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GENDER POLICY : CONCEPTS, CONTEXT AND OUTCOMES
LATIN AMERICAN AND THE CARIBBEAN:
A Brief Overview of the Third Decade for Women

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* *The views expressed in this paper, which has been reproduced as received, are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.*

SUMMARY

This paper has been prepared for the “Expert Consultation on Regional Perspectives in the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly entitled Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century”, organized by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women in New York, 5 to 7 May 2004.

This paper examines overarching trends in what regards the use of conceptual frames, policy context and implementation of policies recommended by the IV World Conference on Women in Latin America, at large and the Caribbean. However, with respect to specific quantitative data the analysis is restricted to some South American countries and the Caribbean as a sub-region.¹ It initially examines the meanings of the Third Decade of Women in the two sub-regions in regard to conceptual tools and policy mainstreaming. A second section looks into the economic, political context in which post Beijing policies evolved. A last block offers data and analysis on policy processes and outcomes.

The writing of this document would not have been possible without the support of my friends and colleagues. Teresa Valdéz, coordinator of the Gender Unit at FLACSO in Chile, kindly and generously provide me access to the preliminary reports of the Index of Fulfilled Commitments (ICC), a creative tool developed jointly by FLACSO and feminist researchers and activists to assess Beijing implementation in eight Southern American countries. Peggy Antrobus and Aziza Ahmed, at an extremely short notice, found enough time in their overstretched agenda to search for and analyse data regarding Beijing implementation in the Caribbean sub-region. Angela Collet, my assistant, struggled hard against time to reorganize the ICC data in a format adjusted to the objectives of this paper. I thank them for this outstanding support.

¹ Few reasons explain this choice: the shortage of time to collect data, the greater familiarity of the author and collaborators with these two sub-regions and, most principally, the existence of systematic and concise country specific system of indicators produced by feminist organizations to monitor Beijing implementation in most South American countries.

THE THIRD DECADE OF WOMEN: CONTINUATION AND CHANGE

Common threads

In few key aspects, the evolution of Third Decade of Women (1995-2005) in Latin America and the Caribbean present many similarities to what has been experienced in the period ranging from the Mexico City Conference (1975) to Nairobi (1985) and from there to Beijing (1995). Each of these three conferences created in national societies – and particularly among women themselves – cumulative ripples of awareness about gender based inequalities and discrimination. In Latin America, each cycle has created the opportunity for sectors of women who had not been previously involved to be engaged. This would mean the gradual inclusion of rural, indigenous, black, lesbian women and young women, in both national and international related processes.

Another common thread linking the pre and post Beijing period is definitely an attempt to “mainstream” gender in the policy and program environment. First signs of mainstreaming were already visible in the Caribbean even before 1975 – the Women’s Affairs Unit of Jamaica is one illustration. But mainstreaming clearly expanded after Nairobi, the creation of the Brazilian Council of Women’s Rights in 1985 right before the Conference being the most outstanding example. But, in both Latin America and the Caribbean the post Beijing period has been described as the period in which the idea of gender mainstreaming would gain legitimacy and policy leverage. As demonstrated by the assessment made by the ECLAC Gender Unit between 2002 and 2003 (see Guzman, 2003, pp 27-29), in Latin America women’s ministries and women’s rights councils expanded and consolidated, and in the Caribbean cross-sector gender mainstreaming practically became the norm.

Last but not least, since 1975 positive policy outcomes can be identified. However the road towards gender equality and women’s human rights in Latin America and the Caribbean was never linear or easy (*easily walked through*). Rather it has been a long and tortuous road in which most often one step ahead has been followed by two steps backwards. One reason that may explain (explaining) this “back and forth pattern” is the perennial break of continuity in terms of policy formation and implementation that occurs at changes of administration, independently of the level being examined, since more than often at each new cycle the gender equality wheel has to be re-created almost out from scratch. Given this structural limitation policy gains that can be presently assessed and measured would not have taken place in the absence of sustained advocacy and monitoring work performed by women’s organizations, at all levels. On the one hand, the international agreements adopted in Mexico, Nairobi, Beijing and other conferences of the UN 1990’s Social Cycle – as well as the investments made by international agencies to create awareness about these events – have been critical points of departure for policy change at national levels. On the other, real changes would not have occurred if women’s organization had not invested in advocacy, monitoring and sometimes exerting more radical forms of pressure. The corollary to that is that when and where feminist and women’s oriented advocacy lacked vision, energy and capacity policy progress has tended to be poor or uneven.

What is distinct in the post-Beijing era?

Despite the common threads identified above distinctions do exist between pre and post –Beijing policy experiences that need to be examined more closely. In this context of analysis it seems interesting to look into two of these differentials: the choice and use of conceptual frameworks and measurement tools.

Conceptual Frameworks: Gender

Gender as conceptual tool has been crafted in the mid 1970s and since then it has been extensively applied in feminist theorization and research. However, the use of gender as policy tool gained full legitimacy in Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1990's, most particularly in the aftermath of Vienna, Cairo and Beijing, when its use expanded far beyond the boundaries of the academia and feminist circles. In the late 1990's gender started to be used in official documents, by the press and other relevant political and policy actors. This is not to be seen as a trivial step. As Nafis Sadik said once in relation to sexual and reproductive rights: *“ If governmental official and donor agencies start use the term, even if they do not exactly what it means, this is a good start for them to start asking question about the hard realities that are behind those concepts”*².

Nevertheless, as relevant as this recent semantic revolution may have been the conceptual shift from women to gender has not been completed and lack of clarity still exists in what regards the meaning and use of gender. Presently in Latin America consistent gender approaches to policy making can be identified in few policy areas, particularly in relation to violence and health. However, what still tends to prevail under the auspices of Beijing implementation is the proliferation, at all levels, of “women oriented” policies and programmes. Despite much investment on dissemination of literature and training that has taken place in the last decade, in most Latin American policy settings the depth and complexity of gender as an analytical category has not been properly absorbed. By and large gender remains being understood as a synonym of women, and if not so micro-policy domains (health, violence HIV-AIDS) are those in which gender is more often correctly and consistently applied. The absence or scarcity of gender analysis of macro-policies remains a striking handicap when investments made in the last decade are brought to mind.

In the Caribbean, the use of gender in policy making is described by feminist analysts as being further problematic. The substitution of the word ‘gender’ for ‘women’ in the mainstreaming mechanisms established in the First Decade is mostly interpreted as an attempt (and a successful one at that) to depoliticise the notion of women’s empowerment and “to start paying attention to marginalized men”. Indeed, in the post-Beijing period, concerns the ‘under-achievement’ of boys in school started to outweigh those about women’s subordination and discrimination against girls and women in a number of institutions. This trend became known as the policy concern with “male marginalization”. Many feminist activists and researchers consider this to reflect the difficulties and contradictions that emerge whenever the status quo in gender relations is challenged. Other voices interpret this “biased use of gender” as the symptom of a backlash against advances achieved in the region in terms of gender equality and women’s empowerment.

