



GENERAL

LC/CAR/G.262

17 October 1988

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean

CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENT AND CO-OPERATION COMMITTEE

Advisory Group Meeting on Women Traders in the Caribbean
St. George's, Grenada
9-11 May 1988



REPORT ON THE ADVISORY GROUP MEETING
ON WOMEN TRADERS IN THE CARIBBEAN



UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean



REPORT ON THE
ADVISORY GROUP MEETING ON WOMEN TRADERS
IN THE CARIBBEAN

ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING¹

1. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Advisory Group Meeting on Women Traders in the Caribbean was convened at the Hibiscus Hotel in Grenada, 9-11 May 1988.

2. The purpose of the meeting was:

(a) To discuss the findings of the country studies on women traders and identify priorities for action;

(b) To advise on strategies for implementation of follow-up action;

(c) To prepare a plan of action in relation to agencies with relevant competence;

(d) To draft a list of parameters and indicators for future research in the field of women traders;

(e) To specify training needs;

(f) To formulate recommendations within the context of mainstream priorities at national and subregional levels.

Attendance²

3. ECLAC consultants who did research and prepared documents on women traders in Barbados, Dominica, Jamaica, the Leeward Islands and Trinidad and Tobago, attended the meeting.

4. The meeting was also attended by government representatives from Grenada, Saint Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago; representatives from the CARICOM Secretariat, the Women and Development Unit of the Extra Mural Department of the University of the West Indies (WAND), the Dominica Hucksters Association, The Traffickers Small Business Association of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Grenada Community Development Association (GRENCODA) and the project of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Barbados. Marketing specialists and development workers invited by the government of Grenada also attended as observers.

¹ The Agenda for the meeting is attached as Annex I.

² A list of participants is attached as Annex II.

Opening session

5. The meeting was declared open by the Honourable Grace Duncan, Minister of Women's Affairs. In her opening address, the Minister observed the importance of hosting an Advisory Group Meeting on Women Traders in the Caribbean. She noted that this meeting was timely, as Grenada was in the process of forming a women traders association. She recognized that approximately 80 per cent of the inter-island traders were women and expressed satisfaction to the fact that there were agencies and institutions who were actively engaged in doing research and developmental work in this field.

6. The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Communication, Works and Division of Women's Affairs, also made an opening statement.

7. The opening session included presentations by:

Ms. Sonia Cuales - Social Affairs Officer
ECLAC/CDCC Women in
Development Programme

Ms. Monique Lagro - Expert-on-Mission
ECLAC/CDCC Women in
Development Programme

8. In her presentation, Ms. Cuales briefed the meeting on the historical background of the ECLAC/CDCC project "Women in Development and Trade" which had started in 1984. In noting the spread effects of the pilot study on women traders in Trinidad and Tobago, she observed that ECLAC research on the geographical movement of women traders has developed into two directions: the inter-island trade in agricultural produce, and the so-called suitcase trade in scarce commodities and consumer goods such as wearing apparel and accessories. This development, she added, has taken shape in documents prepared on the cases of the Dominican Republic, Guyana and Jamaica, as regards the first type, and of Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, the Leeward Islands and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines as regards the second type.

9. Ms. Cuales stressed the need for acknowledgment and recognition of women's contribution to economic development in the subregion through their participation in these income-generating activities in the so-called informal sector. She suggested that ECLAC's project on women traders, which produced a wealth of data, has tried to contribute to such acknowledgment.

10. One of the significant effects of the project has been the continuation of in-depth research of the second type within the framework of another subregional project which is concentrating on the establishment of a data base on selected areas of women in social and economic development.

