribbean State Parties to CEDAW

ment appointment for women, maternity leave, domestic violence and stalking, as well as changes in electoral rolls, where married women are listed by their married name.

There is still no legislation that addresses the concerns of girls in Suriname. The committee has appealed for the introduction of laws on the trafficking of girls, with explicit punishments.

While Trinidad and Tobago has made great strides in domestic violence and anti-discrimination laws, the legal framework is still inadequate in protecting women's human rights. The Constitution merely states that discrimination on the basis of sex is forbidden, but has no definition of discrimination and no provision against it, as noted by NGOs in critiques of the Government's CEDAW reports. They maintain that the lack of a clear definition of "discrimination" has prompted individual ministries to set their own standards, which in turn could create legal loopholes to the detriment of individuals seeking redress.

Several inconsistencies in marriage laws need to be reviewed. The age for marriage is different for girls and boys—16 for Muslim boys and 12 for girls; 18 for Hindu boys and 14 for girls. The age of consent for sexual relations is higher than the age for marriage. Section 23 of the Marriage Act, which makes it legal for minors to marry with the consent of both parents, also needs to be reviewed. If the child is not in favor of the marriage, this section leaves room for coercion.

The Government's medium-term policy framework has included a commitment to incorporate a gender perspective in development planning, with a focus on activities to achieve gender equity. The Women's Affairs Division was renamed the Division of Gender Affairs, and now has a clear mandate and authority as the central body for gender policy development and mainstreaming. It has already developed a Draft National Gender Policy and Action Plan.

In general, however, the inertia of successive administrations remains an obstacle to stronger laws and policies. In addition, not enough has been done to educate the populace about existing laws—government thinking seems to be that people will use the laws if the need arises.

Guyana has no independent agency to investigate any discrimination cases. This has stymied progress in implementing the Prevention of Discrimination Act, which has provisions to address racial and gender discrimination, and the Equal Rights Act, which defines sexual harassment as a form

of discrimination on the basis of sex. Complaints must be made to the Chief Labor Officer, who is mandated to conduct an investigation and take appropriate action. To date, no cases have been filed under either law.

In Guyana, anyone marrying under the age of 18 must have the consent of his or her parents. Polygamy is punishable by law; however, many men marry formally and set up other informal marriages. The laws of the country do not recognize common-law unions, although such unions are an integral part of the culture.

Legislation for mandatory maternity leave for all sectors of employment is not at present under serious consideration. Efforts to introduce both maternity and paternity leave policy and legislation have not been successful, largely due to opposition from some members of the private sector.

In Jamaica, the Constitution defines discrimination but omits the word "sex". Several outdated pieces of legislation discriminate on the basis of gender, including the National Insurance Act (1947), which stipulates the national retirement age as 65 for men and 60 for women. The Women's (Employment) Act (1942) prohibits women from working at night except under specified circumstances. The obligation to share costs in the maintenance of children should be reflected in the Maintenance Act, and the definition of rape and incest should be applied to both sexes in the Offences against the Person Act.

Barbados has passed laws since the Fourth World Conference on Women to protect children from exploitation for pornographic images, and to protect women and children from domestic violence. The Sexual Offences Act (1992) updates the legislation dealing with rape, incest and other sexual offences committed against women and children. The Women's Forum, a national women's organization, leads a coalition to lobby for legislation to deal with sexual harassment on the streets and at the workplace.

The Bureau of Women's Affairs at one point undertook a public education program to disseminate information on laws relating to women's rights in Barbados. But the reality for women is that existing laws are often not adequately enforced by the police and judiciary, especially those covering domestic violence. In addition, not all complainants are aware of the legal provisions to protect them.

After the Beijing conference, the Bureau of Women's Affairs was re-designated the Bureau of Gender Affairs.

The Bureau is charged with facilitating gender mainstreaming in national development policies and programs. It also participates in public education, legislative reform and human resource development programs. One of its major shortcomings is the lack of staff to carry out its mandate. A recent development has been a movement away from women's issues and a greater emphasis on men. Men are agitating for a change in the

COUNTRY	SIGNATURE	RATIFICATION/ACCESSION
Antigua and Barbuda		August 1989
Bahamas		October 1993 (with reservations)
Barbados	July 1980	October 1980
Belize	March 1980	May 1990
Dominica	September 1980	September 1980
Grenada	July 1980	August 1990
Guyana	July 1980	July 1980
Jamaica	July 1980	October 1984 (with reservations)
St. Kitts/Nevis		April 1985
St. Lucia		October 1982
St. Vincent and the Grenadines		August 1981
Suriname		March 1993
Trinidad and Tobago	June 1985	January 1990 (with reservations)

Source: UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 01/10/05, [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw)

Bureau's staff and programs, and have suggested adding more men to the staff and establishing a Men's Desk.

In 2001, Barbados established the National Advisory Council on Gender to track gender issues and make recommendations to the minister responsible for gender affairs.

Across CARICOM, no specific legislation for girls has been introduced, although most governments have reviewed legislation on children.

### Public Awareness

In order to educate women on their rights, the Guyana Women Lawyers Association, in collaboration with other women's NGOs, has published three popular booklets in a series entitled *The Law and You*. Written in simple language, the booklets have been widely disseminated by NGOs and promoted through the media. CAFRA Guyana and the Women's Affairs Bureau collaborated on a public forum

32 square miles for Nevis—it is very difficult for a shelter to guarantee anonymity. Advocates have proposed relocating survivors to neighboring islands, given that free movement between the islands is commonplace.

A growing number of women in Guyana use the protections offered under the Domestic Violence Act, which was drafted by women's NGOs. Women's groups have taken the lead in building awareness about the Act at crisis centers, in workshops and via radio and television. However, there is an urgent need for more legal aid facilities to assist women and children in rural and interior areas.

In Grenada, guidelines on the Law on Domestic Violence aim to make the process of going to court easier. They include a mandatory reporting procedure to facilitate speedy resolution. The Grenada National Organization of Women contributed to this legislation, which has been followed by a series of public awareness programmes. The organiza-

against Domestic Violence was set up in 2002 to raise public awareness about the effects of domestic violence on individuals and groups.

In St. Lucia, implementation of legislation to prevent and punish domestic violence is poor. The legal system does little for many women and girls who have been raped. Most recently, it failed to remove a 13-year-old girl from her harmful environment even though she reported being raped on three occasions. The day she was to attend a court hearing, she was found brutally murdered. There has been no conviction. Women are granted restraining orders, but they are still not protected from the perpetrators, largely due to the insensitivity of the police.

There is a shelter in place, but it can only accommodate five families at a time, for not more than five days. There is no social relief for victims and no legal aid, even though the cost of justice is high. Physical health services are available, but mental health services are extremely limited.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the Domestic Violence Act has had a positive effect; no longer can the police ignore domestic violence as "family business", but they must intervene and file charges against the perpetrators. A Domestic Violence Unit has been established within the Gender Affairs Division, but it is not able to prevent women from dropping charges after being coerced by their partners or families.

The Domestic Violence Act gives power to the magistrate's courts to grant protection orders, and is commendable for its flexible approach and provisions to cover non-state bodies. However, local NGOs have discovered difficulties in enforcement. Many police officers remain unwilling to interfere in domestic matters, and are often perpetrators of violence themselves. A summons might not be served due to inadequate financial resources. Abused women may fear losing their job if they take time off to appear in court, or are embarrassed about the openness of a court action.

In the courts, the practice of blaming the victim and making excuses for the accused is not accepted as it once was. One judge openly declared he wanted to send a strong message to men that "when women say no they mean no."<sup>22</sup> Because of social prejudice, however, prostitutes and lesbians who suffer violent attacks are likely to suffer further abuse from the justice system.

It is difficult to obtain data on the number of women who have brought domestic violence cases before the courts, benefited from protection orders or been killed through do-

The most significant culture-based aspect of domestic violence is the tacit acceptance of it as a husband's right.

on violence against women and girls, and Guyana participated in a 17-country project to train police officers and social workers on the issue.<sup>1</sup> The Guyana Police Force has now introduced ongoing training.

In Suriname, several NGOs advocate for women's human rights. Most activities are financed by donor agencies, but have marginal results because of their small scale and ad hoc nature. In some cases, there is unfruitful competition between NGOs working on the same issue.

In Trinidad and Tobago, two NGOs promote and defend human rights through education, advocacy and action: Do Justice Seek Justice, and the Coalition for Justice and Human Rights. Other organizations also work on rights issues but less consistently.

### Violence Against Women

The greatest problem affecting women in St. Kitts and Nevis is the growing number of women who are killed because of domestic and relationship-related violence, according to a critique of government reports to the CEDAW Committee by the National Council of Women of St. Kitts. Government safe homes have limits on the period of use, and although the Government offers free legal advice, women often do not know about this service. Additionally, because of the country's small size—68 square miles for St. Kitts and

tion and the Grenada Legal Aid Clinic have held community workshops on domestic violence, and conducted extensive training of police and social workers in collaboration with CAFRA.

Presentations take place in schools on violence, rape, incest and sexual abuse. Additionally, the Ministry of Social Development has set up a public help line in its Domestic Violence Unit, along with a child protection help line. A shelter provides relief, access to legal aid, counseling and other services. However, its capacity is insufficient to meet current and future demands.

In Barbados, the Business and Professional Women's Club manages a government-funded shelter that includes counseling services and a 24-hour telephone hotline, and has developed guidelines for using existing domestic violence legislation. In 1998, the police established a victim support group to offer emotional and practical support to nationals, nonnationals, and their families and friends who have suffered traumatic experiences as a result of various crimes and domestic violence. All new police recruits are trained on domestic violence intervention.

Women's organizations continue to press for creating a special police unit to deal with violence against women and for a Family Court with in-camera hearings to support traumatized survivors. The National Forum



mestic violence. The Central Statistical Office does not classify data by gender. But a national task force consisting of representatives of the Government, NGOs, the University of the West Indies and the Central Statistical Office has come together to begin developing a database.

There are some 20 shelters and more than 25 drop-in centers, most run by NGOs, with some supported by the Government. Shelters and their referral agencies have direct links with the police. The Government has set up a hotline with trained listeners, and established community drop-in centers with mandatory counseling for victims and perpetrators. Legal aid is also now available.