² Nafis Sadik opening speech in the Cocoyoc Feminist Conference in Preparation for Cairo +5

A last comment must be made with respect to transformation at play in regard to the conceptualisation of gender as acknowledge is made of other manifestations of inequality and discrimination. Very clearly in the second half of the decade, particularly under the impact of World Conference against Racism and specially in Latin America, greater attention is being given to issues of class, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation, in order words the challenge of consistently tackling inter- sectionality. Last but not least it is necessary also to underline that in both regions the number of feminist academics and activists devoted to deepening the knowledge and understanding of gender and macroeconomics has definitely expanded. This is a very positive trend as it may in the years to come fill the gap mentioned above in regard to gender analysis in macro-policy domains.

GENDER AT PLAY WITHIN GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS

As we have seen, when looked at from broader social perspective, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the “use of gender” in policy mainstreaming has been limited, biased and contradictory. The picture is not so different when those directly engaged in mainstreaming processes express their opinion on the matter. In a seminar organized by the ECLAC Gender Unit in October 2003, Ms Cecilia Perez the Chilean Minister of Women’s Affairs (SERNAM) analysed the methods, processes and outcomes of efforts made to engender the National Programme of Managerial Improvement (of the state machinery). The assessment demonstrates that despite a full decade of gender debates:

- In the state machinery what still prevails in the conventional idea that public policies are neutral,
- Much resistance to gender equality still exist among staff and in the governmental institutional culture,
- Decisions are informed by biased and problematic perceptions. The first is that institutions already “know what women want”. The second is that gender problems are naturally resolved and do not require specific state intervention. A third common sense idea is that gender programmes are programmes exclusively designed for women.
- Macro policies and budgets must be managed by “experts” and women are not enough prepared to deal with the complexities they imply.

On the other hand, the SERNAM evaluation of its recent efforts also indicates that the ability to perform consistent gender institutional analysis of policy and programs is made possible by the use of gender tools, as the one provided above, is in itself an achievement. In addition, positive policy outcomes are also identifiable, which suggest that while the simplified use of gender must be critically examined, it does not seem wise to throw away the concept, because it is being used incorrectly or in a limited manner.

Conceptual Frameworks: The Human Rights of Women

Women's rights have been part of the political vocabulary in Latin America and the Caribbean long before Beijing. Particularly in the case of Latin America, from the late 1970's the call for women's rights evolved interwoven with the notion of citizenship rights and has become a critical discursive tool in the democratizing processes that transformed the regional and political landscape. Nevertheless it is important to underline that after 1995 the idea of women's human rights has expanded both in terms of contents and boundaries. Probably the most striking illustration of this expansion is the understanding of violence against women as a human rights issue and the gradual legitimization of sexual and reproductive rights as a non negotiable dimension of human rights. Although the emphasis on sexual and reproductive rights is more clear and easily found in the discourse on NGO's and social movements, these two terms already appear in official documents and in the speech of policy makers.

Concerning boundaries a critical shift is also underway. In Latin America, in the last five years women's rights are increasingly understood as an entitlement that includes the obligations of national states, but goes beyond it. Individuals in the women's rights movement now speak of women's rights as the human rights of all women, independently of the specific national legal frames to which specific codes and rules are bound. Women's organizations have also become increasingly acquainted with international human rights mechanisms and processes relating to enforcement and accountability. The outstanding example of this conceptual shift is the proposal of an Inter-American Convention on Sexual and Reproductive Rights initiated by CLADEM in 2000 for which a broad campaign is currently underway.

This expansion is not trivial. If nothing else it points towards the reframing of the very idea of citizenship and state boundaries. On the other it points towards the need of creating awareness among national actors – both governmental and non governmental – about the meaning and potential use of international instruments. Advocacy work performed in relation to CEDAW in Brazil has indicated, for a instance, that the large majority of professionals operating in the legal and judiciary systems are not informed about or acquainted with international human rights instruments. The same applies to social actors themselves, particularly at the grass root levels, whose agenda remains basically informed by the more conventional notions of entitlements that relate to national state legal frames. This means that a great gap can be identified between the increasing use of a human discourse by women's organizations and the understanding of what this really means and, most principally, of how these rights can be enforced and states called to accountability.

Measurement and Indicators

A third important distinction to be identified in the post Beijing era is the great investment made in regard to measurement – indicators of progress and regression – with respect to gender equality, in its various dimensions. This is one area where not just women's organizations but also international and governmental agencies have been effectively engaged. The results of these combined efforts have been extremely positive. The dramatic problems of data and information about gender inequality – that was desperately experienced in the 1970's, 1980's and early 1990's – is being quickly overcome.

As I have indicated in a brief presentation at the CSW High Level Panel on the Use of Statistics (March, 1st 2004) important problems of comparability across countries and levels still remain; and gaps of information are still striking in critical areas as it is the case of: intra-gender (women) race and ethnic disparities; information on maternal mortality rates; abortion incidence and related female mortality; women's sexuality and, most principally the exercise and enforcement of women's human rights. Also sustained and additional investment is still required to design and perfection methodologies to examine policy processes and not just policy outcomes. But even considering these limitations and flaws the progress made in the last decade, in Latin America and the Caribbean with respect statistical data and indicators is unequivocal, when we have in mind conditions prevailing before 1995.

Most important perhaps is to examine the new meaning of this leap forward with respect to measurement and indicators, having in mind the longer history of "statistical measurement". As we know, throughout modern history measurement has been systematically used by states, and other powerful actors, to administrate (control) societies. A more radical view on the subject would say that since the 18th century, statistical measurement has evolved in an intimate association with social engineering. Bringing this understanding to the domain specifically pertaining to gender equality and women's human rights the best known illustration of the data-social engineering nexus has been the extensive use of demographic data to create a basis of evidence to justify the control of women's fertility.

In light of that longstanding trend one extremely positive trait of the new era of gender inequality measurement is that tradition of using statistical data to control societies is being gradually turned upside down. Instead now, statistical data and indicators are being increasingly used by societies to critically assess the commitment and effectiveness of state policies. This "turn" was not invented by the women's movement. In the case of Latin America the use of data to expose policy failures has been with us at least since the 1970's when indicators have been produced and used to examine the policy biases of dictatorships in a political context in which any other form of political critique was not permitted. But during the 1990's a clear breakthrough was experienced with respect to methodologies of measurement aimed at examining policy outcomes, that tended to be obscured by conventional indicators. Within this new strand, the Human Development Index (1990) can be recognized as one early major step, while the Millennium Development Goals can eventually be portrayed as a culmination.