11. She hoped that the meeting would facilitate the implementation of required action in this field.
12. Ms. Lagro highlighted some of the findings of research carried out so far and noted some of the concerns for the future of the participation of women in the inter-island trade.
13. She presented an overview of the geographical movements of women involved in trading activities and explained how their involvement accounts for a very significant contribution to food supply in the subregion, employment generation and economic development in general.
14. In noting the preliminary findings related to socio-cultural aspects of these women and their families, she emphasized that research on these matters should be pursued in the near future in order to complete the picture on the subject matter.
15. A documentary video film "God Give Us the Talent - The Hucksters of Dominica", produced by ECLAC, was presented in illustration of the issues raised by Ms. Lagro with regard to the inter-island trade in agricultural produce.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

16. The country studies were presented by the various consultants involved in their implementation. The discussions of the relevant presentations are summarized as follows:

Trinidad and Tobago

17. Ms. Daphne Phillips, who worked on the pilot research "Women Traders in Trinidad and Tobago" (LC/CAR/G.151) in 1984, described the geographical movements of women who trade in Trinidad and Tobago. She pointed to certain social and economic characteristics of the female traders, and elaborated on the findings of her research. These included interesting data for example on age structure, level of education, type of domestic arrangements, union status and family composition, productive activities, daily time budgets of women traders, and their total earnings.
18. The consultant distinguished two types of trade in the informal sector: one was seen as a direct response to economic needs; the other was a regular trading activity, permitted and controlled by existing agreements with CARICOM.
19. Ms. Phillips' recommendations included co-ordinated planning in agriculture and trade, regional zoning of industries, and expansion/improvement of the central market in Trinidad.

20. As a follow-up to the pilot study, a team of students conducted a small survey among women traders in Trinidad and Tobago in 1988. Ms. Anne Rajack, who co-ordinated the survey, presented the findings of "Exploratory Research of the Activities and Experiences of the Inter-Island traders Operating in Trinidad and Tobago" (consultant's paper).

21. She noted the following problems faced by traders from Grenada and from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: praedial larceny, inadequate facilities on the port and at the Central Market, bureaucratic red tape with regard to documentation and financial transactions.

22. Ms. Rajack also drew reference to the implications of these problems on the socio-cultural status of the traders in Trinidad, and their response to the situation. Traders have a very low status in society, and this negative perception is internalized. They do not perceive themselves as important and are consequently reluctant to seek any assistance.

23. Her recommendations sought to address the problems identified, focusing on the importance of traders' associations in the islands of origin and also in Trinidad and Tobago. The consultant felt that an affiliation between a traders' association in Trinidad and Tobago and vendors' and farmers' associations operating in Trinidad and Tobago might avoid a lot of problems.

24. She suggested that further research be undertaken with a view to increasing the visibility of the contribution of these women traders in the field of agricultural development, food production and distribution.

Barbados

25. Dr. Christine Barrow presented the study "Women and Inter-island Trading with Barbados" (consultant's paper) for which the research had been done by Ms. Dawn Marshall and Ms. Avril White. In recognizing the fact that only a very limited number of interviews had been conducted, Dr. Barrow observed that the study allowed for an examination of five main areas:

- (a) Personal characteristics of the traders;
- (b) Nature of the trade;
- (c) Predictions for the future;
- (d) Policy recommendations;
- (e) Suggestions for further research.

26. Dr. Barrow observed that the traders do not keep accounts and that, as a result, business and household expenses are not separated. With reference to the future, it was noted that the longevity of the group implies that they will continue to perform their roles in food distribution. However, she expressed concern that in view of the fact that Barbados is diversifying its agricultural sector, reducing its food import bill will cause severe competition for the inter-island traders who are already thinking of searching for new markets.

27. She furthermore advised that policy recommendations be introduced with caution lest they result in the decline of trading and further marginalization of women traders. Practical recommendations included the following: provision of refrigeration/cold storage facilities, insurance coverage against spoilage, flexibility on the part of immigration and customs departments, developing and expanding marketing links with the modern sector, co-operation by the formation of associations or collective action, and the introduction of simple accounting procedures.

28. In conclusion, Dr. Barrow emphasized the need for further research on the economic and social situations of the traders and; on the contribution of the trading practice to social mobility of traders and their children. Finally, Dr. Barrow suggested that the relationship between trading activities and social reproduction be examined very carefully.

29. Ms. Ogarro, representing the Dominica Hucksters Association informed the meeting that family life is affected when the female hucksters are away trading. She explained that although close kin take care of the children in most cases, not all women traders can count on that support. In some cases, the young daughters take over from aging grandmothers or mothers in the trading profession. As a result the age group of female traders tends to decrease.

