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WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN IN THE 1990s

In this issue of "Notas", the Information Service of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) includes the document entitled *Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1990s: diagnostic elements and proposals* - LC/L.836(CRM.6/4) - prepared by the ECLAC Secretariat for the sixth session of the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean, to be held at Mar del Plata, Argentina, from 25 to 29 September 1994.

This sixth session will serve as the regional preparatory meeting for the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in 1995.

ECLAC analyses the status of women in the framework of its general proposal on "changing production patterns with social equity", whose central postulate is that the full development of Latin America and the Caribbean can only be achieved through an integrated approach, combining changing production patterns, economic growth and ever greater degrees of social equity. In this context, the full participation of women in society, the economy and the exercise of power without discrimination and with access to the same level of training as men, is necessary for their own benefit and for that of society as a whole.

Four main topics are discussed in the document: i) women in the regional scenario during the 1990s; ii) gender equity in the proposal on changing production patterns with social equity using an integrated approach; iii) the situation and status of women in the 1990s: core issues of the quest for social equity, and iv) conclusions and proposals.

I. WOMEN IN THE REGIONAL SCENARIO DURING THE 1990s

At what is almost the halfway mark of the 1990s, the regional context, against which the situation of women needs to be evaluated, is one of complexity, with many contradictory elements; none the less, the desperation of the 1980s is absent today. In the political sphere, the consolidation of democratization processes continues apace, negotiated settlements have brought an end to armed conflicts, and human rights are increasingly being respected. The establishment —or rather re-establishment— of pluralist political systems has led in most countries to a growing democratic culture and the emergence of new social actors, who demand transparency in the conduct of public affairs, greater room for participation and the incorporation of other issues into the political arena. Democracy guarantees the women of the region, as citizens, the same juridical and legal rights as men. However, it should be said that neither the experience gained in the 1980s as a result of social movements organized by women or which involved their participation, nor the importance or the impact that these movements have had in the processes of democratic renewal, has resulted in greater room for initiative for women or enhanced their access to the decision-making process. Women rarely participate in the upper levels of democracy, whether in government or in political parties. It is a major achievement that the issue has gained legitimacy in society and has been incorporated into the agendas of different decision-making bodies.

In the economic sphere, the countries of the region began at the outset of the 1990s to change the direction of their development strategy, a process which involved the reimposition of strict fiscal discipline and anti-inflationary controls within the framework of trade reforms which reduced the levels of effective protection. It has consequently been possible to raise savings and investment rates, initiate a gradual process of change affecting the productive sectors, and establish a more effective commitment to intraregional cooperation, which took the form of various formal agreements on economic integration. This has led to a moderate

economic recovery and relative financial stability over recent years.

Any analysis of trends within the region must bear in mind that although such trends may appear to be valid for most countries, they vary greatly in their intensity and that the situations which are encountered in Latin America and the Caribbean are very diverse. At almost the mid-point of the 1990s, a pattern of moderate growth is being maintained, featuring considerable price stability, control of public-sector spending and a large balance-of-payments current account deficit, offset by a major net inflow of capital. The export sector continues to lack dynamism, despite its diversification and expansion, levels of investment have not been sufficiently high as to ensure sustainable growth over the long term and a backlog of social problems has built up. Although the economies of Latin America are operating on a new footing, the rate of economic growth has not been such that unemployment and underemployment have fallen. The element of uncertainty, always present in the region, is heightened by non-economic factors and the changing international economic scene is sending contradictory signals.

The dominance in the economic sphere of strategies which emphasize the market as the principal allocator of resources has not generated answers to profound inequality and has indeed accentuated inequality in the case of the vast majority of women; this has been reflected mainly in a job supply which is discriminatory, segmented and increasingly inconsistent with the greater level of education attained by women. The gap between women's expectations and their actual job prospects is increasing and constitutes an obvious form of gender discrimination.

The adjustment process brought to bear in the region was both recessionary and regressive, and this was reflected above all in real wages and in employment. Thus, serious problems and difficulties remain, most obviously in the forms of persistently high rates of poverty, inequitable distribution of income and, quite often, a deterioration in the provision of social services, and this not only renders current democratic processes fragile, but also calls into question the sustainability and indeed the very nature of the economic recovery so far achieved. In addition, only a handful of countries have managed to fully consolidate the adjustment and stabilization policies undertaken and the process is marked by many interruptions.

In this period, the productive sectors of the region have undergone a gradual transformation. This has been reflected in the increased diversification of export patterns, the growing number of firms able to compete globally, greater entrepreneurship, and the growing flexibility of the labour regimes, which strengthens the link between wages in the formal sector and productivity. Nevertheless, this transformation has served to further accentuate the dual nature of production patterns, with a marked increase in the so-called "informal sector", which, though expanding rapidly, generates mainly low-productivity jobs and even lower wages. This dual nature of production patterns has markedly increased the variety of situations facing women. Although part of the female population has been integrated into the emerging patterns, women's lack of exposure to the fields of science and technology (both fields with which one is required to be acquainted if seeking work in the sectors in question), and the discrimination they face in gaining access to the job market, have led to a situation where growing numbers of women have joined the informal sector, especially those segments with lower productivity and lower wages. Similarly, even though many women have found employment in highly dynamic sectors, such as export-oriented agribusiness, the jobs to which they have gained access have, for the most part, been characterized by low skill levels and low pay; further, they are jobs which provide little possibility for organizing or negotiating better working conditions.