But yet more relevant is to recognize that societies at large and particularly NGOs and social movements have greatly benefited from this "turn". At least from the perspective of these two regions, in particular Latin America, a critical outcome of the 1990's United Nations cycle of conferences has been the increasing engagement of civil society organizations – there including women's networks and organizations – in systematic efforts to monitor policy implementation both globally and nationally. In their effort to devise better instruments to "control the behaviour" of government and multilateral institutions, NGOs are using methods and data produced by other institutions, while at the same time are investing in the creation of their own measurement tools.

One example is the IFC – Index of Fulfilled Commitment – that will be more closely looked at subsequently. Therefore, the domain of measurement and indicators of gender equality and women’s human rights appear as one area in relation to which a very positive appraisal can and should be made regarding post-Beijing achievements.

On the other hand, it must be also said that while indicators and policy monitoring tools have greatly improved, the policy scenario itself would become increasingly problematic with respect to the gender equality and women’s human rights. A note of caution is therefore required to remind us that monitoring policy processes and measuring policy outcomes do not resolve automatically obstacles in regard to policy formation, sustainability and effective implementation. This observation seems to be necessary because, particularly in recent years, the obsession for indicators and measurement seems to be gaining precedence over investments in the hard struggles that by the end of the day determine policy formation and implementation.

THE POST BEIJING POLICY CONTEXT

Once again, recurrence and distinctions can be identified in regard to the policy contexts that prevailed in Latin American and the Caribbean in the pre and post Beijing eras. A continuation of trends is easily identified in what concerns the long cycle democratization in Latin America and the economic environment of the Caribbean that since the mid-1980s has been determined by the implementation of structural adjustments policies. On the other hand the policy context of the Third Decade has also been transformed under the impact of new globalized economic environment (liberalization, privatization, market and financial integration). This section will look into those trends, examining separately the Caribbean and Latin America, with a particular focus on South American countries.

THE CARIBBEAN

For the Caribbean, the last decade, by and large meant the continuation and intensification of the policy framework of SAPs. The threats that loom over regional economies as their integration into the global economy proceeds through trade negotiations in relation to the WTO, the FTAA and the Cotonou Agreement (between former European colonial powers and the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, ACP countries). Integration has often meant loss of jobs due to the closure of enterprises that are unable to compete in liberalized markets: from agricultural products like bananas to manufacturing and tourism, CARICOM economies with their small size and fragile ecosystems, cannot compete against products that enjoy economies of scale, and offer lower wages than CARICOM workers receive.

Poverty continues to persist, despite the attention given to ‘poverty reduction’ as a ‘priority’ by many governments in the region. Indeed, the ranks of the traditionally defined poor have increased by addition of those who have seen their income and status severely eroded as a result of SAPs and globalization, and this includes large sections of the working population which is being thrown into informality. Economic pressures due to the continuation and intensification of the neo-liberal policy frameworks in the context of trade negotiations within the WTO, the FTAA and the European Union have preoccupied CARICOM governments and made it more difficult to deal with the social fall-out of increasing poverty, the spread of drugs and the violence and instability that accompanies this, and the HIV-AIDS pandemic.

The political climate of the CARICOM community continues to uphold democratic principles. Changes in government have not led to dramatic changes. But at the same time, the ‘marketization’ of governance – corporate influences and pressures to privatize the public sector – has created gaps in the relationship between the state and civil society in many countries with implications for transparency and accountability. Emphasis on market liberalization and foreign investment has also introduced levels of corruption previously unknown in these countries, and a widening gap between rich and poor.

SOUTH AMERICA (FEW GLIMPSES BEYOND)

After 1995, the political and policy context in Latin America can be grossly said to be divided in two phases. The first ranging from 1995 to 1999/2000 corresponded to a period of reasonable economic and political stability. By and large the democratic gains of the previous decade have consolidated in terms of both institutional frames and state-society accountability. But this was not always the case, as the Peruvian experience under Fujimori demonstrates. It is also important to observe that in the particular case of Mexico a late political transition has taken place in the second half of the 1990’s which led to the first multiparty elections (after 70 years of PRI rule) in 2000. Lastly it is important to remark that despite the fact that progress has been observed in regard to political and policy accountability, problems of corruption have not been fully resolved.

Even with the limitations listed above the 1990’s were a period of relative political stability that allowed for a gradual consolidation of democratic governance, meaning more that institutional democratic rules and periodic elections. Pratts (apud Guzmán, 2003) says that democratic governance is not just the quality of governments, but an attribute of societies and institutional systems at large. This consolidation, although yet fragile, is not to be minimized in a region that for most part of the 20th century has been plagued by political authoritarianism. Most principally, it is very relevant from the point of gender equality and the implementation of the Beijing policy agenda, because as Guzman (2003) reminds us: “the *relations between State, market and families are to a great extent the relations that sustain the ‘gender order’ in society*”. Therefore if state/market/families relations become more democratic, this will infuse the gender systems. On the other hand, more democratic gender relations can help sustaining democracy in its broader sense.

This amplified and qualified notion of governance must be borne in mind when we look at how guidelines and programmes deriving from Beijing have materialized. In most cases, policies have not been exclusively designed by governments but rather created in a tense frontier between the States and civil societies. Most principally – as mentioned before – implementation has been often the result of pressure and systematic monitoring. Although much research is still required to demonstrate that, Cairo and Beijing related policies in most South American countries may constitute an outstanding illustration of democratic governance at play in policy formation.

On the economic front most of the 1990’s was devoted, in Latin America to economic reforms aimed at adjusting national frames to the requirements of globalization. But this cannot be portrayed as a homogeneous policy landscape since even under the overarching hegemony of liberal oriented premises variations and heterogeneities exist. For instance, in Chile where a

stringent structural adjustment policy was implemented since the early 1980s, some space has been open under the new democratically elected government (1990) to address poverty. Mexico by 1994 was already experiencing an advanced stage of privatization and liberalization when it was caught by an acute financial crisis, the first in a series that later would negatively affect the region as a whole. While many countries have extended privatization to all social sectors, this has not been the case everywhere (Brazil is a clear exception). Lastly not all countries have fully privatized the state owned economic sectors; the best example is Uruguay where a referendum in 1992 has greatly limited the scope of privatization.

