

ECLAC/CDCC Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting
on Gender Mainstreaming
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**REPORT ON THE AD HOC EXPERT GROUP MEETING
ON GENDER MAINSTREAMING**

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REPORT ON THE AD HOC EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Introduction

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (ECLAC/CDCC) convened a meeting of experts in the field of gender mainstreaming over a two-day period, 13-14 January 2000, in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The experts discussed and evaluated the research process and findings of studies conducted by the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat on the status of gender mainstreaming in 10 Caribbean countries. The study, which was funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) Gender Equity Fund, documented and evaluated the implementation of governments' mandate to incorporate gender analysis and planning in all aspects of development planning and was to be used by the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat to, inter alia, strengthen its technical assistance programme in the area of gender mainstreaming.

The following experts made up the Group: Dr. Eudine Barriteau, Director, Centre for Gender Studies, Barbados; Ms. Anita Zetina, Coordinator, Women's Affairs Department, Belize; Ms. Sonja Harris, Consultant, Jamaica; and Ms. Denise Noel DeBique, CIDA/GEF Regional Adviser, Trinidad and Tobago. The ECLAC/CDCC secretariat was represented by Ms. Asha Kambon, Social Affairs Officer and Ms. Roberta Clarke, Social Affairs Officer, who acted as secretary to the Expert Group. (See list of participants attached.)

Agenda item 1: Opening

Ms. Clarke welcomed participants on behalf of Dr. Len Ishmael, Director, ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, who was unable to attend. Special thanks were conveyed to Ms. DeBique for CIDA's funding for the 10-country study on gender mainstreaming in the Caribbean. Regret was expressed that the participants invited from the Centre for Gender Studies, University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Commonwealth Secretariat were unable to attend, as they would have further enriched the ensuing discussions.

Ms. Noel DeBique expressed her gratitude at having been invited to attend the meeting and informed participants that CIDA has been responding to the needs of the Caribbean on gender mainstreaming based on the requests by regional institutions. Recent examples of CIDA's assistance included an expert group meeting on planning which put the issue of gender mainstreaming into perspective; the funding of a gender mainstreaming project in Tobago; assistance to Guyana which impacted on the process of gender mainstreaming; the preparation of documents, studies and research in this area and a project with the Planning Institute of Jamaica. She cited the meeting as being very timely as it was important for CIDA to understand and identify projects for funding which were directly beneficial to civil society. Participants were informed that CIDA was in the process of finalizing a draft regional strategy on gender. The organization was particularly concerned about developments in the thinking on gender mainstreaming within the CARICOM countries, within academia and regional Non Governmental Organization (NGO) bodies.

Ms Anita Zetina noted the timeliness of the meeting as the Department of Women Affairs was at the initial stage of implementing gender mainstreaming processes within the Belizean public sector and was further developing its gender plan. Belize's latest efforts in this area saw participation by the Ministry of Human Development, Women and Youth in a workshop on gender mainstreaming which resulted in Cabinet's approval to develop a gender mainstreaming strategy in the public service.

Dr. Eudine Barriteau welcomed this opportunity to discuss gender mainstreaming concerns in the subregion given the challenges in conceptualization of gender as a tool of policy analysis. Dr. Barriteau expressed concern over the existing bottlenecks, conceptual challenges and organizational difficulties in implementing gender mainstreaming. The appropriate point of entry for implementation of gender mainstreaming processes within public administration varies from country to country depends on existing capacities. This, she thought, was not uniformly understood in all countries. Dr. Barriteau, therefore, considered the meeting critical to furthering the comprehension of the challenges which countries experienced in attempting the gender mainstreaming strategy. The meeting offered the opportunity to speak to these problems in an open and unambiguous manner.

Ms. Sonja Harris expressed both caution and optimism on the possibilities offered by the strategy of gender mainstreaming to advance gender equity in the region. The ECLAC study provided an opportunity to define the conceptual framework for gender mainstreaming in the current Caribbean context. She noted that the movement from a Women in Development (WID) to a Gender and Development (GAD) approach over the last 20 years had complicated and diffused attempts to address gender equality issues. The lack of evaluation of governmental policy and programmes has further complicated this situation.

Ms. Asha Kambon also noted her pleasure that the ECLAC/CDCC was able to host such an important meeting because of the need to speak clearly about the issues affecting gender mainstreaming in the region, i.e. pitfalls, possibilities and strategies for the subregion in the process.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda

The following agenda was adopted:

1. Opening remarks
2. Adoption of agenda
3. Review of the study and presentation of research findings
4. Round-table discussions, identification and discussion of emerging issues, and needs assessment on gender mainstreaming
5. Recommendations
6. Closing

Agenda item 3: Review of the study on gender mainstreaming
in the Caribbean

The three researchers, Roberta Clarke, Sonja Harris and Asha Kambon, presented the findings of the research undertaken in the 10 countries. Ms. Harris indicated that her assessment of the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming processes in each country was based on achievement in the five following areas: applications in the gender mainstreaming process; organizational structures; organizational capacity; linkages between stakeholders; and results in gender mainstreaming.