The technological change which is essential if the region is to enjoy improved linkages with the global economy is related to the ability to incorporate technical progress and foster productive linkages. This process requires strengthening technological infrastructure, entrepreneurial skills and the quality of human resources, as well as the adoption of policies which facilitate the technological learning process, productive linkages and recognition of the systemic nature of competitiveness (ECLAC, 1992a). This is the field which has seen the least progress as regards a more equitable integration of women. Although the number of women studying science and technology at tertiary institutions has increased from 0.37 to 0.80 with respect to the number of men between 1970 and 1990 (United Nations, 1992), women do not as a general rule gain access to higher level employment in this field, job training is limited or non-existent and they face cultural barriers in gaining acceptance in these fields. Although technological progress is an essential part of improved regional integration, the absence of trained female human resources in these fields will lead to an increase in the labour-market discrimination women currently face.

Latin America and the Caribbean have the least equitable income distribution in the world, which exacerbates the fragmentation of society and is a source of political and social tension (ECLAC, 1993a and 1994). Against this backdrop, the situation facing women also acquires greater complexity, given that an even greater gap is developing between a minority that continues to show major improvement and a vast majority which is worse off than before; at the same time, both groups are subject to wage discrimination at all levels.

Poverty is one of the most dramatic and recurrent problems facing the region. At the beginning of the 1990s, around 200 million people —or 46% of the total population— were not in a position to satisfy their basic needs, and 94 million people —or 22% of the population— were living in extreme poverty (ECLAC, 1994). In the region, this negative state of affairs affects women proportionally more than it does men, owing to the inequitable integration of women into the labour market; the situation is further aggravated by the fact that the number of female heads of household is on the rise. Increasingly, this issue is coming to be viewed as a human rights problem, and the enjoyment of human rights is regarded as a basic requirement if development is to take place. It is clear that efforts to stabilize the democracies in the region and achieve truly universal de facto citizenship require that progress be made towards the full exercise of economic and social rights; this calls for the elimination of poverty and the attainment of social cohesion. Furthermore, figures for 1990 (ECLAC, 1992b) indicate that today poverty is primarily an urban phenomenon in terms

of the numbers of people affected, and this state of affairs serves to aggravate the deterioration of the environment. This is due to the fact that the crisis of the 1980s had a lesser effect on the rural population, which was able to develop defence mechanisms at the level of basic household consumption. This entailed rural women assuming the production of food as a part of their unpaid work.

In Latin America and the Caribbean the drop in fertility rates, which began 30 years ago, accelerated for all age groups during the last decade, to such an extent that the region recorded the greatest decline in fertility for all regions of the world in this period. This drop is smaller in the case of women in younger age groups and larger in the case of women in older age groups, which reflects changes with regard to high-risk pregnancies; these fall off in the case of older age groups and increase in the case of younger age groups. Although a drop has been recorded in adolescent fertility, the drop is not as pronounced as in other age groups. An analysis of demographic change in the region brings to light marked differences among countries and between rural and urban areas within individual countries, depending on socio-economic variables and levels of schooling. One new feature of this period has been the incorporation of the issue of whether a woman may exercise reproductive rights; that she may do so is acknowledged, at least formally, but in practice the demand for contraception remains unsatisfied in all countries.

In summary, it might be said that in the regional context of the 1990s many situations have changed —and continue to do so quite dramatically— but also that the perspective of analysis has been modified. In contrast to the virtual paralysis which marked the response to the crisis of the 1980s, today sees the emergence of important proposals which have little to do with established models or new ideologies which replace former ones, but which rather are based essentially on information about the current situation, as well as the urgent need to improve this situation through specific initiatives.

To a certain extent, this is a period of greater pragmatism, driven no doubt by the increase in poverty confronting the region and which heightens the marginalization which already exists, both in terms of ethnicity and gender. This is also set against a framework of greater integration, at least at the conceptual level, among the economic, social and political spheres. There is reduced emphasis on ideology, as well as the disappearance of convictions as to which "models" to adopt. There is growing consensus concerning democracy and the forms it might take. The role of the State is being redefined, there is concern as to how to improve government administration and the relationship between the State and society is being reformulated; one of the main thrusts of this process centres on the establishment of citizenship (Ottone, 1991), which is now regarded as encompassing not only a legal right but also effective participation in social, economic, political and cultural life. The idea of the need to combine economic growth with social equity, and to achieve this through an integrated approach, appears in this context as the most feasible option for generating and consolidating development processes.

It is within this framework that gender equity should find its natural scope for development, so as to better address the processes related to the egalitarian integration of women into society. To this effect, gender perspective, which began to receive attention in the 1970s, but became more systematic in the 1990s, contributes the following idea to the analysis of women's living conditions and their integration into development: namely, that simply improving these aspects will not be sufficient if no evaluation is made of the position of women in society, which is determined not only by economic factors, but also by the role assigned to women for cultural reasons, on account of their sex. Although gender perspective is not yet a perfected theory, it is emerging as a possible tool in the search to explain the discrimination and subordination which are features of the status of women.

There is no doubt that successfully ensuring the equitable integration of women into society remains a complex task. Both quantitative and qualitative variables feature in the issue; however, the fact is that the situation calls for a model for a future society, which, in these times of great change, no group has entirely produced; as a result, it is even less surprising that no group has the means to put such a model into effect. Nevertheless, it would appear that one stage has already been completed; that of the identification and legitimation of demands. What is more, countries have already approved a variety of measures aimed at ensuring the implementation of initiatives emanating from the previous phase. Furthermore, despite well-known deficiencies in information, average profiles of women in the region have been formulated, the diversity of situations is understood and the challenges are clear: there is a need to establish full citizenship, with gender equity, for women; such citizenship entails the eradication of poverty, access to decision-making levels and equitable participation in all aspects of society.