By 1995 liberal economic frames were already in place in practically all countries of the region and signs of the instability inherent to globalization were becoming palpable. But national economies were growing, even if rates were not exactly astounding (ranging between 2.5 and 5.0 per cent year), and relative stability was experienced in 1994 – 1995 and right after Beijing. However the regional economic scenario will radically change after 1997- 1998 when the spill over of the global financial crisis initiated in Asia would lead to the turmoil of currency devaluation in Brazil that then spread to Mercosul countries and associates. A sequence of economic crisis resulted, which would culminate with the Argentinean default in 2001. Regarding the social effects of the economic model, data produced by ECLAC indicates the economic reforms of the 1990's have in some cases improved social indicators (particularly education), but have not substantially reduced poverty and most principally have not diminished inequality, in fact in some countries they have implied the aggravation of concentration of wealth. Statistics show that the level of inequality in all of the countries in the region is higher than the world average and poverty levels have either remained stable or expanded in the 1990's. The persistent rates of inequality and poverty are extremely relevant for the Beijing policy agenda, since the Third Decade while gender equality and women's human rights gained legitimacy the rates of inequality among women themselves either became very visible or have definitely increased.

The last half of the Third Decade would be therefore marked by the intensification of the critique of the neo-liberal economic model, as so eloquently expressed by the Feminist Cartagena Initiative analysis presented in the preparations for the Financing for Development (FFD) (Lopez, Espino, León, Todaro, 2001)

“During the 90s, Latin America undertook the per capita growth road but to a much lesser degree than necessary to reduce poverty (6% or 7%) and even lower to the one registered in the region between 1945 and 1980 (5.5% annually). The growth of the 90s decade was achieved through the stability in the principal macroeconomic indices, low inflation, and reduced fiscal deficit. The opening of these economies was consolidated through the advancement of exports, which grew at an average 8.9% per annum, but this growth was achieved principally in México. The worldwide participation of the Latin-American exports continues to be insignificant and slightly superior to 5% of the total. A significant volume of Foreign Investment was attracted to the region but this advance did not completely translate into an increase in productivity; nearly 40% of the investments were fusions or acquisitions of existing assets. The achievements are even smaller in the social area: poverty was reduced with respect to the levels seen during the 80s, from 41% to 36%; but at the end of the last decade the number of poor people reached 211 million.

The social expenditure with respect to GDP rose to more than 12% although there were no advances in the reduction of inequity to more acceptable levels”.

Despite the depth and extension of these critiques and even if concrete policy measures contradicting the rules of the Washington Consensus have been adopted by the Argentinean government in 2001-2002, no substantive changes were observed in the conduction of macroeconomic policies in the region. And – as available official data indicates – the effects of these policies have been ravaging particularly in regard to employment. The economic stagnation – or in some cases open crisis has – unequivocally translated into political institutional instability. The Argentinean default political turmoil can be seen as an icon of the political scenario prevailing in South America in the second half of the Third Decade of Women, as it was preceded or followed by similar crisis in other countries: Ecuador, Venezuela, Paraguay, Bolivia.

Not surprisingly the perception of the population with respect to the benefits and cost of democracy is rapidly changing. Signs of discredit in democratic procedures, which were already identified by the Latino barometer since the late 1990s, have been strongly confirmed in the recently launched UNDP Reports “*Democracy in Latin America*”. The poll conducted by UNDP detected that in average the percentages of those who describe themselves as consistently democratic is of roughly 40 percent, while those who would approve an authoritarian regime that would provide economic security turn around 35 per cent. The collected data also informs that there is no substantial difference between male and female perceptions with respect to the gains and benefits of democracy. The factors lying behind these preoccupying figures would be the following:

The main problems are poverty and inequality, which do not allow individuals to express themselves on matters of public concern as citizens with full and equal rights and which undermine their social inclusion. A key issue is unemployment, since work is one of the principal mechanisms for social inclusion and the very exercise of citizenship, which has an economic component... Thus, despite the progress made, albeit in very precarious conditions, it must be recognized that both in terms of progress towards democracy and in terms of the economic and social dynamic, the region is experiencing a period of change that in many cases takes the form of widespread crisis.(UNDP, 2004)

The report exclusively address Latin American countries. But the description of Caribbean economic and political scenario provided here suggests that much commonality could also be found with respect to perception of democracy. Lastly, if the analysis of the South American experience of the first half of decade is correct in asserting that a period of stability and democratic governance has somehow favoured progress in gender equality and women’s human rights, the appeal of authoritarianism that lurks behind the data collected by UNDP may be interpreted as a threat emerging in horizon.

THE MORAL CONSERVATIVE WAVE

In addition to being affected by the previously mentioned economic and political instabilities, the Beijing policy agenda faces another important threat: the growth and expansion of fundamentalism. Although the manifestations of this global trend may have

assumed in the Caribbean and Latin America a different form than what is observed in other regions of the world, these forces are present in the two regions. They have expanded within countries but also influence the policy dynamics from outside. Moral conservative strands affect mentalities, social norms and the formation of policies, particularly in the domain of sexual and reproductive health and rights. In fact since 1999-2000 – when ICPD and IV WOW reviews occurred – and with greater intensity after 2001 these forces have, in each and every UN negotiation, tried to undo the 1994-1995 global consensus on gender equality and women’s human rights. Even if the whole they have not had much success within this ongoing trend one important gain they have made was the exclusion of ICPD and Beijing sexual and reproductive health and rights goals from the MDG indicators frame. More recently pressures to promote retreats in sexual and reproductive health existing policies are being exerted through bi-lateral agreements and donor assistance, particularly in the case of funds directed to HIV-AIDS prevention. Internally the expansion of moral conservative views on women’s roles, autonomy and particularly sexuality is identified in both Catholic and Evangelic manifestations. As it happens elsewhere fundamentalist forces build up on the spaces left open by lack of employment and social protection and are particularly appealing to male youth and very concretely pose a threat to the principle of secularity that is to be seen as a cornerstone of democracy.

ASSESSING IMPLEMENTATION: SOME ILLUSTRATIONS

THE CARIBBEAN EXPERIENCE

Since the Beijing conference in 1995, three ministerial conferences on women have been held in CARICOM: Guyana (1997), Trinidad & Tobago (1999), & St. Vincent (2004). These Ministerial meetings are attended by Ministers responsible for Gender Affairs (the new designation for the former Bureaus of Women’s Affairs), heads of the Bureaus of GA, and officials from UN agencies and invited NGOs (e.g. CAFRA – DAWN has never been invited, partly a reflection of our lack of visibility in this region). This session draws on documents prepared for the 2004 Meeting, and incorporates my own observations and analysis. At these Ministerial meetings government commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action are reaffirmed and new recommendations made for more effective implementation. Although these are the expected official moves; they do not reflect either serious commitment by governments or by women’s organizations to effectively make the platform meaningful to women’s lives.