Women's groups across the CARICOM region report high incidences of violence. The acceptance of this among young people is an especially serious issue. There are now youth advocates working in groups such as the YMCA, Advocates for Youth Sexual Health and Rights, and the Trinidad Youth Council who address violence, HIV/AIDS, family life education, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Cognizant of the fact that any attempt to eliminate violence against women must take the views of young people into account, the Barbados Bureau of Gender Affairs in collaboration with the National Organization of Women implemented a program on gender-based violence and conflict resolution in two secondary schools. The program aims to raise student awareness of the implications of gender, encourage acceptance of gender equality as a national goal, and reduce violence in the school population.

Female genital mutilation, dowry deaths and honor killings are not prevalent in the CARICOM region. Abuse of virgins as an alleged antidote to AIDS is not common. The most significant culture-based aspect of domestic violence is the tacit acceptance of it as a husband's right.

## PEACE AND SECURITY

### Security Council Resolution 1325

In most CARICOM countries, there is little knowledge of the provisions of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, simply because its application in this region is not yet apparent.

Caribbean women do feel they are at war, but more with overarching systems than in the conventional sense. An oppressive economic system means the poor get poorer while the rich getting richer. An inadequate security system cannot control the ever-escalating violence against women, gang warfare and drugs, and kidnappings and trafficking.

The illicit use of small arms is connected to the drug trade in the region. The violence that results touches people in their homes and communities. A CARICOM task force on crime found illegal drugs to be the principal threat to security and illegal firearms the primary instrument of violence.

Other major threats to security come from hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and flooding. CAFRA has worked with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Relief Association to produce a disaster preparedness manual for communities, with particular attention paid to women's central role in disaster management.

In Suriname, the Organisatie voor Gerechtigheid en Vrede works on peace and security issues in communities in the interior, where people are fighting the military and police to protect their lands against takeover by multinational corporations.

The S-Corner Clinic in Jamaica is conducting training among youth in an attempt to curb violence there. Residents now say that it is once more safe to go for a walk in the evening since the level of gun violence has dropped. Peer educators speak about the dangers from guns, violence and drugs. Some sessions are held at sporting events.

Women Across Differences in Guyana is doing similar work in Buxton, a highly volatile area with frequent clashes between youth and police. In Trinidad and Tobago, CAFRA works with youth in Laventille, where there are frequent gang shootings, murders and rapes. Both Buxton and Laventille are riven by racial prejudices and strife between people of African and Indian descent. These rivalries have translated themselves to the national level, where electoral seats and districts are won according to race.

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### Asylum Seekers, Refugees, Internally Displaced

Suriname has no specific services for migrant, immigrant and minority/indigenous women who have been subjected to violence. There are no provisions for refugee and internally displaced persons. Unemployment is very high in these groups, and access to food, health care, shelter, education and employment is poor.

In St. Lucia, there are no provisions to protect refugee and internally displaced women's and girls' human rights. There have been press reports that more than 200 women from the Dominican Republic are working as sex slaves in brothels and strip clubs. One

escaped and told *The Voice* newspaper that on arrival in St. Lucia, she was met by apparently influential persons who escorted her through immigration and customs and then kept her passport.

The U.S. Government issued a 2004 report on human trafficking to the Government in Guyana, giving it a three-month deadline to take certain steps to combat the trafficking in



persons or face possible trade and aid sanctions. Guyanese women have been trafficked to the U.S. or tend to be illegally living there. Guyana's Ministry of Labor and Human Services has now launched a country-wide anti-human trafficking campaign. It has included visits by the Minister to mining towns and remote regions, given that Amerindian women from these areas are deemed most vulnerable. In 2004, the Government tabled a new piece of legislation with tough penalties for offenders, including long prison sentences, forfeiture of property, and payment of full restitution to the trafficked persons.

In Barbados, the Sexual Offences Act aims to curb trafficking in women and girls, but there are no data on the problem. The Bureau of Gender Affairs and several other groups are now conducting research.

### The International Criminal Court

Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago have ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, but there is little public awareness on its operations and provisions.

## POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

### Representation and Impact

There are too few women engaged in politics and positions of decision making across the countries of the region, although women's political participation has improved markedly in some countries.

There is currently one female minister in St. Kitts and one in Nevis. Under discussion is a gender parity policy to ensure that

women occupy at least 30 percent of political positions.

In Guyana, the number of women in Parliament increased from 12 (18.5%) in 2000 to 20 (31%) after the 2001 general elections. There are now four female ministers of government, compared to two in 1997. The deputy speaker of the house is female. A woman also holds the highest position in the judiciary, the chancellor. Of three justices of appeal, one is a woman. At other levels, including among permanent secretaries and deputies, women are underrepresented, as stated in the government report to the CEDAW Committee. Among public officers, however, women hold more positions than men. Within the teaching profession for example, women accounted for 71.7 percent of head teachers in 2002.

Women are active in many political parties in Guyana, and the National Democratic Institute has trained a number to run for election. In 2003, the Institute collaborated with the Guyana Association of Women Lawyers and UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and held a regional conference on increasing women's political participation. Participants from women's NGOs attended, along with government ministers, local government leaders, political activists, gender specialists and media practitioners. The conference highlighted ways to increase public awareness of the issues that constrain women's political participation, and to develop networks of women politicians nationally and regionally.

In Trinidad and Tobago, there has been a 27 percent increase in the number of women in the House of Representatives and the Senate over the past decade. There are similar increases in the numbers of female magistrates and judges, and in public administration. Political parties have nominated women to the Senate (non-elective), with women occupying 30 percent of the seats. Approximately 46 percent of permanent secretaries are women.

The high figures are largely attributed to the advocacy of women's organizations on the island and regionally. The Network of NGOs for the Advancement of Women, for example, produced a training manual to assist women candidates in their political campaigns.<sup>3</sup> The manual focuses on the practical: how to dress, how to deliver a speech, how to make eye contact with an audience, where to campaign, how to plan ahead, what to do about childcare, how to ensure spousal sup-

port. It has been widely disseminated nationally and regionally.

Women are now working across party lines to form caucuses and discuss the challenges of their work as people's representatives. Political parties have sought to respond to the pressure of increased public support for a higher level of women's representation by supporting women in both elected and non-elected public positions. However, it is the Network of NGOs for the Advancement of Women that conducts awareness-raising on women's participation in political parties.

The Government has not instituted any



March against violence draws women and men.

measures to advance women's representation, although it has supported the efforts of NGOs to train women running in local government elections.

There have been no institutional changes within the national Parliament to acknowledge women's reproductive responsibilities and needs, making it difficult for women to fit into traditional working patterns. Women are still not granted maternity leave, and the meeting times, which often go late into the night, have not been changed to enable women with children to attend. These barriers to women's participation could easily be removed if there were a strong commitment to gender equality in decision-making.

In Suriname, to date, women politicians have not lobbied for women's issues. Despite training in caucusing, they are often forced to carry out a party strategy.

In Grenada, significant legislative and other successes have resulted from the advocacy of women decision makers. Examples include improvements in reporting and support systems related to the Domestic Violence Law; establishment of the Women's Shelter and Resource Centre; and support to NGOs working with women.

Other steps forward include the provisions of personal development and skills train-

ing for domestic workers; microeconomic support for women; and public awareness-building on gender issues. However, inadequate funding, insufficient personnel in the Gender Affairs Division, and the perception of the Division's ineffectiveness hamper these efforts.

In Barbados, women's rights to equal participation and to freedom of assembly and association are guaranteed under the Constitution, but this has yet to translate into political parity. In the 2003 elections, four women were elected as members of Parliament, out of 28 seats. There are presently five female ministers out of 17. Of the 21 Senate members, six are women who were appointed to serve in 1999—up from four following the 1994 elections.

One woman serves on the High Court and four out of 10 magistrates are women. None serves as a judge of appeal. The Attorney General, Solicitor General, Chief Parliamentary Counsel, Principal Crown Counsel and their respective deputies are all women. (A woman became Attorney General for the first time in 2001.) Women also serve as the registrars of the Supreme Court and of corporate affairs.

Within the public service, only seven of the 25 permanent secretaries (28%) and eight deputy permanent secretaries (33%) are women. Thirty women (33%) are presently serving as directors or heads of department. In the foreign service, three of the 11 positions at the ambassador/consular level are filled by women. Overall, women account for 63 percent of senior managers, 55 percent of middle managers and 73 percent of junior staff.

More women are entering the Barbados Defence Force. Out of a current total of 1,296 members, 12 percent are women, but 75 percent of all new applications come from women, possibly because women make up the majority of the unemployed. With a fall off in applications from men, there is now a need to consider modifying the structure of the force to accommodate a large increase in women.

Both active political parties in Barbados, the Barbados Labor Party and the Democratic Labor Party, both embrace the participation of women and have established women's caucuses.

Several agencies and NGOs conduct training for women interested in entering politics, including the Bureau of Women's Affairs,

CAFRA and the Caribbean Policy Development Centre. Lack of financial resources for female candidates is an obstacle, however. During the 2003 elections, the National Organization of Women presented a token financial contribution to assist women candidates and used the occasion to draw attention to this issue.

In St. Lucia, there are many female attorneys and two women judges out of a total of five. Women hold positions in most areas of the public service, and serve as permanent secretaries. However, they make up only 20 percent of the National Assembly and 15 percent of the Cabinet. Men still hold most top positions.

Women are well represented in local government, but over the years most local government responsibilities have shifted to central government. Notable impacts due to women in decision-making include the Family Law and the establishment of the Women's Support Centre.

Most political parties have a women's arm, but they are virtually inactive except for electoral campaigning when the party requires women's support to win. Parties offer little encouragement to women to become actively involved in mainstream politics or to lobby for women's issues. Women make up only 21 percent of decision makers in political parties, and gender equality issues are still regarded as typically female concerns. They are usually only discussed by women politicians.

## POVERTY ERADICATION

### Access to Public Services and Resources

In Barbados, the National Assistance Board provides services to the elderly that include housing, repairs, assistance with furniture and appliances, home help, activity centers, and residential and day care. The National Disabilities Unit helps formulate policies, programs and activities to assist all persons with disabilities.

The Poverty Eradication Fund reaches out to the most vulnerable groups in times of acute need, particularly when traditional sources of help have been exhausted. The fund speeds up social services delivery, and provides skills training and practical education-for-living programs.

The Poverty Alleviation Bureau, established in 1998, provides economic and financial opportunities as well as educational and vocational training. Relief 2000, funded by private and public resources, focuses on families in extreme poverty, offering employment training, financial assistance and

adequate housing. The Welfare to Work Program provides training and counseling to women on welfare.