Lastly, it should be pointed out that owing to the lack in most countries of specific and ongoing policies geared towards women, it is not possible to evaluate initiatives which have brought about changes. Furthermore, many of these changes cannot be accurately reflected in figures and regional averages do not provide an adequate basis today for a more comprehensive analysis, capable of giving shape to specific policies, on account of the diversity of situations in the region and within countries.

In this changing world, men and women are with great difficulty redefining their roles in society, the family and the couple, and seeking to adjust to a changing reality which places an array of demands on them. The arrival of women on the public scene has inevitably led to changes in the private sphere, but the magnitude of the change is still not clear and discrepancies remain between pronouncements on the issue and things as they currently stand.

It is becoming clearer that there is a growing consensus on the need to analyse the issue of women's participation in society in regional terms and in the light of men's participation in society. This means that simply improving or promoting just some specific aspects of women's lives is not sufficient; rather, the issue of how to establish citizenship for men and women in Latin America and the Caribbean must be addressed comprehensively. This is fundamental if inclusive and more cohesive democratic societies are to be achieved; it is also essential to understand the meaning of the changes in interpersonal relations between men and women. The kind of analysis of regional situations which is beginning to be conducted places great importance on

matters such as democracy, cultural factors, environmental concerns and society's participation in its own management. Such an analysis will permit greater progress, since it will at the same time shed light on more complex relationships between the different matters which must be addressed and facilitate multiple-impact actions.

II. GENDER EQUITY IN THE PROPOSAL ON CHANGING PRODUCTION PATTERNS WITH SOCIAL EQUITY USING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

The crisis of the 1980s marked the culmination of the process which resulted in the obsolescence of the development model; this process had begun once the 1960s were over. The end of the cold war and the consolidation of an economic paradigm which promotes the efficient allocation of resources through the use of market signals gave rise to a situation in the world which is characterized, up to a point, by a lower degree of conflicts, but which has been unable to offer increased material well-being for all. Ideological conflicts have lost their impetus and there undoubtedly exists greater consensus concerning the validity of democratic ideas and the importance of individual freedoms. Along with this consensus, new conflicts have arisen, whose origins can be traced to ethnic, cultural and religious tensions. Even though today the objective conditions exist for improving the standard of material well-being of individuals, industrialized and developing nations alike have witnessed an accentuation of phenomena such as social decay, poverty, chronic unemployment, insecurity, fear and violence. Against this backdrop of globalization, interdependence and accelerated technological change, it becomes clear that "social" considerations can no longer continue to be seen as divorced from, and secondary to, the issues of economic growth and the development of science and technology. The experience of Latin America and the Caribbean also makes it clear that an accelerated rate of economic growth does not necessarily translate into an increased level of well-being for the entire population and that, on the contrary, what frequently results is increased inequality and marginalization. Consequently, it becomes vital that the search for solutions be conducted using an approach that addresses, in a simultaneous and integrated manner, the drive for development in all its forms: growth, social equity, security, participation, peace and respect for human rights.

As has been indicated (ECLAC, 1991b and 1991c), the framework within which ECLAC currently analyses the status of women is that of the proposal on changing production patterns with social equity; it is the contention of this proposal that, in spite of all the differences, initiatives in the region must be set within a framework of strategic concerted action and consensus, in order to achieve development with democracy. By definition, this proposal incorporates the principle of respect for individual freedoms, and this obviously includes the rights of women, which range from the right to participate equitably in society and positions of power to the right to bear or not to bear children, in accordance with their own convictions. The search for changing production patterns with social equity, which must encompass equity between the sexes, offers ample scope for bringing together today's innovative modes of thinking and incorporating entirely new dimensions which can make a contribution to shaping just societies that respect a code of ethics. The proposal is complemented by other elements: the role of social policies in the process of changing production patterns with social equity; policies which take into account environmental concerns in the development process; the formulation of the content of an appropriate educational strategy; and the role of economic integration.

Today, it is not merely sufficient to incorporate women into areas into which they have traditionally been accepted, such as education, employment and health. It is vital to ensure they are integrated in a context characterized by the profound scientific and technological revolution currently in progress, a progressive globalization of the markets and a competitiveness based increasingly on the incorporation and widespread use of technological progress.

There currently exists a consensus on the fact that a society which pursues the goal of social equity also seeks equity between men and women. Historically, this perspective can probably be traced to two simultaneous trends: the modernization of societies, especially as a result of the processes of industrialization and urbanization which created new labour markets, and at the same time assumed the economic function of households; and the women's emancipation movements, which should be seen within the framework of the struggle for the broadening of citizenship.

Both from the cultural point of view and in practice, changes in the reproductive field are also having a great influence. Now that reproduction has become optional, women have been offered a new source of participation in society, since the amount of time devoted to reproduction and bringing up children has ceased to take up their entire lifespan. Greater life expectancy, the widespread availability of education and the recognition of juridical and political citizenship bolstered a process whose conclusion appeared to be only a matter of time. When this did not occur, studies began to be made and consideration began to be given in different spheres to the issue; this was made possible by increased opportunities for democratic expression, as well as by greater expectations. It was taken for granted that women would be involved in decision-making, given their participation in different spheres of society. However, women's acquisition of juridical citizenship still did not put them on an equal footing with men in the public domain, nor did it free them from their primary responsibility for household and children.

The existence of discrimination in society against women was recognized as far back as 1948, with the

establishment of a special body within the United Nations to address the issue. The issue received a particular stimulus in 1975, when, within the conceptual framework of integration into development, a large number of initiatives were taken which were designed to ensure women's integration. In the beginning, the proposal's basic aim was to provide women with access to the areas of law, education, employment and health. Over a period of 20 years, the process has shown signs of advancement, but has also revealed that the issue is one of great complexity. Some women have gained access to development and equity, while others have gained access only to development. Still larger numbers of women, however, have been unable to participate in either development or equity.