In the meantime, Beijing, along with all the other PoAs from the global conferences of the 1990s, has been upstaged by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs – renamed by Peggy Antrobus as the ‘Most Distracting Gimmicks’). The MDGs emerged at a time when the backlash against women’s equality and equity was already becoming evident. Given weakness of indicators on gender equality included in MDGs and the lack of a feminist consistent gender perspective on other goals (which are just as important for women) the use of the MDGs as the main frame to orient resource allocation by CARICOM governments is rapidly removing the technical coherence and political power that the Beijing PoA represents for women.

Finally, in the Caribbean, the backlash against women's empowerment, gender equality and gender equity continues to express itself through open and implicit resistance to further advances in areas such as proposed legislation on sexual harassment (Barbados) and attempts to introduce affirmative action on behalf of boy's education (there is widespread concern throughout the region about what is termed the 'under achievement' of boys in the education system).

When considering specific areas or strategic objectives in the Caribbean the priorities are: Women in Decision Making; Women and Poverty (including women's participation in the economy), **Sexula and ??** Reproductive Health (especially in the context of the relentless spread of HIV/AIDS) and Violence against Women. Outcomes and obstacles in relation to these three areas are summarized below.

Women and decision-making

Women are gaining in confidence and competence in a number of fields and their visibility in leadership is clear, even if their numbers have not increased significantly in the ranks of senior policy makers.

With the exception of Dominica, where a quota system was introduced at local government level (the government has enunciated a policy of nominating women to fill at least two of the three positions on local councils if they were not among those elected), no major policy provisions were made since 2000 that have spoken explicitly to the goal of women and decision-making. Nevertheless, it is clear throughout the region that women are now more involved in decision-making in both public and private sectors, and the fields of sports and entertainment. In St. Lucia and the Bahamas women have been appointed as Head of State, a symbolic position in these countries patterned on British parliamentary democracy.

Women and the Economy/Poverty

For the Caribbean, the continuation and intensification of the policy framework of SAPs in the context of globalization has meant that poverty continues to persist, despite the attention given to 'poverty reduction' as a 'priority' for many governments in the region. In short, not much has changed for women in relation to the economy: women continue to be over-represented among the poor, to enjoy high participation rates in the formal economy, albeit under conditions that are less favourable than those of men, and to be as vulnerable as men to the threats that loom over regional economies as their integration into the global economy proceeds through trade negotiations in relation to the WTO, the FTAA and the Cotonou Agreement (between former European colonial powers and the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, ACP countries).

Integration has often meant loss of jobs due to the closure of enterprises that are unable to compete in liberalized markets: from agricultural products like bananas to manufacturing and tourism, CARICOM economies with their small size and fragile ecosystems, cannot compete against products that enjoy economies of scale, and offer lower wages than CARICOM workers receive. Indeed, the ranks of the traditionally defined poor have increased by addition of those who have seen their income and status severely eroded as a result of SAPs and globalization, and

this includes large sections of the working population which is becoming increasingly informalized, casualized and lacking in protection for the most vulnerable categories of workers.

In the Caribbean the overwhelming majority of poor households (as high as 96% in St. Vincent and the Grenadines) are headed by women. The link between women, poverty and the economy is well understood in this region and a number of initiatives have been taken to address the needs of poor women. These include:

- (a) Gathering of statistical and other information on poverty and situational analyses of women
- (b) National Development Strategies that explicitly refer to the gendered face of poverty
- (c) Provision of public assistance to neediest groups
- (d) Enhancement of women's access to credit and savings mechanisms.

However, many of these are sporadic, rhetorical, small scale, dependent on project funding and in no way compensate for the macroeconomic policies and global trends that exacerbate the problem of poverty. While gender analysis is applied in studies and surveys that are about women it is seldom integrated across government sectors. Even poverty assessment studies are often without a gender analysis, despite the understanding of the link between poverty and gender. Some countries (Anguilla, Barbados, Belize, and Guyana) have introduced gender budget initiatives, but many remain at the conceptual level.

All countries have public assistance programmes, however women are often the beneficiaries by virtue of their high representation among the poor, and not necessarily because such programmes had an explicit gender focus. And there is no evidence to suggest that any of these programmes have changed (i.e. given greater priority, or modified to incorporate new findings and insights on gender and poverty) as a result of the Beijing Platform of Action.

On the other hand, new programmes aimed at providing assistance to banana workers adversely affected by falling banana prices on the world market (e.g. EU funded Social Recovery Programme), and those emphasizing micro-enterprise development are often explicitly directed to women. And it can be argued that this reflects a greater awareness on the part of the international community of the need to ensure that women are beneficiaries of development assistance. It is also important to draw attention to the fact that, in the Caribbean in the 1950s and 1960s, poverty reduction was at the centre of national development planning. Today it is marginal, manifested through projects rather than national programmes, and often lacking in gender analysis.

In the area of women and the economy, three types of strategies can be linked to the Beijing Strategic Objectives:

- Strengthening the legal framework to prohibit discrimination against women and improve women's working conditions;
- Providing training opportunities for women and access to resources;
- Promoting a more equitable distribution of labour in the home.

Of these, programmes in the areas of micro-credit/enterprise and training are the most common. Role sharing in the household (the promotion of 'harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men') is almost never discussed in official document, except in

terms of maternity/paternity leave (in Belize the issue of paternity leave has been raised, though not taken further). Regarding training, the acquisition of education and skills do not necessarily translate into income-earning opportunities. Lastly regarding the legal infrastructure to ensure gender equality in employment, some countries have approved legislation relating to sexual harassment and equal pay for work of equal value (Belize and St. Lucia). In others, (e.g. Barbados and St. Kitts-Nevis) while the legislation has been tabled it has sometimes (e.g. Barbados) run into strong resistance by men who resent women's advancement. Nevertheless, even with the appropriate legislation, the intent of the law is not fulfilled without the machinery for their effective implementation.

A few reporting countries have increased minimum wages for the lowest categories of workers, largely women. Guyana's National Development Strategy explicitly names the setting up of a public ranking system that issues performance tables in relation to gender equity in the government and private sectors – but there has been no move towards implementation of this initiative. Since one of the clearest links between women and poverty is the unwaged work of women in the household, failure to address it means that no real progress can be made toward reducing the higher incidence of poverty among women. Another fundamental area for change toward gender equality is the attitudes towards gender of those occupying key political and administrative posts. The financial and human resource constraints faced by several of the Gender Bureaus, while undoubtedly related to the economic difficulties experienced in the region, must also be partly indicative of the low level of importance attached to gender across government sectors in all the countries.