The Barbados National Insurance Scheme covers all working people between 16 and 65 years of age, including the self-employed. Women can also access short-term reimbursements, including sickness benefits, as well as for employment injury and funerals. Long-term benefits include those for invalids and survivors, along with pensions. Women have the same rights as men regarding housing allowances and insurance benefits offered by employers.

Free legal services are available under the Community Legal Services Act of 1981 for serious criminal offences as well as all family law matters except divorce. The provision of nurseries and day care facilities, including 15 run by the Government, has greatly enhanced employment opportunities outside the home for women.

In Jamaica, the Government has introduced several services and programs that benefit the most vulnerable members of society. Accessibility is based on need. The Jamaica Welfare Department provides family counseling on childcare and behavioral problems, access and custody issues, relationship and marital problems, and domestic violence. National Assistance is given in cash and/or in kind, and can include the payment of house or land rent and water and electric bills; provision of food or clothing; burial; legal aid; and disaster preparation, relief and rehabilitation.<sup>4</sup>

Jamaica's Employment of Women (Maternity Leave) Act guarantees any women employed in the same workplace for at least 12 months a maternity leave of 12 weeks. This can be claimed three times from the same employer. When a woman resumes work, she maintains her seniority, returns to the former work or its equivalent, and does not suffer a drop in wages.

An area of great concern to Jamaican women, especially single mothers, is maintenance for children, especially for those born out of wedlock. The law covering maintenance dates back to 1887 and provides a meagre J\$15 (J\$1=US\$0.016) per week for children born out of wedlock. The Miscellaneous Provisions Act of 1992 allows magistrates more discretion with respect to maintenance for both children and spouses, and fathers are now more likely to be asked to pay according to their earnings. But the old law is still on the books and needs to be updated. Many women support deductions being made directly from the father's income.

In Trinidad and Tobago, maternity leave

benefits are in place under the Maternity Benefits Act, but extend only to a women's first pregnancy. Paternity leave benefits do not exist. Household assistants can now access maternity leave, although they are not considered "workers" under many existing labor laws.

### Employment Patterns, Women's Work

Women in the Caribbean have been hard hit by structural adjustment measures, because they constitute the majority of the poor and have faced various forms of discrimination in society. Nonetheless, they have struggled for political and economic changes, and there have been some improvements.

Regionally, women's organizations have promoted gender budgeting. The concept has only been introduced recently, and by and large governments have yet to commit to it. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Finance and the Division of Gender Affairs have been giving the approach concerted consideration. Both have expressed interest in taking it on board. In addition, the Central Statistics Office is developing measures to value women's unpaid work, which remains invisible in national income accounts.

In Guyana, 88 percent of men participate in the labor force, compared to 55 percent of women.<sup>5</sup> Women experience more abject poverty than men, especially those in female-headed households. This may reflect the fact that many women work in the informal economy as street and market vendors, or provide unpaid labor in agriculture and family businesses.

In St. Lucia, women's income has decreased significantly as a result of losses in the agriculture sector. More women are selling produce on city sidewalks and working in hotels and other industries, which takes them away from their communities and increases costs related to transportation, meals and child care. For displaced farmers working as maids and waitresses in hotels, a split shift means working from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m., and then returning to work from 3 p.m. to 11 p.m.

The poultry and meat industry is suffering considerably from globalization, and as a result women consume more cheap powdered dairy products, which has a negative impact on their health and that of their families. There is also increased consumption of imported chicken and meats of inferior quality.

When the agricultural industry was doing well, many parents could send their children to school. But many girls are now unable to continue their education since their parents cannot afford it. Girls are more often kept



## Box 28. Suriname's Case of Corporate Non-accountability BY MONIQUE ESSED-FERNANDES

Alcoa and BHP Billiton are two of the largest bauxite mining companies in the world. They have been operating in Suriname for almost a hundred years. A 2002 World Bank study gave both companies favorable ratings on their corporate social responsibility policies. But just how “favorable” are these policies from the perspective of women in Suriname?

During the 1990s, Suriname's bauxite industry accounted for about 56 percent of foreign direct investment, followed by gold (19 percent) and petroleum (13 percent).<sup>1</sup> Bauxite and alumina exports have consistently covered 70-90 percent of export income. Alumina exports alone remain Suriname's most important single generator of foreign exchange.

But at the same time, an estimated 60-70 percent of the population lives in poverty.<sup>2</sup> Among the poor, women carry a disproportionate burden. Unemployment is twice as high among women as men, and only 1 percent of government land allocations have gone to women.<sup>3</sup> Rural, indigenous and maroon women are particularly affected by forest degradation and mining activities, leaving them with additional burdens related to their families and making a living.

Alcoa has been the main beneficiary of the hydro energy generated by a dam built in 1960 that flooded 44 indigenous and maroon villages. Villages surrounding the dam had to wait for 30 years before they had access to electricity. Both companies have held government-issued concessions giving them full power and authority over the land within those concessions.

During the past decade, however, villagers

have started to protest the adverse effects the mining activities are having on their lives. One group, Comite Red West Suriname (Committee Save West Suriname), was founded by a woman who is an environmental activist. In 2003, it vehemently protested against plans to build another dam. On other fronts, women's organizations such as Projekta and the Women's Parliament Forum have worked since 1994 to ensure women and local governments participate fully in political decision-making.

In 2004, a community meeting was held for the first time by BHP Billiton on a proposed mines project. The meeting was well attended by local government representatives, including a woman who had received advocacy training from women's organizations. She was vocal in questioning why a bridge to be built over the nearby river would not be available for community use. The company has agreed to send its Environmental and Social Impact Assessment to all stakeholders present at that meeting.

For women's groups, this is only the beginning. They will need to hone their political skills and endurance to ensure they can question development processes that for them are neither sustainable nor beneficial. They will continue holding multinational companies accountable for policy slogans such as, “We take our corporate values wherever we go.”

### Notes

1. WTO, *Trade Policy Review Suriname*, 2004
2. UNDP
3. UNIFEM, *Situation Analysis of Women*, 2000

at home to assist with other children and do household tasks, especially as mothers increasingly seek alternative employment.

In Suriname, women's work is still influenced by traditional ideas about labor division, with the majority of women finding work in administrative occupations. Their participation in technical training and other non-traditional areas remains low. Few training opportunities exist in the interior of the country.

In recent years, women entrepreneurs have been returning to the informal sector in or-

der to cope with the negative consequences of globalization (including imports from Japan, China and India), the economic crisis and stricter taxation. No measures exist to ensure that national policies related to international and regional trade agreements do not have an adverse impact on women. Most businesses run by women are microenterprises targeting small, local markets. Most carry out traditional activities and invest relatively little in technological innovations such as computers.

The majority of rural women are self-em-

ployed or unpaid family workers. Women's work in the unpaid sector is not visible in the national income accounts. Even the contributions of women to community food security are not counted.

Women face more barriers in accessing credit than men because they often do not have the required security. While women's organizations conduct special training for women, or support small micro-credit facilities, women still choose training courses in traditional occupations where the market is already saturated.

In Jamaica, the sex trade is a realistic solution to unemployment for some women. Research conducted by CAFRA found that a woman can earn more as a sex worker than as a domestic worker or waitress. Many sex workers questioned stated that they loved the job for the money and hated it for the sex.

An alarming finding was the growing numbers of young girls in tourist areas dropping out of school and entering the trade, some with the consent of their parents, who benefit from their earnings. Many are underage and migrate from rural areas to make money as “go-go dancers.” Young girls are recruited on a Thursday at a bus depot for work in the clubs at the weekend.

In the CARICOM region, no explicit laws, policies or programs have been put into place to address sex tourism, which is becoming more pervasive through the Internet.

### EDUCATION

Under the law in Barbados, there is no gender discrimination in education. All public education is free and compulsory from five to 16 years.

Teenage pregnancy is the major cause for girls dropping out of school, although students who become pregnant are allowed to return to school after consultations between the principal and the parents. However, while students are not supposed to be debarred from an education as a consequence of pregnancy, school principals have been known to deny girls re-entry. Teenage fathers usually remain anonymous.

In Suriname, owing to the lack of possibilities for continued education in most rural areas, girls are sometimes prevented from completing higher education, especially when a choice has to be made between sending a boy or a girl to Paramaribo, the capital.

In Guyana, education is free from nursery through secondary levels, and compulsory for children aged six to 14 years. Constitutional revisions have been proposed to desig-



nate free compulsory primary and secondary education as a fundamental right, but this provision has yet to be passed.

The Government reviewed its policy on education in 2000, and considered adopting a gender-sensitive approach to the school curricula. This has yet to take place. Fees have been introduced at tertiary institutions, including the University of Guyana, which may constrain women's access.

The Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security established the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute in 1998. From 1998 to 2004, it trained 1,355 women on subjects including leadership skills, gender and development, organizational management, history, social studies and entrepreneurial skills. Program beneficiaries come from a cross-section of NGOs, youth groups, and political and religious organizations.<sup>6</sup>

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has committed to the goal of education for all, which on the surface contains an appreciation for gender. But gender is not a common thread throughout actual policies. There are no specific interventions targeting gender imbalances, and no mechanism in place to ensure that new policies address gender issues.

The Ministry of Education has a stated policy of non-discrimination in student admissions, but there are inequalities in some areas of the curriculum, especially those that are technical or vocational. No particular effort has been made to encourage the participation of women and girls. Most education research and data collection seems focused on men and boys. One concern is finding reasons for boys' underachievement in schools.

Efforts to improve the quality of education include curriculum review and ongoing professional development for teachers. The overriding philosophy seems to be that everyone will benefit if quality is improved, so there is no need to target specific groups. An exception is those with special needs, such as students who have scored less than 30 percent on the Secondary Entrance Assessment. To assist these students, the secondary school curricula now includes the visual and performing arts, an attempt to cater to all types of abilities. There has been no effort to review curricula language for sexist and discriminatory content.

Primary education is compulsory between the ages of five to 12. All government and government-assisted primary and secondary education is free. Fees are charged at private institutions. At the University of the West Indies and other tertiary government institu-

tions, students pay approximately 20 percent of the real costs. There are also assistance programs that pay up to half the student's costs and the full amount in the case of the very needy.

## NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY

### Decision-Making

In Trinidad and Tobago, women now occupy positions at all levels in the environmental sector—minister, permanent secretary, technical officer and administrator—but men still fill most appointments at the senior technical levels. There are no specialist technical units or policies that make explicit linkages between gender equity and natural resource management.

A study in two communities in the Nariva Swamp region of St. Augustine found that men and women share environmental decision-making, but men often make the final decisions. Gender also influences the use of natural resources. Men control the deeper forests and manage high-value activities such as watermelon production and fishing, while women are relegated to low-income work such as short-crop cultivation.