The so-called "women's issue" has undergone marked changes of direction over these last decades. At the present time, a great deal of attention is being paid to possible limitations concerning the idea of "integrating women into development", which served as the almost natural framework for the issue. The criticism has been based on a general overview which indicated that, from a conceptual point of view, no integration as such had occurred, but rather that most of the time the issue was merely "tacked on" to the main development concerns. In a similar vein, initiatives designed to "integrate" women are being questioned, given that, quite the contrary, they have often contributed to the increasing marginalization of the issue and indeed women themselves. Although it cannot be denied that the approach has helped to increase the visibility of many key aspects of the situation facing women, attention has been drawn to the theoretical and practical limitations of such an approach: namely, that however broad the concept of development may be, the corresponding economic indicators always refer to the production of goods and this inevitably leads to a situation where the major contribution of women remains invisible. This contribution has to do with reproduction and the unpaid "services" women provide, as if it were only natural, in maintaining the health of their families, taking care of other people, providing meals, and rearing children.

It is now recognized that women are indeed integrated into society and that what is needed is to improve the way in which they are integrated. This means taking into account not only the position women occupy in society, based on socio-economic strata, but also the social role they are assigned in their culture by virtue of the fact that they are female. At present, there is acceptance within the United Nations that it is not possible to achieve development in a broad sense —in other words, development which goes beyond mere economic growth— if there is no improvement in the social status and prestige conferred on women.

Such thinking gave rise in the 1970s to the so-called gender approach or perspective, in response to the unsolved theoretical and methodological issues raised by gender-based asymmetries and inequalities between men and women; some authors contend that this new view amounts to the most important epistemological innovation in the social sciences field in the last 20 years (Fraser, 1989).

Until now, in keeping with the current state of knowledge, the gender approach has encompassed a set of sustainable hypotheses, which are somewhat coherent, but neither research nor current academic discussion have reached a stage where it is possible to talk in terms of a perfected theory (de Barbieri, 1991). Nevertheless, as a framework within which to interpret the current state of affairs, it constitutes a suitable conceptual instrument, and it is hoped that it will become an equally productive methodological and operational tool.

Gender, then, is defined as a cultural, social and historical construct, which, on the biological basis of sex, determines what is masculine and what is feminine in society in accordance with cultural norms, and also determines individual and collective identities. Similarly, gender determines the existence of an asymmetrical value placed on males and females by society, as well as the power relationship established between the two sexes. Studies conducted in this field from the perspective of social status and prestige, analyses of social relationships and the theory of the systems of power have contributed not only to enhancing our knowledge of women, but also to linking this issue more strongly and meaningfully with more comprehensive social issues. The idea that development benefits or harms men and women in different ways has now received much greater acceptance and is much easier to grasp (Rico, 1993).

The fact that the concept of gender has only recently been incorporated into the terminology of the social sciences has meant that it has come to acquire different connotations for different authors; there is a broad range of meanings and approaches. On some occasions, it replaces the variable of sex, while on others, it is a synonym for women; there are those who consider gender to be a system of social status and prestige, while others see it as reflecting social hierarchies derived from the social division of labour.

Although it is not yet a perfected theory on which consensus has been reached, the idea of gender, as a relative concept, is a useful tool for analysing women's position in society compared to that of men. This approach considers the dynamics of male-female relations in each particular society and ways of achieving equity in that regard.

It also acknowledges the need to stop generalizing and to focus on how specific aspects of policies inhibit or promote equity between the sexes, and not only in response to given problems. Lastly, it involves humanizing public policy so that it serves the people's interests by considering not only the macroeconomic aspects of a society's functioning, but also issues of daily life and their interrelationship with the lives of individuals.

It seems that certain processes taking place and on their way to consolidation will lead to more active participation by women in all of these areas. Undoubtedly, the crisis of the 1980s and the consequent worsening of poverty in the region had the pernicious effect of unleashing a process in which priority was given to other issues. But it is also clear today that some problems are much more bound up with the relationship between men and women and the structure of the balance of power, and that they cannot be expected to resolve themselves, at least in the medium term.

III. THE SITUATION AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE 1990s: CORE ISSUES OF THE QUEST FOR SOCIAL EQUITY

Both the integrated approach and the gender perspective postulate that problems should be addressed comprehensively, taking their interrelationships and meanings into account and making use of multiple-impact actions. From this viewpoint, it seems difficult to isolate the most relevant issues, since they necessarily cut across boundaries and often appear to duplicate themselves or overlap. However, in order to contribute to the evaluation of the situation of women in Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1990s, these issues must be identified, if only to classify them and highlight certain elements. It is clear, for example, that if the region is to have a supply of skilled female human resources, it must provide women with appropriate education, suitable vocational training, equitable wages, proper health conditions and the capacity to participate actively in the functioning of society. Since these ideas resurface in all areas, this document summarizes some issues considered relevant both to a diagnosis of the real situation of the region's women in the 1990s and to the preconditions for improving it in ways that also help to change production patterns with social equity, including gender equity, while enhancing social integration, reducing poverty and expanding productive employment.

