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Integration of Women in the Economic and Social
Development of Latin America

Note by de secretariat

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1. CEPAL resolutions and activities of the secretariat which culminated in the Regional Conference at Havana

Resolution 321 (XV) adopted at the fifteenth session of the Commission (Quito, March 1973) recommended that the secretariat should prepare a study on the participation of women in the development of the region and the measures to be taken to eliminate discrimination and the lack of educational, employment and economic opportunities for women.

One of the measure taken by the secretariat was to hold a Regional Seminar for Latin America on the Integration of Women in Development, with special reference to demographic factors, which was held at Caracas from 28 April to 2 May 1975. Among its resolutions it was recommended that after the United Nations Conference of the International Women's Year a regional conference should be held to evaluate its results and to consider their application to the Latin American region.

The recommendations of this Seminar were presented at the sixteenth session of CEPAL (Chaguaramas, May 1975), where they were duly noted and it was decided to transmit them for the consideration of the World Conference at Mexico in July 1975.

The Regional Seminar on the Participation of Women in Economic, Social and Political Development: Obstacles to Their Integration, which took place at Buenos Aires from 22 to 30 March 1976, recommended, among other measures, the convening of a working group composed of specialists designated by the governments in accordance with an equitable geographical distribution, for the purpose of preparing a preliminary draft Regional Plan of Action.

In accordance with this recommendation, the Technical Consultative Meeting held at the CEPAL Office in Mexico City from 10 to 14 January 1977 prepared a preliminary draft Regional Plan of Action.

At the seventeenth session of the Commission (Guatemala, 25 April to 5 May 1977), it was unanimously decided that CEPAL should hold a Regional Conference at the government level in Havana to consider a Regional Plan of Action in this field.

/This led

This led to the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in the Economic and Social Development of Latin America (Havana, 13-17 June 1977) at which the Regional Plan of Action on the Integration of Women in the Economic and Social Development of Latin America was adopted and the Executive Secretary was recommended to convene an extraordinary session of the Committee of the Whole of CEPAL in the course of 1977 for the final adoption of the Plan.

2. Consultations formulated by the secretariat and their results

The secretariat widely circulated the Report of the Havana Regional Conference and requested comments from governments, agencies of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental agencies.

Many governments and agencies replied to the consultation, expressing their approval of the Regional Plan of Action concerned. Only one government and five agencies made comments on the Plan, as shown in the relevant document which has been distributed for this Extraordinary Session. From perusal of the comments it is concluded that none of them would mean any substantial change in the Regional Plan of Action prepared at Havana.

It should also be noted that the resolution recommending final approval of the Regional Plan of Action also recommends that a Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into Latin American Economic and Social Development be convened as a preparatory activity for the World Conference of 1980, and a meeting of a group of government experts in order to make an appraisal, prior to the World Conference, of the implementation of the Regional Plan of Action.

In view of the general acceptance of the Regional Plan of Action and the relative proximity of the Regional Conference, the secretariat wishes to suggest the advisability of giving final approval to the Plan prepared at Havana now, without prejudice to the introduction at the next Regional Conference of such changes as may be dictated by the experience gained in its implementation.

Admittedly, in its present state the Regional Plan of Action has some shortcomings, among which may be mentioned the failure to establish priorities, the vagueness in indicating to whom the action

/proposals should

proposals should be directed in some fields, and insufficient consideration of the feasibility and impact of many of the proposals. In the secretariat's view, however, the Plan provides a broad and solid basis for action and the existing disadvantages may well be turned into future advantages. In fact, paragraph 46 of the World Plan of Action establishes certain general priorities within the framework of which the governments, either on their own or in the form of sub-regional action, can define their priority fields of action. Moreover, in the present stage of activities in this field, it may be an advantage not to have expressly indicated the agents to whom the action proposals should be directed, in view of the diverse institutional structure of the countries of the region and the possibility of activities of a sub-regional character. Lastly, the feasibility and impact of the proposals should be considered in the light of the experience of putting them into practice.

The resolution adopted by the Regional Conference at Havana, in recommending that the Executive Secretary of CEPAL should be kept informed of the progress made in implementing the Plan of Action and should maintain contact with the Presiding Officers and the governments of the region concerning progress toward implementing programmes in the field of women's integration into development, is indicating an adequate procedure for collecting, systematizing and evaluating experiences which might make possible changes in the Plan advisable.

3. Secretariat activities

The secretariat has no wish to go into a detailed account of the many activities carried out in this field even before the existence of a Regional Plan of Action. Suffice it to record that in all the Regional Appraisals of the International Development Strategy (Quito, 1973; Chaguaramas, 1975; Guatemala, 1977) the status of women in Latin America has been considered.

Since the Havana Regional Conference and in spite of the fact that the Regional Plan of Action recommended by that Conference had not yet been finally adopted, the secretariat has been engaged in

/intensive activity

intensive activity, which is detailed in the relevant document distributed for this Extraordinary Session. This is a good opportunity to consider some aspects in detail.