In the region, community-based organizations most often represent women's interests. Some are formal groups, like producers' cooperatives; others are informal. Government ministries and gender affairs departments as well as international development agencies have supported these initiatives.

Participatory planning for protected areas is developing in the region, and there is increasing demand for policies, institutions and mechanisms to assist this process. This movement has alluded to the need for women's participation, yet the prevailing climate remains antithetical to sharing power and embracing decentralization.

### Gender Impacts

Limited access to potable water affects women because they expend much of the extra effort to fetch and carry clean supplies, often over long distances. Both in the coastal area and in the interior of Suriname, women and girls are generally responsible for hard and time-consuming collection activities—carrying buckets to and from the water source, or setting out containers at home to collect water. The pollution of drinking water, most commonly by insecticides and mercury, harms women's health and increases their burden when they are forced to travel ever longer distances to find safe water.

In many parts of the region, the privatization of water has only recently been introduced. The implications of these initiatives are not clear.

In St. Lucia, women still working in agriculture cultivate bananas, and some of the pesticides used are harmful to their health and the environment.

Property rights across the region remain skewed towards men, and as land values have increased sharply, favoring those with the



ability to pay, access has become even harder for women. Lack of regulated development has also resulted in gains for who already have access to resources and power.

Bio-prospecting has increased and could adversely affect women, but there have been few policy steps taken in response.

Progress on meeting the international commitments and obligations made in the Biodiversity Convention, the Convention to Combat Desertification, the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on Climate Change has varied in the region. Even where there has been progress, there is little evidence to suggest that gender equity has been a feature of planning or implementation.

## HEALTH

### Access and Affordability/ Reproductive Health

Guyana has advanced women's access to reproductive health care through the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (1995). It allows a pregnancy to be terminated up to eight weeks. Women received quality and adequate primary health care at health clinics, most of which are government run. Private and NGO clinics also play a pivotal role.

Contraceptives are free in all clinics. The Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association, the Family Planning Association of Guyana, and Lifeline Counselling educate women and girls on their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Lifeline Counsel-

## Some laws do not recognize the right of Barbadian women to have full control over their own bodies.

ling provides training for young women as peer educators.

The Government of St. Kitts and Nevis has in place excellent prenatal and antenatal systems at accessible clinics located on both islands. They are open to all women who cannot afford a private clinic. Pap smears and mammograms are offered, along with some medications and vitamins.

In Barbados, much emphasis is placed on access to health care for all. The Government allocates 14 percent of total expenditures to health, and provides a range of free family health services for all citizens and residents of Barbados. Health education clinics help increase awareness of disease risk factors, as well as disease prevention and control. A Cancer Control Project was set up in 2000, aimed at influencing women in the 45 and over age group to have pap smears. The Ministry of Health says it is now developing a Gender Management System for the health sector that would disaggregate all epidemiological data by gender.

Services are targeted to women and adolescent girls through the Maternal and Child Health Program. It offers medical examinations, pap smears and pre- and postnatal care. Family planning services are integrated into the program with the assistance of the Barbados Family Planning Association. The Association also runs a family life and peer counseling course, which originally targeted youth but is now open to adults as well.

The Ministry of Health's adolescent health program for the 12 to 19 age group provides support for socioeconomic, psychological, nutritional, health and inter-personal problems. Cultural resistance remains a barrier to supporting active adolescent sexuality, however. While adolescent girls benefit from education and information on reproductive health, they cannot access services without parental consent.

The legal age of consent for sexual intercourse is 16 years, and the state has the power to take action against offenders who have unlawful sex with underage persons. But this power is often compromised by the lack of parental cooperation.

The Barbados Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (1983-4) allows the lawful termination of pregnancies up to 12 weeks if a medical practitioner finds there is a risk to the life or health of the pregnant woman,

or that the child would be seriously handicapped. For pregnancies with durations of 12 to 20 weeks, two practitioners must make this claim. The termination of pregnancies over 20 weeks requires three practitioners. A parent or guardian must give written consent for the termination of pregnancy for a patient under 16 years old or of unsound mind at any age. Pregnancy termination is free of cost once it is accessed through the public health system and the required conditions are satisfied.

Women in Trinidad and Tobago have access to primary health care but the quality leaves much to be desired unless they can afford private services. The public health care system is neither gender nor culturally sensitive—it is a rare sight for minority Muslim woman to attend any of the public health centers, for example. Since public services do not meet the special needs of girls and adolescents, some NGOs aid pregnant teens and assist with caring for their babies.

Family life education is taught in schools, but does not include sexual and reproductive health and rights. Public health centres provide a weekly service covering contraceptive information and sometimes distribution. The Family Planning Association distributes written information to its clientele but charges for contraceptives.

All methods of contraception are available, but information on emergency contraceptives is not widespread. NGO advocates for safe parenthood have conducted a radio series on emergency contraception and disseminated postcards through doctors' offices.

Major hospitals provide only limited pre- and postnatal services, including obstetric care. Abortion is against the law in Trinidad and Tobago, except when the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother. Women and girls do not have full access to information on safe, legal abortions. Many end up in public hospitals suffering from the complications of unsafe abortions. The Government spends approximately \$1 million a month to treat women and girls with these complications. Post-abortion counselling is not available.

The collection of data on maternal mortality, morbidity and abortions is not done systematically. An accurate national assessment of cancer prevalence cannot be made since a national cancer screening program has not yet been established.

### HIV/AIDS

In Guyana, the Government has established programs to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, including a new three-year National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS focusing on care and support, information, education and communication, monitoring and evaluation.

A national HIV/AIDS awareness-building campaign, "From Me to You: Save One, Reach One," was launched in 2003. Public hospitals and health clinics administer free antiretroviral drugs. In 2000-2001, the Government briefly promoted awareness-building programs in the workplace, which encouraged employers to implement policies and training for staff. Condoms were distributed, and TV and radio ads developed.

In Grenada, HIV/AIDS-related health services and information are available to every citizen, including pregnant women, girls, sex workers and transgender individuals. But these services are limited in scope and accessibility due to inadequate funding. What services do exist are not fully accessed for reasons including religious beliefs, the negative attitudes of health staff, fear of confidentiality breaches, the lack of an adolescent health care program and limited public knowledge of the services.

In Barbados, an estimated 2.5 percent of the adult population is infected with HIV. There are 1,252 reported adult AIDS cases; 331 are women. The number of women with AIDS has been increasing. Women also make up a growing percentage of the total number of HIV-positive people. The Bureau of Gender Affairs has implemented a program of workshops to provide information on gender relations and the gender dynamics of HIV/AIDS.

In 2003, the National HIV/AIDS Commission launched Speak-Sister, a national campaign designed to empower women in their responses to HIV/AIDS. It provides information on reproductive rights, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and gender. A media component comprises public service announcements and cartoons, and workshops reach out to women living with HIV/AIDS as well as to health care and other service providers. The National Organization for Women helped design the campaign.

The Commission has also launched a campaign to encourage partners in sexual relationships to assume responsibility for their own reproductive health. It has undertaken sensitivity training for teachers and principals in some schools.

People living with HIV/AIDS are still subject to stigma and discrimination. There

are as yet no laws to protect them, although trade unions and the Barbados Employers Confederation have been collaborating with the Government to establish workplace policies to protect employees.

Problems remain with laws that do not recognize the right of Barbadian women to have full control over their own bodies. For example, husbands cannot be charged with marital rape unless there has been a breakdown in the marital relationship. This has implications for the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

In Trinidad and Tobago, HIV/AIDS health services and information are available to all women, including pregnant women and girls. Sex workers and transgendered individuals are not specifically targeted due to legal and social pressures—prostitution and living off the earnings of prostitution are illegal; transgendered persons are not recognized and accepted.

UNAIDS has recommended that prostitution be recognized as legal work in Trinidad and Tobago as a way of protecting sex workers. Sex tourism itself needs far greater recognition by the Government—the experiences of Tobago and other countries pur-

suing a “hospitality” agenda all point to the urgent need for prostitution to be factored into tourism development plans.

Gender inequality remains a critical factor in the increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS in the region. Where women are dependent on men economically and socially, they face a disadvantage in sexual relationships. Further, women have the responsibility of caring for family members who are sick and dying from AIDS.

Some agencies and NGOs are now more actively engaging in raising awareness of the gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS, including the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre, Community Action Resource; Friends for Life; and the Health Economics Unit of the University of the West Indies. The obstacles to full and comprehensive access include the scarcity of testing sites, the costs of medication, and widespread stigma and discrimination.

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#### Sources

Data was based on consultation with local women's organizations, and interviews with national women's bureaux, departments of gender affairs, and councils of women, as well as relevant ministries of government. Source materials included National Action Plans and CEDAW reports.

#### Notes

1. Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands (Tortola), Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts/Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Turks and Caicos, and Trinidad and Tobago.
2. *Trinidad Express*, 10 January, 2001
3. *Engendering Local Government Women's Campaign Workbook: Guidelines for Winning in Politics.*
4. Welfare Department documents.
5. 1998 Guyana Labor Force Survey.
6. Guyana Women's Leadership Institute.

## LATIN AMERICA AND THE SPANISH-SPEAKING CARIBBEAN

### Commitments to Women's Rights Surge Forward, but Implementation Lags Behind

The years since Beijing have been fruitful for Latin American women in terms of mobilizing around women's rights. Women's activists have come together to discuss and advocate for actions to advance women's rights, and rallied women at large by broad dissemination of information on the issues at hand.

Through close interaction with parliaments and other state institutions, activists are helping to put in place policies to redistribute opportunities and resources between men and women at all levels of society, and to promote women's participation in decision-making. Among the most important advances have been mechanisms for inserting gender perspectives into planning bodies, budgets and control activities. Practically all countries have now adopted legal frameworks that address international commitments to gender equality.

Women still lag far behind, however, in playing an equal role in decisions about sustainable development, despite their fundamental contributions to managing land, water and other resources. And while

governments have made concerted efforts to increase the number of boys and girls attending school, overall educational achievements in education are scarce and slow, and there are no specific programs promoting the access of girls and women.

Poverty remains the backdrop to many women's concerns in Latin America. Despite high levels of economic growth in some countries, poverty levels have stagnated or worsened. The region continues to have some of the world's greatest disparities in income. Women often bear the brunt of these trends, comprising the majority of members of poor households. They earn much less than men, even when they can offer better formal qualifications.