A. WOMEN'S LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE 1990s

1. The labour situation

Although many aspects of the paid and unpaid work done by women have been discussed extensively in recent years, some of them are worth repeating in the context of this document, which is intended to highlight the remaining problems which must be solved in order to change production patterns with social and gender equity. That objective calls for intersectoral, multiple-impact policies that help improve women's quality of life and strengthen their capacity to participate effectively as full citizens by incorporating them into productive employment in conditions of parity with men.

a) *Underreporting of women's economic participation*

Although it is true that, with the growth of the so-called informal sector, many occupations go undetected by statistics, this phenomenon is more frequent in the case of women than of men. If effective actions are to be implemented to generate new jobs for women and improve existing ones, beyond the average levels noted today, especially in urban areas, it is essential to devise a data compilation system for use in designing specific policies. This requires very definite changes in censuses and probably also in household surveys, on which relevant recommendations have already been made. It is also necessary to train the users of these data to take advantage of the effective opportunities for analysis offered by available information. At the same time, progress could be made in this field on the basis of the many partial qualitative studies conducted in the region on women's employment in both urban and rural areas. The latest studies on female food producers, for example, provide a clearer picture of their contribution to the economies of some countries (IICA/FIDA/UNIFEM, 1993). A large pool of information could be compiled by systematizing existing studies.

b) *The economic participation of the region's women*

Despite this problem of underreporting, all of the analyses conducted in recent years show that women's growing participation in paid work has become a structural trend and will continue to increase regardless of short-term conditions. This trend has even intensified in recent years, especially among young and middle-aged women. By the end of this century, 65 million women will be active in the region's labour market, representing a notable increase from the 10 million women that belonged to the economically active population in 1950. It is estimated that women's participation will continue to rise by about 3.2% a year, while men's participation will grow by 2.2% a year. In other words, not only will more women be working, but there will also be a change in the proportions of men and women in the workforce. Currently, the gap between men's and women's participation is wide; according to figures gleaned from household surveys the activity rates of urban women range from 34% to 50%, while men's rates range from 73% to 84%. The data also show that women's marital status does not affect their rates of economic participation, although age group does make a difference. It seems that at the present time there are two generations of women in the labour market, whose behaviours differ, and that the current group of 25- to 45-year-olds will, in the future, impose new models of behaviour in the workplace that are already beginning to emerge. The proportion of households headed by women has also increased, to an estimated one fourth to one third of all households; specific support measures are needed for this sector, in view of its greater vulnerability.

c) *Support infrastructure for working women and men*

A third issue that bears repeating, on which sufficient information is also available, concerns the discriminatory conditions in which women enter the labour market because, on the one hand, they are still considered to be mainly —and often entirely— responsible for child care and, on the other, there is a lack of policies that truly seek to provide a comprehensive solution to this problem. Although many countries in the region have adopted regulations on child care facilities, and many initiatives have been taken, the fact remains that in 1989 only about 14% of all children up to age five in the region were enrolled in preschool education. It should also be borne in mind that the private sector has played the most important role in this regard, with the result that supply has been primarily directed towards that segment of the urban population that can afford these services. It is also interesting to note that although preschool education coverage is still extremely limited, it has nevertheless increased markedly over the past 10 years, having reached only 7.8% in 1980 (Schiefelbein, 1992; Schiefelbein and others, 1989; Schiefelbein and Peruzzi, 1991). Preschool education is also an important angle from which to approach

the design of integrated multiple-impact policies, since it offers possibilities for ensuring equality of opportunity for all from the outset and can help enhance equity between girls and boys in the socialization process, improve women's integration into the labour market and ensure proper health care for children, among other effects.

d) *Wage discrimination*

A more recent issue that has emerged from the latest studies is that of wage discrimination. Women usually earn less than men, regardless of their level of education or job category. Women's relative disadvantage *vis-à-vis* men in terms of hourly wages is equivalent to roughly four years of formal education (ECLAC, 1993a). Other studies (Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos, 1991) point out that wage differentials are higher in developing countries than in developed ones, amounting to 66% in the former, and that they can only be explained by cultural factors that segregate the job market. According to a more recent study of urban areas in 13 countries, women's average income represents only 44% to 77% of men's average income. Although ILO Convention No. 111 of 1958 established the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, the situation is evidently different in practice, and again calls for multiple-impact policies, since wage discrimination is closely related to women's job options, socialization and vocational training.

e) *Women's occupations*

Currently, at least three factors come into play in defining the kinds of jobs that women perform. The first is perhaps the most dynamic, and refers to each society's view as to which occupations are "appropriate" for women; this, in turn, is reflected in the supply of jobs accessible to women. The radical changes of recent years have broadened the spectrum of "female" occupations, but there is still a wide gap between women's current educational opportunities and their job options in the labour market (and, even more, the levels of responsibility to which they can aspire). It is interesting to observe that this change is also related to the jobs held by men, who tend to abandon some occupations, which then become not more egalitarian but more "female". Examples of this phenomenon include the patterns observed first among the region's teachers, later in the medical field and probably, in the coming years, in economics. Although this trend is less accentuated in the field of science and technology, recent UNESCO figures show that the ratio of science and technology students in the region, which was 0.37 in 1970, has reached 0.80 in the 1990s. This could indicate that there is a time lag between trends in education and trends in the labour market, which should continue to change over time. The region's main problem in this regard is of a cultural nature, meaning that broadening women's range of options in terms of both occupations and access to higher levels of decision-making within each career requires both awareness campaigns aimed at employers and proper training of women themselves. Women's rising levels of education are increasingly incompatible with the kinds of jobs to which they effectively have access; this represents not only a source of frustration for women, but also a waste of skilled human resources for the countries concerned.

A second consideration relates to the branches of activity in which women work. In urban areas, the services sector continues to absorb between 42% and 65% of the female workforce in the 1990s. Most women in this sector work as professionals, technicians, salespersons and domestic employees. In the professional and technical fields, the proportion of women in the banking, insurance and finance subsectors has increased to about 30% to 40% of all workers in these areas. However, a number of studies on the services sector have found, once again, that women usually do not have access to the top jobs in these occupations, and that the division between female and male occupations is reproduced within each branch of activity. A relatively new but growing phenomenon is that of women executives and entrepreneurs. Although no precise quantitative studies are available as yet, data from FLACSO (Valdés and Gomariz, 1993) on a number of countries in the region show that between 15% and 20% of the workers in the managers/administrators category are women. Also, women's participation in small businesses has increased, and 60% to 70% of the region's micro-enterprises are owned by women.