GENDER AND ECONOMICS

“While Caribbean women generally have higher labour force participation rates than women in other regions (especially in Latin America), they are still less visible than men, operate in a stratified labour market, tend to have higher unemployment rates and greater barriers to entering the labour force (principally on account of their household responsibilities), and also perform unpaid labour in the household and in the agricultural sector.” Labour Force Reports for Trinidad and Tobago (1998-2001) show women's average income as a percentage of men's in occupational groups indicate the highest percentage for 2000 among clerks (women earn 87.8% of men's earnings), and the lowest among legislators, senior officers and managers (52.8%), craft and related workers (55.2%) and service and shop sale workers (57.7%). In the informal sector women are more likely to be positioned on the margins; in the case of small businesses women are less likely to have collateral (property, control over land etc.) and are therefore less able to access loans from banking institutions.] This situation has not changed much in the past 4 years. Indeed, the loss of employment, reduction in income and loss of services has been exacerbated by the downturn of economic activity in these years. In Saint Lucia the closure of some garment and electronic factories has affected women in particular; in ethnically stratified countries like Guyana, public sector cutbacks affect Afro-Guyanese women in particular; in the agricultural sector, particularly in relation to the banana industry, large numbers of women, farmers, farmer's wives and women labourers, have lost incomes as a result of the loss of guaranteed European markets resulting from WTO rulings. At the same time, disinvestment in social services has shifted increasing

responsibilities to women.”

Source: Report of Caricom Ministerial Meeting of 2004

Violence against Women

While it has been impossible to collect hard data on the subject, feminist in the region have a general impression that the level of violence in all societies have increased, and with it violence against women. Much of the violence is understood to be drug-related, while in Trinidad and Tobago kidnappings of the relatives of prominent business families are common. The ending of violence against women is a priority area for Caribbean women and, with support from UNIFEM and other regional institutions (including the Caribbean Development Bank!) there has been an on-going campaign, an expansion in services such as ‘hot lines’ and shelters. There have also been comprehensive and apparently effective training programmes with the police in all the countries. CAFRA serves as the focal point for both the campaign and training.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

The Caribbean faces a unique challenge in the global health arena due to the diverse body of countries found in the region. One cannot provide an overview of health without acknowledging the differences in investment and investment capabilities in the health care systems. For example, only 24 percent of women giving birth in Haiti do so with a skilled birth attendant while other countries such as Cuba, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines have 100% of births attended by a skilled birth attendant (HDR 2003). Average life expectancy in the Caribbean ranges from 50 in Haiti to 77.3 years in Barbados. For women the life expectancies are higher ranging from 50.5 in Haiti to 79.6 years in Barbados.

The Caribbean is second highest in prevalence of HIV/AIDS to sub-Saharan Africa. In addition to prevention efforts, key elements in curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS stem from ending stigma and discrimination while appropriately treating and caring for those people who are living with HIV/AIDS. Women often carry the load of care taking those members of their family living with HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean and throughout the world. Special attention therefore needs to be paid to the impact of the epidemic on the lives of women as individuals, as caregivers and as the head of their households.

The Beijing Platform for Action (PfA) in 1995 and the “Beijing +5” conferences set and renewed a global commitment to women’s health. There are five strategic objectives outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action:

- Increase women’s access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and quality health care, information and related services.
- Strengthen preventive programmes that promote women’s health
- Undertake gender-sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health issues
- Promote research and disseminate information on women’s health
- Increase resources and monitor follow-up for women’s health.

The language for the Beijing Platform for Action on health was initially defined through the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action. The Programme of Action defines the right to reproductive health:

Everyone has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States should take all appropriate measures to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, universal access to health-care services, including those related to reproductive health care, which includes family planning and sexual health. Reproductive health-care programmes should provide the widest range of services without any form of coercion

The Beijing Platform for Action takes the language of the ICPD further recognizing, in paragraph 96 women's right to control her sexuality and sexual relations on an equal basis with men.

Problems and Obstacles

Vertical Funding Streams

A major obstacle to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the Caribbean is the vertical structure of funding streams to HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, and the health sector at large. HIV/AIDS policies and programmes are not contextualized within a broader sexual and reproductive health and rights framework perpetuated by vertical funding. This means that HIV/AIDS programs (funded through vertical streaming) are not developed or implemented in the context of a broader sexual and reproductive health and rights approach. In addition to vertical funding and donor driven priorities, the emphasis on the Millennium Development Goals for HIV/AIDS epidemic this disjunction tends to be aggravated because of the way money is spent and how projects are funded as the MDGs further direct funding to Maternal Health and HIV/AIDS leaving sexual and reproductive health and rights neglected. In addition, since the MDGs have not incorporated broader S&R H&R goals outside of the reduction of maternal mortality there is a clear risk that policies retreat back to conventional MCH programmes (that had not been consistently transformed after 1995).

Ironically, the direction of funding streams towards either HIV/AIDS and/or Maternal Mortality occurs in the context of having acknowledged globally that the most effective programs in this regard happen within a broader framework of sexual and reproductive health and rights. In regards to women's health, MCH seems to be the driving paradigm which means that women's health issues of women are addressed in the context of pure reproduction and of women as reproductive agents. The woman as a sexual agent (in need of services around sexual health) is an idea that is almost never addressed. Another new trend to be underlined is the emphasis on health promotion and the family health programme because there once again the idea that women's health is analogous to maternal health is perpetuated. Last but not least, since maternal mortality rates in some Caribbean countries are very low – in Barbados it is practically zero – the focus on maternal mortality and maternal health (including post abortion care) *may* become entirely marginalized as it is no longer seen to be an issue. While if the frame had been

conceived as sexual and reproductive related mortality and morbidity programs at the ground level could be more effective in responding women's needs.

While some in the development sector acknowledge the necessity to incorporate HIV/AIDS programs into a larger sexual and reproductive health rights framework there is little political will to do this—a problem further perpetuated by the similar challenge of funding streams. In addition, a gender perspective is lacking in the majority of HIV/AIDS programs.

An illustration of these flaws can be seen in the recently published document on the Health Reform Strategy for Barbados that acknowledges that women do not have easy access to family planning services. In the same strategy however reproductive health is defined purely in terms maternal health and demographic growth, neglecting to acknowledge that women's health is dependent on access to quality health services outside of the scope of maternal health, including family planning services. The section on women's health discusses dynamics in the family contributing to women in the workforce, breast and cervical cancer, and obesity, leaving aside the critical sexual and reproductive health and rights dimensions emphasized by the recommendations of the Beijing PfA.