Generally, the research process revealed the existence of an uneven understanding or appreciation of the goal of gender mainstreaming within the countries studied. Further, the countries were at varying points in the implementation process and, in general, the health sector was used as the entry point for gender mainstreaming. Little evidence of a systemic process or coordinated approach for implementation was found. Some countries were found to be lacking organizational support to facilitate the process.

The researchers agreed that throughout the region the strategy of the establishment of interministerial committees had not been particularly effective in mainstreaming the responsibility for gender equity within the public sector. The interministerial committees were often comprised of persons without decision-making capacity within the ministries, which they represented. Meetings were held irregularly and often excluded key stakeholders within the public sector.

Another problem noted was the lack of capacity to implement gender mainstreaming in the subregion. A number of the national machineries lacked personnel trained in policy analysis and planning. In addition, a lack of coordination and cooperation among stakeholders was observed.

The status of the national machineries was thought to have improved over the last 10 years, particularly with regard to increases in staffing. It was observed that while women continued to update their capacity to direct the national machineries, the institutions within which they operated were inherently weak. A missing link seemed to be the ability to deal with the political structure. Women's Bureaux were also, notably, the most adversely affected with changes in government as no systems existed to ensure continuity.

Many of the national machineries for women appeared to be unsure of the composition of their constituency and the issues affecting them. In some cases because of ambiguous political will, bureaux, although understanding their roles, did not have the capacity to implement gender mainstreaming.

It was thought that the process of gender mainstreaming was occurring in a climate, which might be unconcerned or even hostile to gender equality issues. This manifested itself in the apparent lack of respect for the heads of national machineries for women who generally were among the lowest salary earners at their level even when their public sector competencies were increasing due to their participation in training programmes. In three of the countries researched, the heads of bureaux were

the lowest paid within their ministries. This seemed to give credence to the observation of the lack of respect for gender issues and experts in the field.

It was agreed that, in general, social and economic planners accepted the validity of gender planning. The Beijing Platform for Action recommended the assignment of a strategic gender planner to the national machineries to ensure the incorporation of a gender perspective within policy and programmatic formulation.

It was noted that presently no regional strategy existed to coordinate and evaluate gender mainstreaming efforts. It was indicated that in this regard participants in the research have asked that ECLAC/CDCC play a coordinating role.

The meeting agreed that consensus on a strategy, political will, familiarity with the gender mainstreaming framework, definition of constituency, knowledge of the political process and understanding of power dynamics were necessary ingredients for countries and the implementers to move the process of gender mainstreaming forward.

Agenda item 4: Round-table discussion, identification and discussion of emerging issues, and needs assessment on gender mainstreaming

Participants noted that the largely inaccurate assumption of capacity in the area of gender mainstreaming which existed in the Caribbean resulted in inappropriate funding by international agencies to the subregion. It was felt that continuous evaluation-oriented consultation with regional experts on the status of gender mainstreaming in the Caribbean should be maintained. Such consultations could inform the focus of training needed as well as the target groups. The participants noted that gender mainstreaming within the public sector had been a focus of concern since the 1980s. However, historical links or references to inform and guide the current phase in mainstreaming were lacking.

In the context of limitations, the participants reflected on the possibility of decreasing levels of commitment to gender equity concerns and, therefore, gender mainstreaming. There was a noted difference between the goals of technocrats and those of the political directorate. The political directorate tended to be more concerned with meeting the popularly articulated needs, particularly for services to boys and men.

The participants explored the extent to which the perception of male marginalisation was informing this development. The participants pointed out that education statistics, particularly statistics from the UWI were insufficient to provide an accurate picture of the status of women and men. Reference was drawn to the continuing pay gaps which favoured men at all levels of educational achievement, to higher unemployment rates amongst women, to lower levels of technical and vocational training amongst women and to increasing levels of violence against women. The participants agreed that there was a pressing need for a more systematic collection of social data which would explore gender gaps in the economic and social sectors.

There was recognition that the three levels of planning, namely, national, sectoral and gender should be integrated. Gender mainstreaming was seen as

influencing and challenging each sector within the State to incorporate gender analysis in the planning processes. It was noted that many of the national machineries have not operationalised the relevant components of the Beijing Platform for Action. An enabling environment for this would include the presence of strong political commitment and will, institutional capacity, intersectoral cooperation, the establishment of time-frames, targets and benchmarks. In this, the national machineries required technical assistance which provided uncomplicated tools and action plans to achieve gender mainstreaming.

Concern was expressed with the continued deficiency in social data collection in the region. In recognition of the importance of a regional thrust toward collection of statistics and data, it was noted that although the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) was currently in the process of collecting social statistics for the formation of a data bank for its countries, there still existed the opportunity for the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat to facilitate data collection on gender indicators and on indicators of gender mainstreaming. This was especially important given the rise in the awareness and use of social statistics by governments and the private sector. In this respect, it was again reiterated that the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat should provide technical assistance towards monitoring the status of gender mainstreaming in the subregion and giving focus to the way forward.