Another factor that should be taken into account is the diversity of socio-economic situations that keep women from becoming properly integrated into the labour market. Various categories of workers can be mentioned in this connection, such as women who work at home, on a self-employed basis, in domestic service, in rural areas —on plots of land in tenant farming units or small-scale agriculture—, in marketing and in agro-industry. This group, which comprises most of the region's female workers, is also the most vulnerable in all respects. Although not all women in these groups are poor (for example, the category of self-employed women includes physicians in private practice), most of them are, with the added problem that they usually have no retirement benefits or health insurance, have no possibility of organizing to strengthen their bargaining power, and earn low incomes; they may work in the primary, secondary or tertiary sectors, and the economic contribution of their work is often hard to define. Case studies have partially elucidated the important contribution of these workers to food production —especially in the Caribbean and Central America—, to the large-scale exporting of agricultural products and to commercial activities in general, but have not sufficiently quantified this contribution or fully recognized the importance of this majority sector of workers in the region. Migrant women are of special concern, considering that changes over the past decade have altered their traditional patterns of migration in the region, with increases in temporary mobility, commuting, counter-currents of migration between urban and rural areas, interurban and intrarural migration and urban residence with rural employment; these conditions aggravate the problems of precariousness, low wages and absence of unionization in these women's employment (Szasz, 1994).

f) *Women in workers' organizations*

According to ILO data (Ulshoefer, 1994), no more than 10% of the region's female workers are unionized; of that group, only 20% are union leaders. Awareness of this phenomenon is growing, and many attempts have been made to increase women's participation in such organizations, including the establishment, in many cases, of ad hoc commissions to address the issue. However, the problem has not been easy to solve in practice. The reasons are well known, and have to do with women's

family responsibilities, the tendency to merely talk about the issue instead of including it on agendas for action, prevailing leadership styles and union priorities that fail to take women's work-related concerns into account, among other factors.

g) *Labour regulations and their effectiveness*

Up to 1950, ILO conventions on women's work were basically designed to protect working women, while a subsequent set of conventions focused on promoting equality of opportunity and treatment. Countries readily acceded to the conventions of the first phase, but the ratification of those of the second phase has been extremely slow, and few countries have acceded to them to date. Although all of the countries' constitutions establish equality of rights between men and women, most of them have yet to establish mechanisms for enforcing this principle in the workplace, and these provisions often coexist with older protective regulations.

In the 1990s, the core issues in this area are the ratification of rules on equality of opportunity and treatment and the establishment of effective enforcement mechanisms. Also urgent is the effective implementation of other conventions and recommendations, especially those on equal pay for work of equal value (1958), human resources development (1975) and equality of workers with family responsibilities and affirmative action (1981).

One issue that should be reiterated is that of maternity protection and the need to provide child care services for workers (both male and female) with family responsibilities, to prevent discrimination against women in the hiring process.

Another problem that has recently come to the fore is sexual harassment in the workplace, which has been widely discussed by labour organizations.

2. The education of women in the region

Undoubtedly, one essential change in recent decades has been the expansion of the educational system, whose coverage reached an average of 90% of the region's children in 1990, with marked increases in secondary and higher education. For at least four decades, education was an important vehicle for social mobility in Latin America. This expansion was not a natural process, but rather a result of specific policies carried out under concrete socio-political agendas. The State played a basic role both in setting up the formal educational system and in expanding its coverage. Thus, throughout the region, at different times in history, countries laid the foundations of an education policy with three basic imperatives: to universalize basic education, in view of its democratizing tendency to promote equality; to distribute that education equitably (i.e., to provide universal primary education before beginning to invest in secondary education); and to ensure that other processes contributed to the steady expansion of education coverage (Solari, 1988).

Despite its expansion, the education process was marked by inequitable participation. The main disparity was between urban and rural areas, as participation rates in cities were 1.7 to 6.7 times the rates in the countryside. Differences between age groups were also significant, and in the older age groups gender differences were observed as well; in some cases, illiteracy rates among adult women reached 90%. Although the socio-economic variable has always been a basic factor in educational inequality, the problem has been aggravated by other factors, such as the constant devaluation of education as higher proportions of workers become more educated, and the stratification of educational institutions, which tends to coincide with social stratification.

Currently, beyond the problem of education coverage, the challenge is to adapt education to the kind of society that will emerge in the near future. The change in the production paradigm and the globalized concept of the world demand a type of education that is very different from the kind currently imparted, which essentially reflects the needs of nineteenth-century industrial society more than the future needs of the twenty-first century. The basic features of this new kind of education will be flexibility, know-how, mental openness, continuing education, autonomy and creativity. This change requires an unprecedented education strategy that encompasses not only education reform, but also consensus among all of the public- and private-sector actors involved and strategic coordination combined with decentralization; with regard to the material taught, the basic aims are to ensure universal access to the codes of modernity, generate an open institutional framework for education, encourage creativity and promote gender equity. To that end, society as a whole must make a financial commitment to education and promote, as an essential factor, the development of regional cooperation on education (Ottone, 1991). This is particularly important in view of the significant reduction in investment in education during the 1980s, which influenced the deterioration in education quality.