Despite these wide gaps, macroeconomic policies still take for granted the equality of all economic agents. In the future, women will need to play a vastly expanded role in forming policies that embrace a truer equality, recognizing that macroeconomic and development strategies that are not gender sensitive will not solve women's problems or fulfil their needs.

#### HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights reports in different countries have raised awareness of the importance of policies and actions to protect and promote

all dimensions of rights. There has been an emphasis on the understanding that since “human rights and fundamental freedoms are indivisible, the full realization of civil and political rights without the enjoyment of

economic, social and cultural rights is impossible. The achievement of lasting progress in the implementation of human rights is dependent upon sound and effective national and international policies of economic and

social development.”<sup>22</sup> However, despite some advances on human rights laws, many Latin American societies maintain practices, customs and value judgments that in fact harm women’s rights.

### CEDAW Compliance

All 10 countries in South America have ratified CEDAW, with Ecuador and Uruguay the first countries to do so, and Bolivia and Chile the last. All ratifications took place within just one decade, followed by the relatively quick establishment of enforcement mechanisms in less than two years.

Colombia incorporated CEDAW into national legislation in 1981, but there is little knowledge of it or use of it to exert political pressure. Argentina faces institutional obstacles to implementation. While the National Women’s Council has traditionally reviewed basic human rights treaties and conventions, it has not participated in this process for several years. Many rights are not respected in practice.

Bolivia’s achievements relative to CEDAW mainly involve legal frameworks, such as the 1995 Law Against Family or Domestic Violence, which defines and punishes domestic

logical burdens on women.

Awareness of CEDAW’s Optional Protocol appears to be limited. In the Dominican Republic, for example, little information about the Protocol has been distributed. El Salvador has not ratified the Optional Protocol because of the strong pressure exerted by conservative groups such as the Catholic Church and “Si la Vida” (Yes to Life). These interests also use concerted campaigns and the media to consolidate their power and block any possible improvement in issues related to CEDAW, especially in terms of sexual and reproductive rights.

All 10 South American countries have ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). However, in Colombia, although social expenditure increased from 8 percent of GDP in 1990 to 16 per cent in 1999, there are no substantial improvements in terms of people’s economic, social and cultural rights. Argentina and Brazil have introduced cultural subsidies, including through tax exemptions.

Among the eight countries from Central America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean analyzed for this report,<sup>3</sup> Costa Rica was the first to ratify the ICESCR and the

and freedoms. The Convention points out that violence against women includes physical, psychological and sexual violence that occurs within the family or domestic unit, within any other interpersonal relationship, or in the community. It states that violence can be perpetrated by any person or perpetuated or condoned by the state or its agents, regardless of where it occurs.

Uruguay approved its Law on Domestic Violence in 2002, followed by the first National Plan to Fight against Domestic Violence. Covering the period 2004-2010 and focusing on public policies, the plan aims at eradicating domestic violence in the country, and promoting healthy lifestyles characterized by equity, tolerance and respect for diversity. The law also created the National Advisory Council for the Fight Against Domestic Violence, which will carry forward and monitor the plan.

In 2000, 44 percent of married women in Colombia reported violence inflicted by male partners; 11 percent of pregnant women reported abuses. While Colombia’s Law 575 provides mechanisms to report violence against women, the number of women who come forward is still low. Public awareness campaigns are limited, and there is a prevailing view that conciliation is possible in domestic violence cases.

Some ethnic groups in Colombia, such as the Wayu, maintain dowry-related practices. There are also indications of the practice of female genital mutilation, but no studies that offer scientific and systematic accounts. Non-quantified information exists about women and girls who have been drugged to be assaulted, but impunity is widespread, and there are even cases where the assaulted woman herself ends up being found guilty.<sup>6</sup>

In Nicaragua, one in three married women reported violence inflicted by their partners in 1998; the figure was one in five in the Dominican Republic in 2002. Eleven percent of pregnant women in Nicaragua report abuse by their partner; in the Dominican Republic, the figure is 5 percent.

In 2002, to begin documenting the nature and extent of violence against women in the region, the Women and Development Unit of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) published a report<sup>7</sup> on the phenomenon, discussing how it is rooted in the private sphere and thus largely invisible. It proposed measurement options that can be used for a complete diagnostic and for public actions and policies.

The first experiences of measurement within countries consisted of exploratory studies.

The women’s movement has played an active role in the peace process through proposals on development, economics and employment.

violence as a public order crime and is directed at prevention. The 1998 Family Code stipulates equity among family members, the elimination of discriminatory practices, equitable legal treatment, and the value and essential dignity of people. The Civil Code establishes the same legal capacity for both men and women to perform acts of civil life.

In Central America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, Cuba became the first country to ratify CEDAW in 1980, followed in 1981 by Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Panama. The last country to do so was Guatemala (see Chart A). Since Cuba’s ratification, the CEDAW Committee has recognized its broad achievements in expanding women’s roles in the economic, social and cultural fields, and in bringing them into managerial and legislative positions. The Committee has also acknowledged the negative effects of the Helms Burton Act and the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the U.S. Government. These constrain the full application of CEDAW and the Beijing Platform and impose material and psycho-

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); Guatemala was the last to ratify the ICESCR and Honduras the last on the ICCPR.

### Violence Against Women

Women’s movements in Latin America have defined violence as one of the most serious problems affecting women. They have advanced the definition of violence from being centered on the concept of the “battered woman”<sup>4</sup> to considering the woman as the victim of human rights violations that originate in the structure of society itself.<sup>5</sup>

The 1994 “Belem do Para” convention, the correct name of which is the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, is one of the main steps forward in the region to define, prevent and punish violence against women. States Parties affirm that violence against women constitutes a violation of women’s human rights and fundamental freedoms, and impairs or nullifies the observance, enjoyment and exercise of such rights



Women's offices have been in charge of carrying out surveys; national statistics institutes have participated to a lesser extent. In some countries, NGOs have taken the initiative. There is a general tendency towards cooperation among different sectoral institutions and ministries, mainly in the area of health.<sup>8</sup>

## PEACE AND SECURITY

Colombia is the only country in South America with an active guerrilla movement consisting of armed groups with historical platforms of demands and claims presented to the official government. Women's participation in armed conflict has been marginal. The women's movement, however, has played an important role in the peace process through public hearings in San Vicente del Caguan, where they made proposals on development, economics and employment.

In terms of arms purchases, Chile spent \$156 million on conventional arms imports in 2003, Argentina \$127 million, Brazil \$87 million, Colombia \$48 million, the Dominican Republic \$76 million and Mexico \$127 million.<sup>10</sup>

Other security issues include sexual assaults and bribery. In Buenos Aires, 61 percent of people were victims of acts of delinquency in 1995;<sup>11</sup> in Bogotá, the rate topped 54 percent. Rio de Janeiro was the city with the highest percentage of sexual assault victims, at 7.5 percent of the female population; Buenos Aires was second with 6.4 percent. In 1996, 4.8 percent of women in Bogotá suffered sexual assault. In Costa Rica, the only Central American city for which figures are available, 40.4 percent of the residents of San José were victims of acts of delinquency in 1995, while 7.5 percent of women suffered sexual assault.

### Asylum Seekers, Refugees, Internally Displaced

There are not significant numbers of internally displaced or refugee women in Latin America. Argentina and Brazil hosted 3,000 asylum seekers each in 2003; Ecuador absorbed 6,000. Costa Rica managed 14,000 refugees in 2003, and Mexico accepted 6,000. In El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, 4,000 people live in refugee-like conditions outside their country of origin. Unfortunately, none of this information is disaggregated by gender.<sup>9</sup>

In Colombia, the Solidarity Network provides assistance to displaced people, but with no special programs for women. Argentina passed a new Migration Law in 2003

that aims to "ensure an effective equality of treatment towards foreigners" and "punishes the illegal traffic in people", which is compared "to the traffic in weapons and drugs". It also prohibits the hiring of irregular migrant workers.

A Dominican Republic-based organization, Coordinadora Mujer y Salud, describes the discrimination and suffering of refugee and displaced women: "The first thing is the economic exclusion for not having access to employment, which implies engaging in the informal employment of an economy in crisis. The lack of income prevents them from having access to education and health services, since neither education nor public health services are totally free of charge for any population segment, and within the last two years these have suffered a total collapse. There are NGOs that offer services and support to women's groups in the so-called marginalized neighborhoods where migrant women live in overcrowded conditions, but these are programs with low coverage and little impact given the magnitude of this problem in the country's five most important cities."

## POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

Within the last 10 years, women's organizations in Latin America have worked with parliaments and other state institutions on policies to redistribute opportunities and resources between men and women, and to promote women's participation in management and decision-making. Countries have set up specialized agencies for women's advancement and brought gender into a variety of state institutions. Practically all states have adopted legal frameworks that address the international commitments to gender equality in decision-making, including those of CEDAW, the ICESCR and the ICCPR.

The ECLAC Report issued for the 9th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean maintains that international treaties can strengthen the mechanisms for affirmative actions at the state level, and broaden the possibility of responding to the demands made by women's movements, particularly in contexts otherwise not inclined to institutionalize gender equality. In Latin America, the intervention of civil society and particularly of the women's movement has been critical to this process. Women's organizations continue to be the main agents of change, making contributions to the formulation, design, execution and monitoring of public policies with a gender perspective.

## Box 29. CEDAW Ratification Dates

Country	CEDAW, 1979 <sup>1</sup>
Costa Rica	April 1986
Cuba	July 1980
Dominican Republic	September 1982
El Salvador	August 1981
Guatemala	August 1982
Honduras	March 1983
Mexico	March 1981
Nicaragua	October 1981
Panama	October 1981

Source: [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw)

Among the most important advances are new mechanisms directed at inserting gender perspectives into planning bodies, budgets and control activities. Examples include the Management Improvement Program in Chile, the Pluriannual Plan in Brazil and the Planning Council in Ecuador.<sup>12</sup>

The specialized agencies for women are generally charged with proposing legislation related to gender, advising ministries on public policies and serving as an advocate for women's interests within the state.<sup>13</sup> The power, institutional position, resources and legitimacy of these agencies, however, varies dramatically among countries. A preliminary analysis reveals that their success depends on several factors, such as the personal interest of the president and other senior leaders, a favorable relationship with other ministries, stable budgets, and credibility with the organized women's movement. Without these conditions, women's agencies can become ghettos that isolate women's issues from the mainstream of state action, or instruments to promote the interests of the ruling party.