The participants identified issues and questions which needed to be addressed for the enhancement of the gender mainstreaming process. These included the need for definitional clarity of gender, gender and development and gender mainstreaming goals. The participants agreed that gender mainstreaming should be transformative of bureaucratic structures and processes and development goals and policies. Data and research should inform gender mainstreaming initiatives. Evaluation of gender mainstreaming should not be based only on quantitative measures or indicators.

The participants explored the socio-economic and political context within which gender mainstreaming was being promoted as a mechanism for ensuring gender equity and questioned whether this context was an enabling one. In this regard, they noted a growing disrespect for the discipline of Gender and Development. Politically, there were signs of voter disaffection and alienation. The values of individualism associated with the neo-liberal economic policies appeared to contribute to social fragmentation rather than cohesion. Crime, violence and increasing economic polarities are factors which undermine social integration.

The participants drew reference to the changing nature and roles of the State. While the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by concerns for social equity and the role of the State in ensuring social mobility, the current economic policies called for a reduction of social welfare programmes. In light of these analyses, the participants posited that there might be a disjuncture between goals of gender equity and development and the existing economic and political framework.

An enabling environment was seen to be of utmost importance to the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming. Participants, however, queried whether the gender mainstreaming process itself was the way to create an enabling environment. The enabling factors for gender mainstreaming included:

- (a) Political will;
- (b) Technical expertise (manifested in an understanding of gender analysis and planning and an understanding of the constituency);
- (c) Data collection; and
- (d) Collaborative planning and analysis.

A substantial level of gender sensitivity and knowledge among public sector personnel was indicative of organizational capacity to pursue gender mainstreaming strategies. Other indicators of preferred entry points for gender mainstreaming included:

- (a) Availability of disaggregated data/research;
- (b) Political will (at both decision-making and technical levels);
- (c) Institutional capacity and skills (intersectoral and within the national machinery);
- (d) Sectoral commitment; and
- (e) Commitment of human and financial resources.

In discussing the content of political will at the technical level, the participants agreed that a strategic understanding of gender power relations and structures was a prerequisite to ensuring effective gender mainstreaming as was a larger vision of social equity. Participants emphasized that there were debilitating consequences to gender mainstreaming initiatives pursued in the absence of a sufficiently enabling environment. They indicated that premature implementation could result in distortions and regression, wastage, spoilage of future commitments to the process and diminution of the status of machinery.

The participants discussed the necessity for developing indicators of implementation for the purpose of monitoring the outcomes of gender mainstreaming. National machineries for women should do that monitoring at the national level. In this regard, the participants considered that the machineries had a central role in research, policy formulation and the provision of technical assistance to sectoral ministries. However, monitoring was also the responsibility of regional agencies.

It was again reiterated that the national machineries for women were willing to take the gender mainstreaming process forward but needed assistance through training. In order to meet the demands of coordination of gender mainstreaming initiatives, the capacity of the technical officers within the national machineries should be strengthened, where necessary, through training in: (a) gender dynamics; (b) gender analysis and planning; and (c) in the interpretation and application of research. In addition to pursuing training, the participants agreed that the national machineries should take lead in extending gender training at regular intervals for other public sector actors.

The participants agreed that there was a need for a regional vision and consensus on the meaning of gender equity and the process of gender mainstreaming. The national machineries for women were primary actors in the development of this consensus. Standardized gender training across the Caribbean subregion was one way in which such a consensus could be built. In that vein, the participants noted the CIDA-funded project on the development of training modules by the Centre for Gender Studies, University of the West Indies.

The participants considered that the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat should have a coordinating role at the regional level in advocating and supporting the gender mainstreaming initiatives. At the national level, the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat should continue to provide technical assistance as well as undertake evaluations of such initiatives. In addition, the secretariat should be able to identify organizations to support and facilitate gender mainstreaming at the national level.

Agenda item 5: Recommendations on the way forward

At the conclusion of the wide-ranging discussions on the imperatives of gender mainstreaming, the participants made the following recommendations:

1. The establishment of an ongoing ad hoc expert group on gender and development whose mandate would be to:
 - (a) Provide support to the ECLAC/CDCC technical assistance programme; and
 - (b) Oversee gender and development goals and processes to follow up implementation of United Nations conferences on women.
2. The development of gender training modules; and
3. The institution of periodic gender training programmes by the Centre for Gender Studies, University of the West Indies.

Agenda item 6: Closing remarks

Ms. Clarke thanked participants for the insightful discussions on the status of gender mainstreaming in the subregion. Generally, it was agreed that the meeting located gender mainstreaming in the current development context which was a much-needed approach. The timing of the meeting was thought to be appropriate and strategic for Belize with respect to its gender mainstreaming implementation process.

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