In relation to women, some tasks are still unfinished and must be addressed to ensure gender equity; they concern the need to consolidate all women's access to education, review the material taught and study the socialization processes affecting both men and women in the educational system, which define their modes of integration as citizens.

a) *Access to education*

All recent studies have shown that in most of the region, women have reached parity with men at the basic and intermediate levels of education; in some countries, they even surpass the enrolment rates for boys and men. This improvement is even more apparent when women are compared to men according to age group. Thus, there seems to be a generational transition, manifested by young women's rising levels of education. This trend will probably lead, in a few years, to a female population that is proportionally more educated than the male population. However, regional and national averages must be analysed in more detail owing to the disparities between and within countries. Rural, indigenous and black women, especially where they constitute ethnic minorities, still have problems in gaining access to education, as do uprooted and older women.

With respect to literacy, between 1980 and 1990 the number of absolute illiterates was reduced from 44.3 million to 42.5 million, and nearly 70 million people in the region received literacy training (ECLAC/OREALC, 1992). However, disparities between countries are very wide; illiteracy rates range from 1.4% to 52%, and the highest rates are found among low-income adult women, especially in rural and marginal urban areas.

Functional illiteracy* is a persistent and large-scale problem in the region that affects both women and men. It reflects the fact that educational systems and curricula are ill-adapted to the diversity of circumstances in Latin America and the Caribbean; the poor quality of the education provided; and the high drop-out rates that stem from socio-economic and cultural factors. The problem is especially serious among children who live in rural areas or belong to ethnic minorities or poor families, whose poverty hampers the learning process. Although functional illiteracy figures disaggregated by sex are scarce, the problem seems more likely to affect women and girls, whose responsibility for household chores isolates them from other learning processes that could link them to the life of society.

Available figures show that preschool education has spread in the region —although coverage is still very limited—, with parity between boys and girls; however, the supply is directed primarily towards the middle and upper socio-economic strata. Meanwhile, as noted earlier, enrolment rates in primary education are nearly 90% for both girls and boys, although coverage in marginal urban areas, rural areas and indigenous settlements is still deficient. It is important to analyse intraregional disparities in this area, since girls' enrolment ranges from 54% to 100% in different countries.

Average enrolment in secondary education ranges from 60% to 75%. Women's enrolment rates are similar to men's in most of Latin America and the Caribbean, and even exceed them in 11 countries in the region. Even in areas with more limited coverage, the ratio of women to men remains unchanged, except in the case of indigenous women and in terms of access to secondary technical education for women in general. Although the information available is limited as yet, case studies show that women perform better than men at this level. The problems of secondary education in the region, as noted repeatedly, are the obsolescence of its curricula and its apparent loss of value as a vehicle for social mobility.

Higher education has expanded rapidly in the region in recent decades, and women's enrolment has risen to levels which, according to some studies, exceed men's average levels by a multiplier of 1.06 (United Nations, 1992). This ratio varies by country, ranging from 50 to 200 women per 100 men, and also by field of study, ranging from 80 women per 100 men in science and technology to 297 women per 100 men in law and administration.

b) *Messages conveyed by education*

In addition to the structural problems already noted, which underscore the urgent need to overhaul the entire educational system to adapt it to current circumstances in the countries, especially in terms of its relevance to employment and the effective exercise of citizenship, another problem remains: the transmission to both women and men of stereotyped images of their future roles in society. Although women's growing incorporation into higher education and the labour market is now a fact of life, the messages conveyed by education and the vocational guidance provided to young men and women fail to reflect this reality, making it harder for them to acquire more realistic expectations concerning the roles they will subsequently play in their jobs, in family life and in interpersonal relationships. Although efforts have been made in some countries to remedy this problem, they are not yet sufficient, nor do they have the coverage needed to prepare future generations to play those roles effectively. This task must be addressed at all levels of education, especially in the technical and professional fields, where fewer women participate.

Another essential issue in Latin America and the Caribbean in relation to changing the messages conveyed by education is the challenge of modernizing education without destroying the region's wealth of cultural diversity. This issue is crucial for minority ethnic groups, who require not only bilingual education, but also the incorporation of their own culture and traditions into school curricula. Education reform must overcome the ambivalence observed in most educational systems with respect to the preservation of cultural identities and the quest for modernity.

c) *Socialization of women and men through education*

In addition to these problems with the messages conveyed by formal education in Latin America and the Caribbean, teachers' socialization of boys, girls and young men and women in the school system tends to reinforce the stereotypes explicitly reflected in educational materials. It is essential to train teachers to project an attitude that broadens women's vocational options and prepares both women and men to share various roles in society, both private and public, including decision-making. This is necessary in order to eliminate gender discrimination and foster greater understanding between women and men for the benefit of both sexes.

3. Human resources development

Human resources development is one of the basic pillars of the integrated approach to changing production patterns with social equity. The education and training of human resources is seen as an investment that reconciles the goals of economic growth and social development. The challenges of achieving structural change, enhancing efficiency in the use of resources and expanding and optimizing participation in international trade require not only changes in production sectors, increased competitiveness and better technological resources, but also, and most importantly, a workforce capable of fulfilling the conditions imposed by a changed labour market whose evolution will continue to gather momentum.

According to the integrated approach, human resources development for today's society requires systemic efforts in three areas: quality education that ensures equality of opportunity from the outset, vocational training that reflects the demands of the labour market, and civic education to train workers to organize, bargain and build consensus under the new employment modalities.

*UNESCO defines as a functional illiterate someone who cannot "engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development" (UNESCO, 1992)

Although the training currently available to both men and women is evidently deficient in these areas, it is in this field that gender discrimination seems to be manifested most strikingly.