The Special Unit for the Integration of Women in Development has already been set up and has shown itself to be a suitable instrument for undertaking the recommended tasks. This Unit has been working with CEPAL on the projects it is carrying out on critical poverty and rural social development, participating in the relevant activities, and endeavouring to include the aspects related to women in both these projects.

Missions have also been undertaken to virtually all the countries of the region, which has provided a first panoramic view of the country situations with respect to the integration of women in development.

At its second session, the Consultative Committee of the Fund of Voluntary Contributions for the United Nations Decade for Women assigned 400,000 dollars to CEPAL to be used in line with the criteria laid down in General Assembly resolution 31/133 and by the Consultative Committee itself.

These criteria have reaffirmed the secretariat's conviction that its activities should be oriented along the following general lines:

- (a) Activities the focal point of which would be women from poor rural and urban groups and from the other marginal or more vulnerable sectors of the population;
- (b) Technical assistance activities centered on the lowest income strata and designed to encourage their organization to facilitate selfhelp efforts; activities designed to develop basic research and the collection and analysis of data; information activities;
- (c) Activities and projects connected with development plans or programmes with a global, sectoral or multisectoral approach, which provide funds for evaluation and continuity with domestic resources;
- (d) Activities and projects designed to expand, develop or supplement development projects or programmes already existing or in course of preparation;

/(e) Priority

(e) Priority will be given to countries which have already established their own strategies and priorities for the integration of women in development and established national machinery linked with the system of formulation and implementation of development policies and plans. Special priority will be given to the less developed, land-locked or island countries. It must be determined in each case whether the countries have the minimum infrastructure necessary for the execution of the project.

In accordance with these priorities and in order to identify the national projects existing in the region, cables were sent to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the following countries: Barbados, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Trinidad and Tobago. Cables were also sent to the UNDP Resident Representatives in those countries, to the CEPAL Office in Mexico, to the CEPAL Office in Port of Spain and to CARICOM, transcribing the text of the cables addressed to the various countries and enlisting their co-operation.

The basic issue is to incorporate women in development by preparing, expanding and complementing programmes linked with national development policies and plans. Thus, in projects apparently intended for both sexes (such as educational, training and employment projects) it would have to be determined whether they actually reach both sexes or whether there is differential access, and in that case a remedy to the situation would have to be sought. Similarly, it would have to be ensured that those projects in which women play an important part in accordance with the sexual division of labour in force (nutrition, health, etc.) or those in which they make a basic contribution in various spheres of activity (integrated rural development, rural social development, community development, etc.) and those in which, sometimes inadvertently, their participation is not duly explained, really do include them in their activities.

/To sum

To sum up, effective measures must be taken to ensure that in the preparation, execution and evaluation of projects account is expressly taken of how they effect the position of women, how they benefit or harm them, and in what manner they incorporate women's contribution to development, instead of merely creating a new category of projects.

Within this context the priority assigned to the relationship between the activities carried out in this field and national global or sectoral development policies and plans should be understood within this context.

For this very reason the secretariat has requested the collaboration of the UNDP Resident Representatives, from whom it has received a very favourable response. Until such time as the countries have adequate mechanisms linked with their national planning systems, the National Office of UNDP will continue to be a central element in regional and sub-regional technical assistance in this field. At all events, the secretariat intends to continue collaborating as closely as possible with UNDP.

It should be kept clearly in mind that as long as countries lack the mechanisms in question, fail to establish their goals and objectives in this matter, and do not identify and establish their action priorities, then the activities undertaken will have only a minor impact. Technical assistance on these aspects can be very useful.

Moreover, consideration should be given to the possibility of sub-regional action based on the decision of several countries to concentrate their activities on some basic areas (employment, education, etc.) with the aid of the corresponding specialized agencies.

In view of the regional structure of the United Nations system, inter-agency co-ordination at the regional level presents various difficulties. It has been and continues to be the practice of the CEPAL secretariat, however, to hold inter-agency meetings not only in order to exchange information but also as a way of ensuring a multi-sectoral unified and integrated approach to development and increasing the impact of activities carried out in the countries or sub-regions.

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It is the secretariat's understanding that the other activities entrusted to the regional economic commissions by the World and Regional Plans of Action and the resolutions of the General Assembly, which include research work, the evaluation of situations and prospects, and the holding of meetings and conferences, should be subordinate to the various forms of technical assistance, the constant objective being development for the benefit of the poorest groups of the region.

The progress made so far suggests that the difficulties encountered lie on the one hand in the novelty of the problem of the integration of women into development and on the other in the unsuitability of the action, concepts and techniques employed from the point of view of achieving development centered on the quality of life. Thus, when it is no longer just a question of thinking in terms of economic results or the general access of individuals to services, but also of effectively improving the situation of a specific category of individuals in the social, political, economic and organizational aspects, many gaps are to be observed in the action, concepts and methods used to date.

Put in this way, the subject of the integration of women in development is seen to have a new potential which must undoubtedly give renewed determination to our will to keep fighting for the economic and social development of Latin America.