Reproductive cancer is also an important health issue for Caribbean women. Death by cancer is one of the biggest killers of Caribbean women; in Jamaica breast cancer is listed as the number one cause of death for women followed by cervical and stomach cancer. Cervical cancer rates are high: in Jamaica 43/100,000 women get cervical cancer while in Haiti the cervical cancer ration is 94/100,000. Considering the high rates of reproductive cancer in particular countries, especially cervical cancer that is directly connected to the spread of HPV, education campaigns need to be strengthened. This can happen by strengthening sexual and reproductive health services.

Abortion

Abortion is illegal in most Caribbean countries (abortion access is legal in most of the territories). Because of the lack of access to abortion services, women often seeking illegal abortion services, and are thereby being denied access to appropriate, affordable and quality healthcare. (Some researchers have made note of the case of 'safe abortion' in the context of illegal abortion. While there is evidence that this practice may exist in the Caribbean, we must continue to question how safe abortion practices really are when they occur in an unregulated environment. The abortion debate has currently been revived in Trinidad and Tobago where an NGO called ASPIRE is working to bring the issue to the forefront of the debate on women's health.)

Young People and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Caribbean youth often have severely limited access to adolescent reproductive health services due to existing programs and policies. The age of consent for sexual activity in most countries in the Caribbean is 16 and because of this law, service providers cannot allow young people access to family planning services. In Jamaica, this policy has recently been adjusted to allow for the distribution of some contraceptives to young people. However, in several countries, such as

Barbados, this law serves as a distinct barrier for young people's access to sexual and reproductive health services. In addition to limiting service provision to young people in existing clinics youth do not have any access to youth friendly centres, which distribute contraceptives, because they simply do not exist given the current policy. In Trinidad, "Rapport", an adolescent reproductive health facility exists for young people but many young people do not have access to these services. These programs seem to exist in some cases, within gray areas of the law.

In sexual and reproductive health and rights, abstinence based programmes clearly distract policy makers and young people themselves from the critical issue of an individual's choice (ability to choose) to make decisions in an environment free of moral coercion and with access to quality information. As articulated earlier, all sexual education is seen as needing to be done in an 'age appropriate' way—often governed by the age of consent law. This means that young people under the age of 16 often do not have direct access to information around sex and sexuality but rather are the focus of abstinence-based programming.

In addition, one can argue that abstinence based programming does not address the reality of young people's lives in the Caribbean, in a region where recent studies (PAHO) show that in some groups of young people around 40% have engaged in sexual intercourse before the age of 10. (A significant number of these young people reported being coerced at their first intercourse. This data points to a number of issues that need to be addressed in regards to the sexual health of young people including violence and sexual abuse).

Highly Vulnerable Populations

Last but not least, groups such as sex workers and MSM experience situations of great vulnerability yet are further marginalized through policy, which makes their actions illegal. In some cases the HIV pandemic has spurred public discourse on the decriminalization or legalization of sex work or the laws that criminalize MSM behaviour. This is exemplified in a recent public debate on sex work and homosexuality in the Barbados. However, such dialogue is still thwarted by conservative forces despite the knowledge that improving the policy environment could decrease the vulnerability of groups high at risk for contracting HIV/AIDS such as sex workers and MSM.

It is also relevant to note that the CARICOM Pan Caribbean Partnership on HIV/AIDS Strategy, a key document in the regional programming on HIV/AIDS, does not identify women as a vulnerable group in their own right.

Integration of a gender perspective

On the whole there seems to be a severe shortage of programmes, which openly address STIs, HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health issues with a gender perspective. In most countries and institutional settings there seems to be a general confusion about what gender and gender integration really means. As it has been mentioned before gender approaches are constantly confronted by emphasis put on 'male marginalization', that derives from the data informing that young women are excelling men in education (exemplified by the greater number of women in the University of West Indies System). This idea has proven to be problematic as it seems to be taking attention away from some of the core gender issues that

women face: gender discrimination in the workplace, sexual harassment, and violence against women including but not limited to domestic violence. It is imperative that programs and policies consider a gender perspective in order to maximize effectiveness.

THE CARIBBEAN: ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

There are clear limits to the implementation of any of the strategic objectives of the Beijing PoA in the Caribbean. Political will is critical in order to design and implement effective and credible policies and programmes that can substantively address the Strategic Objectives of Beijing. However, this is largely dependent on an active women's movement. The inertia of the movement in the Caribbean at present remains an important obstacle to progress in this area. The absence of advocacy efforts is particularly critical in the area of sexual and reproductive health given the dramatic impacts of the HIV-AIDS pandemics. Nevertheless, it must be said that few women's organizations have continued to take initiatives and to keep the Beijing PoA 'on the table. Indeed, the fact that it continues to be a point of reference is thanks to the reminders of the United Nation, the continuing struggles of the transnational/global women's movement that worked on these issues for and the efforts of individual women, some in local organizations, many linked to transnational networks, and some operating out of their own deep commitment to gender justice.

SOUTH AMERICAN COUNTRIES: MEASURING POLICY COMMITMENTS

The post Beijing new wave of measuring and monitoring was particularly creative in South America. In most countries civil society networks and mechanisms emerged to monitor policy implementation in the most diverse areas. In few cases, this was done in articulation with formal accountability bodies that either existed before or were created after Beijing. Great investment was made in the design of methodologies, one example being the ICC, the Index of Fulfilled Commitment developed by the Gender Unit of FLACSO Chile.

Social Watch originally created an index to measure the fulfilment of country commitments to the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD, Copenhagen, 1995) and the Beijing PfA in 1997. The methodology examined elements of political will, indicators of implementation and distance in relation to outcome targets. Later on "Iniciativa" the Chilean feminist civil society network created to prepare for Beijing has adopted the index adjusting and expanding it in order to cover diverse areas and not just the few that were considered by the original Social Watch frame. The frame was then expanded by the FLACSO Gender Unit to be applied to other countries in the region. The Index of Fulfilled Commitments frame combines sets of information/data on policies and programmes in three baskets of pondered indicators – which in many ways are similar to the conventional index used to measure consume. These baskets cover three strategic areas of the PfA: Women's Political Participation and Access to Power, Women's Economic Autonomy and Poverty; and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (that encompasses gender based violence).

The baskets were defined in each country in consultation with feminist academics and advocates. This allowed for some variation of chosen variables and pondering rules across countries as a

way to cope with existing differences in the national databases as well as to take care of the greater or lesser relevance of indicators in each country. Just as an illustration, in the case of Women's Economic Autonomy and Poverty: Argentina included information on male to female unemployment ratio; Brazil has an indicator on white and black women wage gap, Colombia measured the percentage of women earning more than one minimum salary, Ecuador emphasized access to credit and Uruguay included data on female employers.