30. She observed furthermore that quite often a woman trader is trading the agricultural produce cultivated by her spouse or partner. But the trader also buys from farmers. On her return she brings back dry goods; onions, potatoes and so on. Her spouse/partner then takes the responsibility of selling these goods.

31. Mr. G.L. Sidney Simmons presented an historical perspective of the inter-island trade. He elaborated on the cost factor as a major area of concern. He contended that certain technical problems and inefficiencies such as heavy post-harvest losses, financial losses to individual traders, limitations on market penetration and reduced foreign exchange earnings are difficult to tackle on an individual basis. As a result the 'middle man' factor enters the trading cycle. He stated that support from individual governments and national private sector bodies could improve the

performance of the trade. He also sighted the Dominica Hucksters Association as leading the way forward, possibly as a model for other Eastern Caribbean states.

32. Some participants commented on emerging roles in the informal sector and related new job categories. In this connection mention was made of the emerging 'middle man', who now purchases from the traffickers and trades with supermarkets and others. It was also pointed out that, for example, the Dominican Hucksters Association is studying the possibility of assuming some responsibility of importing/retailing. Participants urged that special attention be given to the effects of the trade on women, the home, family life, etc., and other social aspects.

Dominica

33. Ms. Hannah Clarendon presented a case study on women traders in Dominica. She pointed out that inter-island trading creates employment, increases export and foreign exchange earnings, improves the standard of living of the people, and contributes greatly to the nutritional status of the population. Despite these positive factors this activity is not being seriously considered when policies of export and trade are formulated and implemented.

34. Ms. Clarendon proceeded to observe that existing research data on traders tends to be of a technical nature. Information on the people involved in the trade is usually absent. She stressed the importance to determine what kind of data should be collected, why, for what purpose and to whom the data should be presented. Her research identified a need for data which explain various aspects of women's involvement. Such data should give direction to future planning that will enhance the role of women in development.

35. In the discussion on credit, members of the Dominica Hucksters Association informed the meeting on credit opportunities offered by the association as well as on repayment to farmers for goods bought by hucksters on concession. It was agreed that there is room for improvement in this area. The problem of insufficient cash which, in some instances, has led to drug trafficking was raised. The representatives of the Dominica Hucksters Association stated very emphatically that there had been no evidence so far. It was contended that if a member were found guilty of drug trafficking, he or she would be expelled from the association.

Leeward Islands

36. In his presentation, Mr. Pancho Geerman identified two lines of informal trading in the Leeward Islands: agricultural goods and non-agricultural commodities.

37. The consultant explained the geographical movement of the traders in both lines of trade. He suggested that further analysis

of the trade and the involvement of women be undertaken, not only from a technical perspective, but also as regards the relevant social factors. Comparative research might be a useful approach to increased understanding of the subject.

38. Mr. Geerman suggested that data collection take place at four levels: (a) regional, (b) national, (c) shipping and trading agents, and (d) traders. He also advised that programmes be developed to improve skills in post-harvest technology, including handling and packaging. The need for increased knowledge on trade and customs regulations was identified for the purpose of informing regional or inter-regional policy.

Jamaica

39. The Jamaica consultant, Ms. Alicia Taylor, traced the historical development of "higglering" in Jamaica which has been a traditional occupation of women since the days of enslavement. Over the past year "higglering" has constituted a direct response to economic and political changes in the country. Most of the trading in agricultural produce has transformed into non-agricultural products such as garments, footwear, apparel and household items. Ms. Taylor observed a shift from heavy trading in Panama (presently experiencing political and economic upheavals) to trading in Haiti. She noted that this development has been described as a characteristic feature of the informal sector which might be affected if the trade is formalized.

40. The consultant pointed out that the formal sector is unable to provide jobs for all. As a result, the traders could be perceived as a group of women who have created their own employment and are making a contribution to the Jamaican economy. She noted that the traders recognize the need for an association, but the 'individualistic' nature of the trade might present difficulties in achieving such goal.

41. The meeting agreed that the research findings discussed and substantive data presented at the meeting have laid the basis for immediate action, for further research on the subject, and for relevant recommendations at policy levels, both regional and national. There was a conviction that both technical and socio-cultural factors should be addressed. It was noted that the trade and women's participation therein should be studied from a historical perspective.