### Representation

The regional growth in women's representation in legislatures stems from the adoption of affirmative action measures and proportional electoral systems. The most common affirmative discrimination mechanism is the quota system, which establishes a minimum level of women's participation in elections. To date, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama and Peru have passed laws that require political parties to reserve 20 to 30 percent of their candidacies for women. The Dominican Republic assigns a 33 percent quota for women in legislative posts, including in local and municipal gov-

## Box 30. Surveys to Measure Violence Against Women Carried Out in South America

Country and year	Financing and/or executing institution	Age and Population under study		Type of Violence	Results
Bolivia (1997-98)	Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), Ministry of Health and Social Provision, Vice-ministry of Gender and Family, Government of the Netherlands	20 and over	All women	Physical (PHV) and Psychological (PSV)	21% of women report being victims of PSV, 17.9% non-life-threatening, and 13.9% life-threatening
Chile (2001)	National Women's Service (SERNAM) / Center for the Analysis of Public Policies, University of Chile	15 to 49	Women in current relationship or ever in any relationship	PHV, PSV and Sexual Violence (SV)	In the metropolitan region 50.3% of women have suffered some type of violence from their partners. Of them, 34.1% have suffered PHV and/or SV and 16.3% PSV
Colombia (1995)	Asociación Pro-Bienestar de la Familia Colombiana	15 to 49	Married/partnered women	PHV	19% of women have been physically assaulted by their partners some time in their lives
Paraguay (1995-96)	Paraguayan Center for Population Studies, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)	15 to 49	Ever married/partnered women	PHV and PSV	31.1% of women have been verbally insulted, 9.5% reports physical violence
Peru (2000)	National Institute of Statistics and Informatics	15 to 49	Ever married/partnered women	PHV and PSV	41% of women have suffered PHV by their husbands/partners. 34% have been subjected to psychological control; 48% to verbal abuse and 25% to threats
Uruguay (1997)	IADB and Sybila Consultores	22 to 55	Ever married/partnered women	PHV, PSV, SV	No data
Costa Rica (1994)	No data	No data	No data	PHV and PSV	75% suffer psychological violence and 10% physical violence
Guatemala (1990)	UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and PAHO	No data	No data	No data	49% have suffered violence; 47% by a partner
Mexico (1999)	National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics	No data	Men and women in households	PHV, PSV, SV	No information is given regarding the specific situation of women, however emotional abuse constitutes the most frequent type of aggression at 99.2%; intimidation manifested in 6.4%; PHV in 11.2% and sexual abuse in 1.1% of households.
Nicaragua (1998)	National Institute of Statistics and Censuses and Ministry of Health	15 to 49	Ever married/partnered women	PHV and SV	27.6% have suffered PHV, 10.2% SV, and 28.7% PHV and SV either within the last year or in a previous period.

Source: **Bolivia:** Ministry of Health and Social Provision (1999), Public Health and Domestic/Intra-family Violence, Prevalence Survey in cooperation with the Government of the Netherlands; **Chile:** M. Ferrer, (2001), "Detección y análisis de la prevalencia de la violencia intrafamiliar," <http://www.capp.uchile.cl/boletin/julio2001/4.html>; **Colombia:** Profamilia, National Demography and Health Survey 1995, Demographic and Health Surveys, Institute for Resource Development/Macro International, Inc; **Paraguay:** Paraguayan Center for Population Studies, "Centers for Disease Control and Prevention", in IADB, *Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Framework for Action*, Washington, D.C.; **Peru:** National Institute of Statistics and Informatics (INEI), Demography and Family Health Survey 2000, Lima. *Violencia contra la mujer en relación de pareja: América Latina y el Caribe. Una propuesta para medir su magnitud y evolución.* **Costa Rica:** E. Quiroz and O. Barrantes (1994), "¿Y vivieron felices para siempre?" in IADB, *Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Framework for Action*, Washington, D.C.; **Guatemala:** A. Mehrotra (1998), Gender and Legislation in Latin America and the Caribbean, Chapter IV "Gender Violence", UNDP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean in <http://www.undp.org/rblac/gender/legislation/violence.htm>; **Mexico:** National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI) (1999), Intra-family Violence, Survey 1999, Methodological Document and Results, in Isis Internacional, <http://www.isis.cl/mujeres/hoy/viol/dicenque.htm>; **Nicaragua:** Demographic and Health Survey.

ernments. It requires the Central Electoral Board and political parties to take responsibility for implementing these provisions.

No consensus exists, however, that quotas are the best policy tool. Furthermore, the effectiveness of quotas in helping more women

get elected depends on additional factors, such as the country's electoral system and the support political parties give to their women candidates. A study by ECLAC, "Democratic Governability and Gender," contends that effective quota systems are adapted to

the electoral system and included in the electoral law. They should be well regulated, and the electoral body should actively ensure their fulfilment.

The report says that these three conditions have been met in Argentina, Costa Rica and

Mexico, resulting in outstanding growth in women's participation. In Venezuela, quotas were eliminated after being in force for a short period. Paraguay's 20 per cent quota only applies to party lists in internal party elections.

### Impact of Representation

Women politicians in Argentina have achieved a high level of gender awareness in their political parties using strategies such as trans-party alliances. These have launched demands for legislation in defense of women's rights and pressed the national judicial system to require the fulfilment of quotas.

However, since women still often lack decision-making power in their parties, elected candidates are not well positioned to advance gender issues. This is also the case in Bolivia, where despite explicit legal frameworks to promote women's integration into elected and non-elected positions at the same rate and levels as men, political parties have offered only lukewarm support to elected women.

The experience in the Dominican Republic proves that leaving quotas in the hands of political parties does not imply that women candidates will win a seat or a decision-making position, since there are "winnable" and "non-winnable" seats. Even if one out of three candidates is a woman, there is a strong probability that female candidates will end up on the lowest third of the electoral list. In addition, the distribution of campaign resources is often inequitable. Women in the Dominican Republic report that only one of the leading political parties has internally implemented a 25 percent quota for all electable positions. Other parties fulfil the quotas for proposed candidacies only, with no regard for maintaining them among candidates who are actually elected.

In Uruguay, women parliamentarians formed the "Bancada Femenina" (Group of Women Parliamentarians) to encourage inter-party coordination. This initiative has resulted in a number of gender-related joint proposals and work on strategies to ensure their acceptance. The Law on Domestic Violence was one landmark piece of legislation. The Law on Reproductive Health was approved by the Chamber of Deputies, but failed to pass the Senate, where there are only three women senators, one of whom was not supportive.

In Cuba, women's political participation has grown considerably in all sectors. In 2000, women held 33.3 percent of senior management positions at all levels, a figure that increased to 34.5 percent in 2002, the

highest percentage achieved to date. El Salvador represents the opposite end of the spectrum. Women now hold only 6 percent of mayoralties, a figure that has fallen from 14 percent in 1994, and occupy only 20 percent of local government positions and 11 percent of Legislative Assembly seats. The Vice-President is currently a woman.

Countries in the region have started to introduce affirmative action proposals directed at prompting gender equality in executive and judicial positions. Colombia has a 30 percent quota law for women's representation in the executive branch. Costa Rica has established a quota system for the judiciary.

## POVERTY ERADICATION

### Macroeconomic Policies, Development Strategies

The neoliberal economic model implemented in Latin American countries during the 1990s and its related labor reforms has changed the labor market structure and degraded labor rights in general. A large number of people have faced unemployment and social exclusion, while another significant number have only unstable, precarious and badly-paid jobs. These shifts have had a more profound impact on women than men, given their more unfavorable and vulnerable situation.

Most Latin American economies have witnessed a growth in poverty that contributes to already sharp inequities in income distribution. Women comprise the majority of poor households in practically all the countries of the region. According to 2002 data, 43 per cent of Latin American women over 15 in urban areas lacked their own income. Figures are higher in rural areas. This constrained economic autonomy raises women's likelihood of becoming poor if their family or spousal circumstances changed. One indicator of women's vulnerability is that the number of indigent female-headed households is greater than male-headed ones. In the Dominican Republic, 25 percent of female-headed households are indigent compared to 11 percent of households headed by men. In Guatemala, the number is 20 percent compared to 13 percent, and in Costa Rica, 9 percent and 4 percent.

ECLAC's adjusted femininity index<sup>16</sup> of poverty for Central America records values greater than 100 in both rural and urban areas, indicating there are more women in poor households. This phenomenon intensifies among women aged 20 to 59. For this group, the index soars above 100 in virtually

all countries studied by ECLAC throughout the previous decade.

While there are clear gender implications arising from the region's macroeconomic decisions, policies are based on the assumption that all economic agents are equal. In Colombia, the only policies specific to women that have been promoted in recent years relate to women heads of household, and mainly concern income generation through micro-credit, housing and assistance to rural women with property issues.

### Employment Patterns, Women's Work

According to ECLAC's<sup>14</sup> latest studies, during the 1990s the labor participation rate in the region grew faster among women than men. However, women continue to face more difficulties entering and staying in the workforce. They have higher unemployment rates even when, on average, they have higher educational levels than men. And the notion persists of the "man as family support provider, with a full-time job and benefits that can be extended to his family."<sup>15</sup>

Women are responsible for the reproductive, unpaid tasks, and if they participate in



the labor market, they often do so as secondary workers, with complementary salaries, always inferior to those earned by men. Overall, during 1991-2000, the income of Latin American women amounted to only 39 percent of the income of men.

Notions about traditional labor roles have nothing to do with real practices, where salaried work is increasingly informal, flexible and without social protection. Seventy percent of Bolivian women work in the informal sector, for example. In many cases, the main household providers are women, who thus become doubly burdened: as supposed secondary workers with more precarious conditions and lower salaries, and with an increasing unpaid workload, as states cut back social programs designed to support domestic and family responsibilities.