The indexes were defined in relation to goals established for each variable. As an example the goal that provides the parameter to measure progress in regard to political participation is to achieve 50 percent of female parliamentarian seats at all levels. In the economic autonomy area, one goal is that female salaries should one day reach 100 percent of male salaries. The original idea was to cover the 1995-2000 period, but this has not been possible. Although South American gender database can be considered of good quality and reasonable updated – in comparison to other regions – for five countries, in this first phase of the project, the analysis was performed just for the period between 1995 and 1998 project (the two exceptions are Chile and Brazil). Even if the methodology still requires adjustment and improvement, the ICC was clearly an important step forward because it combines indicators of process and of outcomes, and it is content and context specific, while retaining the potential for comparability.

The FLACSO effort has practically been completed for seven countries: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay and the Bolivia data compilation is almost finished. A table with synthetic results of how goals are being met by each country is presented below. The results indicate that progress has been made since 1995, even if the levels of achievement vary across period, strategic areas and countries. For instance, between 1995 and 1998, practically no progress has been observed in Chile, Brazil and Ecuador, while in other countries gains have not been less than seven points. But even within this general stagnation in Chile and Ecuador progress was made in regard to Participation and Access to Power. In addition, in Chile and Brazil were it has been possible to advance the analysis for the 1998-2000 period, a reasonable improvement was detected for the general index of 4 and 5 points respectively.

In what concerns the indexes found for specific strategic areas few aspects call attention. One is the general increase in the Political Participation domain, which is never less than 6 points and in some countries have meant great leaps forward, as in the case of Peru (17 points) – an amazing record when we take into account that this was the Fujimori era – and Paraguay (24 points). This progress in most cases is to be attributed to electoral quotas adopted as a result of Beijing and in some cases (as in Paraguay) to the general transformation of the political system that took place in the period. In relation to Economic Autonomy, Employment and Poverty the gains have been rather meagre and in many cases stagnation and regression is clearly observed. These findings are quite consistent with what has been described with respect to the macroeconomic environment. Lastly, with just one exception (Ecuador), progress is very evident in the domain of sexual and reproductive health and rights. This is not just positive but also rather surprising given that this is an entirely novel domain of gender equality, which has been subject to much policy controversy, as well as virulent resistance and attack on the part to the conservative forces.

ICC –Index of Fulfilled Commitment- Synthetic Results

Country	Participation and Access to the Power			Economic Autonomy and Employment			Women's Health and Sexual and Reproductive Rights			Total		
	1995	1998	2000	1995	1998	2000	1995	1998	2000	1995	1998	2000
Chile	20.78	25	33.1	80.71	75.18	79.05	66.63	69.12	71.13	61.87	61.64	65.73
Brazil	14.75	16.26	20.77	67.2	67.95	70.93	57.18	55.63	61.45	46.38	46.61	51.05
Country	Participation and Access to the Power		Economic Autonomy and Employment		Women's Health and Sexual and Reproductive Rights		Total					
	1995	1998	1995	1998	1995	1998	1995	1998				
Ecuador	9.37	15.78	75.39	73.32	49.49	48.68	49.98	50.3				
Colombia	17.89	22.03	76.53	78.05	80.33	83.65	63.63	70.34				
Argentina	32.26	40.26	76.47	74.97	41.02	63.53	53.18	62.7				
Uruguay	8.13	13.94	71.2	72.19	21.29	44.66	38.15	49.72				
Peru	28.26	45.69	56.09	59.6	55.5	58.98	47.58	54.25				
Paraguay	11.27	35.65	72.7	69.52	58.2	67.77	52.37	60.36				

The existing knowledge about the political and policy environment in the seven studied countries also allow for an exploratory hypothesis in regard to actors, factors and forces that would potentially explain the variations between the indexes. For instance, gains in political participation can be attributed everywhere to a combined investment of institutions – particularly political parties -, state machineries and women´s advocates. On the other hand, the case of sexual and reproductive health achievements, most of them can be interpreted as resulting from the ongoing and unrelenting pressure by women´s organizations. In contrast, the meagre gains registered in the economic – poverty front must be analysed much more clearly in relation to the market dynamics than as a result of policy measures or feminist advocacy. In this area, even the few gains that have been detected must be looked at very cautiously. For instance, eventual improvements in the gender wage gap may not be as positive as they may look at a first glance. In the case of Brazil, for instance they express mostly a convergence due to the systematic loss in average male wages during the 1990 and early 2000 and not to real gains in female salaries.

The full interpretation of the ICC will certainly require additional efforts in terms of qualitative analysis of each country institutional and societal environment, as well as a series of qualified dialogues to more precisely interpret their meanings. But even at this preliminary stage the methodology developed by FLACSO provides us with a creative and effective tool to measure policy progress, and it could be eventually shared with other regions of the world.

CONCLUSIONS

In Latin America and the Caribbean, under the impact of the IV WCW, the last Decade of Women has been rich and meaningful in what regards the adoption of gender and human rights frameworks to re-orient policies design and implementation. Great progress has been observed in the area of data collection and gender based indicators. This step forward has enhanced a plethora of civil society initiatives aimed at monitoring policy progress with respect to gender equality, particularly in Latin America. Nevertheless not few problems, gaps and distortions can still be identified with respect to conceptual clarity of what gender and women´s human rights – in particular sexual and reproductive rights – mean and imply for policy design, planning and evaluation.

Also in regard to implementation a great distance still remain between what has been promised by the 1990´s conferences and the realities of political will, financial resources and institutional capabilities for effectively implementing the recommendations of the IV WCW. Policy progress has been uneven and not sustained in time (two steps ahead are often followed by three steps backwards). This limitations can be to a larger extent attributed to structural factors deriving from the overall economic and political environment, there including the moral conservative resistance to certain dimensions of the the Beijing PfA.

However, in the case of South American – where consistent and systematic methodologies for assessing the policy processes and their outcomes have been developed – data indicates that, despite obstacles and political resistance – progress has been made, even in the case of the more difficult and controversial content areas. Gains have been less evident in the area of economic autonomy and poverty that are directly affected by macro-economic constraints that have not changed substantially in the last ten years. On the other hand, achievements can be identified in

the areas of political empowerment and sexual and reproductive health and rights (including gender based violence). In both cases, what ever progress made can and should be attributed to the persistent advocacy role performed by women´ s organizations, in some case operating under great funding restrictions, or else facing extremely unstable political and economic environments at national levels.

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