Dominica Hucksters Association

42. A representative of the Dominica Hucksters Association presented an overview of the operations of the association. He noted that hucksters respond to training, and that training is crucial and important to the development of the trade. He gave examples of training programmes offered by the association as an

orientation to the trade, qualifying traders for access to a government license in order to trade legally. He also elaborated on the association's record keeping system which encourages self-assessment, increases receptiveness to change and improvement of the activity.

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM AGENCIES AND INSTITUTIONS

43. A representative of the Caribbean Rural Development and Advisory Training Service (CARDATS) made a presentation on the work of the organization, emphasizing its focus on areas of marketing and post-harvest technology as these relate to the inter-island traders.

44. The officers of the FAO Post-Harvest Losses Project No. PFL/RLA/001(PFL) informed the meeting that their project relates directly to traders, and is involved in building market facilities, training programmes, design and testing of equipment and packaging materials used by the traders.

45. The United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) representative supported the view of the meeting as regards the strengthening of associations. She opted for the installation of day care centers as opposed to hostel accommodations as had been suggested by some participants.

46. The Grenada Community Development Association (GRENCODA) representative informed the meeting that GRENCODA is a member of the Caribbean People's Development Agency (CARIPEDA) and was involved in the collection of data, based on work done with traders in one parish of Grenada.

47. The representative of the Women and Development Unit (WAND) Extra Mural Department of the University of the West Indies indicated that WAND could assist in the area of training of traders for individual and personal development.

48. The CARICOM representative outlined that in 1985 the priority field identified was "Economic Empowerment of Women". The need for dynamic marketing skills towards utilization of Caribbean indigenous food instead of non-Caribbean products was emphasized.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Technical level

1. There is a need to look at the existing marketing system, and improve the areas which will ease the problems of trade.

2. In many instances, there was a lack of basic facilities which are needed for the proper functioning of the trade. These include cold storage houses, sheds at the ports and markets, display trays for goods, proper weighing machines, improved and additional toilets and cafeterias.

3. Post-harvest spoilage of goods is high. One of the reasons being, the lack of knowledge and skills of the traders in the handling and packaging of agricultural produce. Training in these two areas is a priority activity, which may reduce spoilage and loss of goods, while greatly improving the viability of the trade.

4. Although there are security measures both on the ports and in the markets, praedial larceny is still a big problem. Improvement of security is urgently recommended.

5. Problems related to completion of required documents for the trade need to be addressed. It was suggested that a simple accounting booklet be designed for use by the traders, in order to avoid the complicated and time-consuming documentation process.

6. Collective action is recommended for the following:

- Purchasing of goods on a contract basis;
- Shared centralized trucking services;
- The operation of a wholesale market to avoid the present time-consuming and expensive individual purchase from farmers.

7. Access to credit should be improved. Credit facilities should be identified to accommodate training and to finance projects which traders may want to implement with a view to the development of the trade.

8. Problems related to insurance coverage need to be addressed.

Social level

9. Recognizing that female traders have multiple responsibilities, technical assistance should be given in areas where women could have more free time for personal and occupational development.

10. Further in-depth research is necessary in order to measure the contributions of women traders. Such information will increase recognition of the trading activity.

11. Considering the silence surrounding the totally unresearched issue of sexual harassment, it is necessary that the various non-governmental organizations which are already active in this area be approached to undertake studies.

12. There is a need for investigation on the reasons for the drop out rate of women in the trade. Measures should be taken to curb this growth.

13. Training programs on leadership, communication skills, and personal development are urgently required.

Political level

14. For further development of the trade, the formation of associations is important. These associations should receive the support of governments.

15. A case study should be conducted on the Dominica Hucksters Association. From this study strategies for forming traders' associations could be learnt.

16. While recognizing the importance of supporting policies and agreements, these measures should neither remove nor weaken the flexibility of the trade as practiced by the women.

17. It has been reported that in some instances the time permitted to the trader to conduct business is too short. In the light of this, it was recommended that visa requirements, with respect to time duration of trader in a country, be flexible, where necessary, to allow them to complete their transactions.