To join the formal sector, women have to fulfil greater requirements than men in terms

## Box 31. Quota Types and Percentage of Women in Legislative Bodies

Country	Quota Type	Results last election	Percentage of women
Argentina	Constitutional Quota for National Parliament; Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament; Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Sub-National Level; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	87 of 255	34.1%
Bolivia	Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament; Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Sub-National Level; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	24 of 130	18.5%
Peru	Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament; Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Sub-National Level	22 of 122	17.5%
Ecuador	Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	16 of 100	16.0%
Uruguay	Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	12 of 99	12.1%
Colombia	Quotas existed previously or quota legislation has been proposed <sup>5</sup>	20 of 166	12.0%
Paraguay	Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament ; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	8 of 80	10.0%
Honduras	Election Law Quota Regulation for National Parliament	7 of 128	5.5%
Guatemala	Quotas that existed previously or which have been proposed	13 of 158	8.2%
Panama	Election Law Quota Regulation for National Parliament	7 of 71	9.9%
El Salvador	Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	9 of 84	10.7%
Dominican Republic	Election Law Quota Regulation for National Parliament; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	26 of 150	17.3%
Nicaragua	Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	19 of 92	20.7%
Mexico	Election Law Quota Regulation for National Parliament; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	113 of 500	22.6%
Costa Rica	Election Law Quota Regulation for National Parliament; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	20 of 57	35.1%

Source: Global Database of Quotas for Women. [www.quotaproject.org](http://www.quotaproject.org)

of qualifications and experience. Most men who work in Argentina's public sector are engaged in administrative jobs, for example, while women are engaged in education. In the private sector, most men work in the area of industry and small trade, while 30 per cent of women work as domestic employees.

Until recently, Argentina's largest chain of ice-cream parlors, FREDDO, had a tradition

of not hiring women at all. The legal clinic at the University of Palermo's Law School filed suit on behalf of the Fundación Mujeres en Igualdad. In 2002, the National Civil Chamber judged that the company had a discriminatory hiring policy, and that it should hire only women until it erased the existing inequality. The ruling sets an important precedent since it is the first judgment on dis-

crimination against a private company, and emerges from a class action suit rather than the complaints of an individual.

The increased entry of women into the salaried workforce has caused many recent changes in Latin American, but an equivalent increase in men's participation in unpaid domestic activities has not followed. Despite the diverse family structures that have emerged, together with demographic changes and the evolution in men's and women's career paths, the proportion of men who handle family responsibilities continues to be minimal. The lack of commercial exchange has rendered this fundamental contribution to social wealth invisible and concealed a significant share of the actual cost of production.

Changes in the labor market have spurred migration to countries within and outside the region that offer more favorable employment opportunities. The number of women migrants has risen significantly, although male migration has left behind a rising number of female-headed households that face economic difficulties and remain strongly dependent on remittances from the migrants.

### EDUCATION

#### International Agreements

Over the last 10 years, Latin American governments, under the pressure of international organizations in some cases, have taken steps to increase the number of boys and girls in school. The 2000 Dakar Framework for Action and the Education for All agreement have given impetus to solving education problems, although not necessarily with progress on gender issues.

Despite international commitments on education that now include the Millennium Development Goals, obstacles to fulfilling them include a lack of awareness by legislators and limited political will. Governments rarely support women's groups and other NGOs on initiatives to promote women's right to education. After the World Education Forum launched Education for All, 10 NGOs in El Salvador proposed collaborating with the Ministry of Culture to create a national follow-up plan. So far, it has not been adopted, in part because the Government has not been open to civil society contributions.

#### Public Policy

In 2004, UNESCO held the 47<sup>th</sup> Conference on Education in Geneva. Its final report contended, "In most parts of the world, there are unacceptable gender differences in access, opportunities, retention and learning outcomes.



This reflects the inability of many education systems to be gender-responsive.” The conference also proposed priority actions, noting, “In many instances it will be necessary to take concerted affirmative actions to compensate for historical and new inequalities. A great deal of research, knowledge and good experiences exist and this must be taken into account as a matter of urgency to universalize gender equality at national, regional and global levels.”<sup>18</sup>

In Latin America, however, there seem to be few measures to promote women’s and girls’ access to education. Bolivia has embarked on an effort to strengthen gender mainstreaming through its 1994 Education Reform Law and the Program for Permanence of Girls in school.<sup>19</sup> A new effort is on to ensure gender equity in curricula, administration and school finance.

By contrast REPEM Colombia notes widely differing perceptions on education priorities: “For the government it is war, for us it is the lack of political will, the priority given to war, the gradual privatization of education and the lack of allocation of resources.”

On teacher training in the region, the 2001 World Education Forum held in Porto Alegre stated: “The focus on gender should undoubtedly be incorporated into teacher training programs, not only from a theoretical perspective but also from an experience-based and analytical perspective, which would prompt a process of self-knowledge and development of their gender and identity awareness.” It went on to note that as not everybody is qualified to introduce these issues into teacher training processes, and there is still resistance at university-level regarding gender. The official culture of school education is the white, Western and male cultural model whether students are boys, girls, young people, *mestizos* and *mestizas*, white males and females, black males and females, or indigenous people.<sup>20</sup>

There seem to be almost no specific proposals to change the contents of curriculum guides to reflect gender issues, at least not from those institutions with the necessary power and economic resources. Argentina’s Fundación Mujeres en Igualdad notes that the Draft Law of the City of Buenos Aires proposes to make sexual education compulsory in basic education. The Dominican Republic has a project called EDUCMUJER, which promotes equal opportunities for women and girls in education, and the elimination of sexist stereotypes from educational

materials. This project has managed to initiate a gender awareness and training program for teachers, and a revision of curricula for basic and secondary education. But no progress has been made on the National Plan for Gender Equity, prepared during 1999.<sup>21</sup>

### Access and Changes in Practices

The regional enrollment rate has improved compared to the previous decade—between 88–94 percent of children now attend primary school.<sup>17</sup> Other educational achievements have been scarce and slow. Argentina has an enrolment rate similar to those of developed countries, but dropout rates remain high.



Fetching water after an earthquake in Colombia.

Across the region, decisions about schooling for boys and girls are made within families, and swayed by gender conceptions, domestic responsibilities, and judgments about the value of education for boys and girls.

The literacy gap between men and women seems to be somewhat more equitable in South America than in Central America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. But figures from Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru reveal inequalities. In terms of enrollment, fewer girls than boys attend primary schools in Brazil, while in Chile gaps appear at the secondary level. In tertiary education, Uruguay shows a significant majority of women, while the opposite is the case in Bolivia.

In Central America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, Guatemala has the greatest literacy gap, registering a rate of 0.85. El Salvador, Mexico and Panama are almost at this level as well. Cuba has a higher level of equality, and there is a slight difference in favor of women in Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Puerto Rico.

Guatemala also shows the greatest gap between women and men on school enrolment rates. The Dominican Republic’s secondary school enrollment rate for women is superior to those in other Central American and Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries.

At the tertiary level, among countries where

data is available, Mexico still has more men enrolled than women. Panama has the greatest gap in favor of women. There are no data for the tertiary level in Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Puerto Rico.

## NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY

### Decision-Making

Women in Latin America play a key role in the production, management and administration of natural resources, but this is not reflected in their level of participation in decisions about the use of these resources. Women’s marginal participation at the state level in Bolivia, for example, means that there are few discussions about women’s specific needs or perspectives. Recently, NGOs such as Coordinadora de la Mujer and others carried out advocacy activities to bring women’s voices into a national referendum on the use of Bolivia’s energy resources, the first time that public consultation has taken place on such an issue.

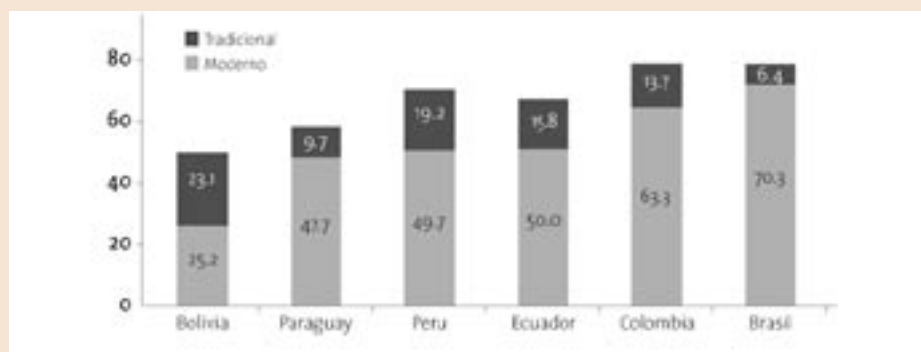
Cuba’s Federación de Mujeres Cubanas notes that women’s participation has grown, but is still insufficient in senior management positions. Some sectors, particularly those associated with rural areas, are more reluctant to accept women’s input. The fight against sexist stereotypes that stall greater participation in decision-making is still considered to be critical.

While Argentina has acknowledged women’s low level of participation, this has not led to changes, with women still mainly involved on a local level. A woman Secretary of Environment turned out to be a corrupt official who went to prison. In general, there are no gender units, experts or policies in the environmental sector.

Argentina’s Fundación Mujeres en Igualdad lists the main obstacles for the full participation of women in decisions on natural resources and the environment: the lack of visibility and knowledge on the subject; the lack of economic resources to attend summits and conferences; the lack of motivation, since it is very difficult to influence government and companies’ policies; and the perception that the debate focuses more on economic issues than on the environment and health. There is also the idea that women tend to narrow in on “women’s issues”, rather than general or collective concerns.

In Paraguay, the Government’s 2004 report to CEDAW promised that, “In the area

## Box 32. Percentage of Women in Union Who Use Contraceptive Methods by Type of Method



Source: Demographic Bulletin N° 70 ECLAC/CELADE, July 2002.

of environmental policy, the medium-term objective is to improve the quality of life of men and women by introducing a gender perspective in environmental policies and programmes...and by having women take part in formulating them.”<sup>22</sup>

Women’s important contributions to managing the region’s land and water resources generally include the management of household water and the farming of irrigated and rain-fed crops. According to censuses carried out in Colombia and Peru, women carry out 25 and 45 per cent of agricultural activities, respectively.

### Gender Impacts

Since the early 1990s, when states began yielding the management and use of lands and irrigation systems to market forces, women have confronted difficulties in accessing water rights, along with agricultural support services such as credit, new technologies and training. Privatization, demographic pressure and the dissolution of traditional forms of land tenure have reduced the amount and quality of lands available to rural communities.

Paraguay’s CEDAW report notes, “Deforestation, added to the lack of water caused by contamination and droughts, forces women to walk long distances, carrying heavy loads, in order to fetch water from very distant places, and this has an impact on their health and on the time devoted to other household and/or productive tasks, above all, taking into account that peasant women in this country work an average of 14 to 15 hours every day.”<sup>23</sup>

Coordinadora Mujer y Salud notes, “Water privatization in the Dominican Republic is a real fact about which we, women, have not yet raised awareness; the demands for water services are basically made on the basis of de-

manding that government authorities build or restore aqueducts, without paying attention to the fact that fresh water resources are being exploited by the private companies in that field.”