Annex I

Advisory Group Meeting on Women Traders in the Caribbean
Grenada, 9 - 11 May 1988

AGENDA

Day 1

- 0930 h. - 0945 h. Official opening
- Welcome address
by Mr. Algernon Antoine,
Permanent Secretary,
Ministry of Communications, Works and
Women's Affairs
 - Opening address by The Honourable
Mrs. Grace Duncan, Minister in the
Ministry of Communications, Works and
Women's Affairs
- 0945 h. - 1030 h. - Feature address
Ms. Sonia M. Cuales,
(UN ECLAC/CDCC) "Women in Development and
Trade in the Caribbean"
- Ms. Monique Lagro,
(UN/ECLAC) "Women in the Inter-island
Trade"
- 1030 h. - 1045 h. Coffee break
- 1045 h. - 1145 h. Presentation of country studies:
Consultants/Resource Persons
- 1145 h. - 1230 h. General discussion
- 1230 h. - 1400 h. Lunch break
- 1400 h. - 1445 h. Presentations of country studies
(continued)
- 1445 h. - 1500 h. General discussion
- 1500 h. - 1515 h. Organization of working groups

1515 h. - 1600 h. Working groups in session
1600 h. Closing

Day 2

0900 h. - 1030 h. Working groups in session
1030 h. - 1045 h. Coffee break
1045 h. - 1230 h. Working groups in session
1230 h. - 1400 h. Lunch break
1400 h. - 1500 h. Working groups in session
1500 h. - 1600 h. Plenary session:
Participatory drafting exercise
1600 h. Closing

Day 3

0900 h. - 0915 h. Opening Inter-Agency Meeting
0915 h. - 1030 h. Introduction and presentation
of summarized overview
1030 h. - 1045 h. Coffee break
1045 h. - 1230 h. - General discussion
- Drafting of recommendations
1230 h. - 1400 h. Lunch break
1400 h. - 1500 h. Closing session

Annex IIList of Participants

ARUBA

Pancho Geerman
Consultant

BARBADOS

Vernie C. Barnes
Programme Officer
WAND

Christine Barrow
Senior Lecturer
Sociology, UWI

Sandra Edwards
Programme Assistant
UNICEF

Jacqueline Schuur
Nutritionist and
Marketing Officer;
Project PFL/RLA/001
(PFL)/FAO

Kees Schuur
Agricultural Engineer;
Project PFL/RLA/001
(PFL)/FAO

G.L. Sidney Simmons
Market Consultant/
Project Analyst

DOMINICA

Hannah Clarendon
Consultant

Cecil C. Joseph
Executive Secretary
Dominica Hucksters Association

Dora Ogarro
President
Dominican Hucksters Association

GRENADA

The Honourable Grace Duncan
Minister in the Ministry of
Communications, Works and
Women's Affairs

Algernon Antoine
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Communications,
Works and Women's Affairs

Patrick Bubb
Comptroller of Customs
and Excise

Winnifred Duncan
Administrative Assistant
Women's Bureau

Linda Evans
Trader (Trafficker)

Maria Noel
Executive Secretary
Nutritionist
Ministry of Communications
And Works

Monique Noel
Agricultural Officer

Robert Reid
Regional Marketing Specialist

Joan St. Bernard
Programme Co-ordinator
Women's Bureau

Judy Williams
Development Worker
GRENCODA

JAMAICA

Alicia T. Taylor
Sociologist
Urban Development Corporation

ST. LUCIA

Bernadette Springer
Women's Affairs Officer

ST. VINCENT

Benjamin Crighton
Trader (Trafficker)
Traffickers Small Business
Association

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Lucy Durgadeen
Committee on the Integration
of Women in Development

Daphne Phillip
Lecturer, UWI

Ann Theresa Rajack
Research Assistant
Agricultural Extension
UWI

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

Sonia M. Cuales
Social Affairs Officer
Women in Development Programme
Port-of-Spain
Trinidad

Monique Lagro
Expert-on-Mission
Port-of-Spain
Trinidad

Jessie Mencia
Secretary/Stenographer
Port-of-Spain
Trinidad