### Right to Natural Resources

Many water policies, such as the ones on irrigation, fail to consider the existing imbalance between men’s and women’s ownership rights, division of labor and incomes. By raising the value of land, irrigation brings about social changes that usually favor men. Irrigation systems lend themselves to monocropping, often for the production of cash crops, and discourage diversified agricultural systems that support a variety of food crops. Since men often control cash crops, decisions about the use of irrigation water tend to be made without accounting for women’s farm and household activities.

Studies from the Laja River basin in Mexico, for example, show that irrigation is considered a male activity in spite of the fact that a large number of women also take part in it. Wrong perceptions about the distribution of productive tasks within rural families, conceals the work performed by women. So when it comes to irrigation projects and the definition of infrastructure works to improve them, as well as to the allocation of subsidies, women are not consulted. In general, they are excluded from decisions and benefits, which exacerbates the discrimination and insecurity that affects them.<sup>24</sup>

The lack of secure land tenure discourages the maintenance of lands in a healthy condition, and although this affects both men and women, women face an additional difficulty. They have to mediate their requests through men in some places. In general, men are still entrusted with legal or customary ownership of property, which has a clear impact on fam-

ily decision-making and on productive tasks administered by women.

Even to use a small plot of land, women often have to seek authorization from their husbands, inherit it from their fathers or make a request to community elders. Farms owned by women are usually small, dispersed, distant and low in fertility. In areas with high rates of divorce or abandonment, or where land remains in the possession of men in the event of separation, women show little disposition to invest their time and resources in long-term land improvements, such as the construction of irrigation, drainage and terrace systems; and in the growing of trees or other activities that maintain soil fertility.<sup>25</sup>

In the Dominican Republic, Coordinadora Mujer y Salud highlights the low productivity of agricultural and livestock tasks managed by rural women. But the lack of materials for microenterprises and the high costs of natural resources that were formerly at women’s disposal are obstacles to the sustainable use of resources and to women’s capacity to perform their tasks without degrading the environment.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), “more information is needed about women’s role in the production and care of crops, in order to outline the extension and training activities that best suits them. Likewise, the development of technologies should be carried out with the collaboration of peasant women, so that they could meet their demands and knowledge on the preservation and sustainable use of crops that are destined to medicinal, artisanal or other uses.”<sup>26</sup>

## HEALTH

### Access and Affordability

South American countries have adopted a considerable number of laws, policies and programmes on reproductive health. Bolivia, Brazil and Peru recognize reproductive health and family planning as fundamental human rights.<sup>27</sup> But health services in the region still fail to acknowledge gender differences, and generally seem unprepared to deal with women’s problems.

A concern in Central America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean is that governments tend to take a technical approach to women’s health care, rather than one based on human rights, including reproductive rights and the rights of people with HIV/AIDS. El Salvador faces a crisis in public health resulting from neoliberal economic policies that have privatized services, with

no consideration for the health needs of girls and adolescents.

Across Latin America, access to information about specific diseases (breast cancer, cervical cancer, etc.) and prevention is poor, especially in rural areas. Primary constraints to better dissemination of information include limited political will and resources.

Services overall are insufficient in Colombia, where over 40 percent of the population has no access to basic health care.<sup>28</sup> In Bolivia, most health care workers are not trained to understand either cultural variations or the native languages spoken in rural areas. This causes people to distrust health services and to prefer traditional medicine. Racism, male chauvinism and class discrimination persist in the attitudes of health care workers towards the people they are to assist. In El Salvador, women's groups have focused on raising the Government's awareness about maternal health.

### Reproductive Health

There are wide gaps in fertility rates between urban and rural areas. Brazil's gap seems to be the most moderate at 1.2 percent. At the other end in South America is Bolivia, with the highest rural/urban gap and also with the region's highest overall fertility rate. Among countries in Central America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, the widest gap is in Honduras, at 6.3 children per woman in rural regions and 3.5 children per woman in urban centers. Costa Rica and Mexico have achieved the most similar urban and rural rates, with a difference of 0.8 and 12 points, respectively.

Where data is available for South America, it appears that a high percentage of women use modern methods of contraception. Bolivia has the region's highest use of both traditional and modern contraceptives, at about 25 percent of women in each case. In Brazil, where the use of traditional methods is the lowest, 70 percent of women between 14 and 44 years old use modern forms.

In Central America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, the usage rate of modern methods is also high. Guatemala has the lowest figure, at 31 percent, and Costa Rica the highest, at 71 percent. The assumption that fewer women are using traditional methods, however, hides the reality of a low overall use of contraceptives. Over 40 percent of women do not use contraceptives at all.

Countries with strong Catholic beliefs or very strict moral rules uphold strong taboos regarding women's sexuality. Female sexuality remains identified mainly with reproduction,

while the idea also prevails that women do not make decisions about their own bodies.

In the Dominican Republic, women's reproductive rights suffer from the prohibition of abortion without exception, the force of the Concordat between the Vatican and the Dominican Government, and the non-separation of church and state.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 4.2 million women each year have abortions in Latin America and the Caribbean. Most are performed under risky conditions and in secret, which can irreparably damage women's health and sometimes leads to death.<sup>29</sup>

Most countries restrict legal access to abortion: Chile, Paraguay and Peru prevent it altogether. Some laws criminalize the procedure under all circumstances. Others allow it on specific grounds: for therapeutic or reasons where the fetus has medical problems or birth defects, or when pregnancy results from an act of sexual violence.

In 2002, debate took place in Uruguay after a draft law on reproductive health was submitted to the Chamber of Deputies. It proposed annulling the law that criminalizes abortion, and suggested instead actions on family and reproductive planning, including sexual education and the reduction of maternal mortality. It allowed the voluntary interruption of pregnancy until the twelfth week for women who estimated they could no longer continue the pregnancy.<sup>30</sup> The law garnered the necessary votes and passed the Chamber of Deputies, but the Senate failed to approve it.

Despite the bill's collapse, the women's movement in Uruguay rated the public debate that took place around it as a positive experience. Diverse groups worked together on the law, including those from the religious sphere, unions and political parties. The affirmative votes of legislators were supported by a long list of people and organizations willing to defend life and respect for human rights, to strengthen democracy and to promote coexistence in diversity. They included the Central Directive Council of the University of the Republic; its rector; six of its deans; the Representative Board of the National Workers' Union; feminist, women's, young people's and human rights organizations; ministers of the Methodist and Valdese Churches; representatives of the Afro-Umbadista religion; journalists; sports people; and representatives of the arts and the academy.

Two countries with legal frameworks that do not punish abortion are Puerto Rico, since the U.S. Supreme Court case *Roe vs.*

## Box 33. Uruguay Defends Reproductive Health

On 10 December 2002, Uruguay commemorated Human Rights Day with the approval of the Draft Law on the Defense of Reproductive Health in the Chamber of Deputies. In this draft law, the State is turned into guarantor of the exercise of Sexual and Reproductive Rights, thus promoting sexual education, the reduction of maternal mortality, the family planning services and the exercise of responsible maternity and paternity. In its article 4, the draft law allows the voluntary interruption of pregnancy, until the twelfth week, when the woman estimates she can no longer continue the pregnancy.<sup>7</sup>

Source: Weekly Journal Brecha, Uruguay

Wade made abortion legal; and Cuba, where abortion is a legal medical practice and there are specialized services to perform it. The Federación de Mujeres Cubanas writes, "The respect for women's sexual and reproductive rights is a fundamental principle in our country; that is to say, women have the right to decide and control their fertility. We defend the existence of abortion services in safe conditions, with specialized medical care. Likewise, coverage and attention to family planning services have been increased, even when (the U.S. embargo has resulted in) a deficit of specialized contraceptives and condoms." Systematic sexual education has reduced the number of abortions, and the widespread dissemination of information has cut down the incidence of uterine, cervical and breast cancer deaths.

### HIV/AIDS

The stigmatization and exclusion of women living with HIV and AIDS undercuts their human rights and substantially increases their difficulties in living in their communities. Apart from some specific programs and awareness efforts, HIV-positive women in the region suffer societal isolation irrespective of their country's borders.

In the Dominican Republic, the lack of political sensitivity and will, public policies and mechanisms for the implementation of Law 55/93 on AIDS hinders women's access to quality services and treatments. Although the law makes an exhaustive account of HIV/AIDS in the Dominican Republic, it falls short on gender and an approach for young people. Only articles 8 and 24

## Box 34. Strengthening Women's Agency In Water Education

BY THAIS CORRAL

Around the world, women and girls are primarily responsible for domestic tasks that rely heavily on water. When this resource becomes scarce, their work doubles to include walking long distances while carrying heavy containers. In the Brazilian Northeast the situation is aggravated by the fact that during droughts most men migrate for wage employment and women become the heads of the household. These women are known as "widows of the drought".

The project "Strengthening Women's Agency in Water Education" was conceived to address gender issues in efforts to combat desertification in Northeastern Brazil. It focuses on improving the capacity of community leaders to better understand and enhance the benefits of water policies and programmes.

The project was developed by REDEH (Network for Human Development) and partner organizations. A Brazilian non-profit organization, REDEH's mission is to strengthen the role of women in sustainable development. It was one of the leading

emphasize sexual education and care of infected boys and girls as well as children of infected people.

El Salvador has carried out sensitization and monitoring campaigns on its HIV/AIDS Law. These highlight human rights and non-discrimination along with information about the impact of HIV. But most information is disseminated by women and NGOs through projects supported by international cooperation.

Cuba is the only country that seems to prioritize HIV/AIDS care. All services provided are free and accessible, and Cuba ranks among the countries with the lowest infection levels, with 0.02 percent of its population HIV positive. A specialized public program on HIV/AIDS involves health entities and community organizations. The Federation of Cuban Women works within this on

women's organizations at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which took place in June 1992, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Since then, REDEH has been actively involved at the national, state and local levels with the implementation of Agenda 21 and other environmental agreements, such as the Conventions on Desertification and on Climate Change.

"Strengthening Women's Agency in Water Education" comprises three main elements: development of an educational kit, training of community leaders, and the use of radio by community educators. The educational materials were designed through a participatory process using language and symbols that are culturally familiar and well accepted by the local population. The gender concepts were discussed in focus groups to avoid marginalizing men.

This methodology has now been used in many of the region's projects to combat desertification. One initiative involves photovoltaic pv pumping, a solar energy system to provide water.

gender-sensitive prevention. The Federation also helps implement the national UNAIDS program through 30 Orientation Houses for Women and Families. Activities include public advocacy campaigns through the media, community workshops and cultural activities with prevention messages.

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*dor: Las Dignas; Uruguay: CIEDUR.*

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