In addition to the limitations noted above in the areas of employment and education, another phenomenon, related to both of these areas, has created obstacles whose combined effect is to block women's equitable access to training, especially in today's changing societies. The problems related to formal education and to the messages and socialization it imparts are compounded by the problem of current socialization processes in the family and in society, which influence women's and men's perceptions of the options available to them. At the same time, however, the internalization of these limitations is objectively validated by the fact that the supply of productive jobs for women is small and confined to a narrow range of activities. This situation, which has arisen because employers' views of women's abilities are based on this same discriminatory socialization model, generates a vicious circle fuelled by women's self-discrimination regarding their job options and by the shortage of vocational training and productive employment for women.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the range of education options available to women has broadened considerably. However, the process is slow, and unless explicit measures are taken, women's training will continue to lag behind the swiftly changing structure of the labour market. The lack of training to enable women to enter more productive and better-paid occupations requiring greater technological know-how perpetuates discrimination in this sphere.

It has been pointed out repeatedly that the problem in this regard is that women have remained in traditional job categories because they have been steered towards activities that are seen as a continuation of their household duties or accepted as feminine. In view of the challenges currently facing the region, this approach must be redefined: the point is not to determine whether a given activity has more or less traditional or modern overtones, but to recognize that keeping women in low-paying occupations reproduces or worsens poverty; represents an inefficient use of available human resources, which are essential to growth with social equity; prevents women from acquiring civic education and leadership and bargaining skills they can use in the workplace; and lowers the prestige of the jobs occupied by women, thereby feeding the processes that generate discrimination and inefficiency.

Human resources development with gender equity therefore calls for clear policies to promote vocational training and retraining for women, but also to induce society as a whole to become aware of the need for each country to use all of its human resources efficiently and of the consequent need for equity between the sexes. To that end, specific actions targeting both the public and private sectors should be implemented to stimulate and encourage a shift towards training female human resources on an equal footing with men and enabling them to enter the fastest-growing production sectors; in particular, such actions must take into account the increasing absorption of technology.

4. **Women's health in Latin America and the Caribbean**

The health of both women and men is conditioned by socio-economic, biological and other gender-related factors; in other words, by the position and role that are culturally assigned to them in society. One problem in this area that affects women and men alike in the region concerns the accessibility and coverage of health care services. In this connection, it should be recalled that health care expenditure was significantly reduced in response to the economic crisis of the 1980s; therefore, one of the region's great challenges in the 1990s is to increase investment in this sector, as part of the process of ensuring equitable access for all.

a) *Changes in the concept of women's health*

Today, it is recognized that efforts to achieve equity in the area of health must take into account not only socio-economic variables and the physiological differences between the sexes, but also factors relative to gender differences (Gómez, 1994). This is because women and men are exposed to different risks, owing to their respective positions in society, and have different survival strategies and ways of gaining access to and managing resources. To establish equity between the sexes, these differences must be recognized and addressed through specific policies.

Traditionally, health care for women was based on the belief that they constituted a vulnerable group, and largely revolved around reproductive health. On the one hand, this idea turned women into passive beneficiaries of health policies; on the other, it saw women's health concerns in terms of their role as mothers. Today, health care is considered one of women's basic rights, and is addressed through an integrated approach encompassing women's control of their own fertility, their options regarding motherhood and the recognition that they have specific health problems at all stages of the life cycle.

b) Women's specific health problems

First, it should be borne in mind that women live longer than men, though this does not necessarily imply that they enjoy better health conditions. Gender inequities in this area are related to preventable diseases and deaths, differences in the care provided to girls and boys, the lower priority given to research on women's diseases and the long-overdue concern about women as whole persons.

For example, a number of studies show that among one- to four-year-olds, girls have higher mortality rates than boys because they are more likely to suffer from nutritional deficiencies and receive medical attention less promptly when they are ill. In adolescence, nutritional deficiencies are usually more acute in girls than in boys, often because girls lack the iron supplements they need when they begin to menstruate. Anorexia, bulimia and suicide attempts are also more common among young women than young men, owing to the effects of current socialization processes. Young men, for their part, tend to be more vulnerable to the risks of accident, homicide, suicide, legal problems and war.

As adults, women are more seriously affected by sexually transmitted diseases than men; they also receive minimal care, since these problems are usually associated with prostitution. AIDS, which was initially more common among men, is now growing among women at rates which, in some cases, exceed men's rates. In addition, women

are more prone to malignant tumours, especially in the uterus (in less developed countries and low socio-economic strata) and breast (in more developed countries and higher strata).

The problems deriving from menopause in older women have begun to be researched only recently, and their treatment still entails unknown risks. In general, the complaints of older women are often attributable to health problems that were not properly treated earlier in life, such as nutritional deficiencies, the wear and tear caused by child-bearing, lack of proper medical care and poverty.

With respect to mental health, women are more susceptible to clinical depression, which is linked to their asocialization and to hormonal changes. Women's occupational health is a very new field of research which, in general, has attracted little interest.

Perhaps the area which has changed most dramatically is women's reproductive health. The World Health Organization's declaration that women's ability to control their own fertility was probably one of the most important events in their history (WHO, 1980) and the affirmation in the Nairobi Strategies that women's "basic right to control their own fertility ... forms an important basis for the enjoyment of other rights" (United Nations, 1985) imply that today, women's right to regulate their own fertility has been recognized, at least in formal terms.

Thus, women have passed from a situation in which they could control their fertility only in the name of "higher interests", without being given more say in the matter, to one in which they are empowered (formally, at least) to take such decisions freely, but are also expected to shoulder virtually all the responsibility for the reproduction of new generations (PAHO, 1990). Although pregnancy is increasingly concentrated in the middle child-bearing years, pregnancy in high-risk groups is still significant, with a marked increase among teenage girls and a decline among older women (ECLAC, 1993b).

In general, it appears that new facets of reproduction are emerging, related to the right of individuals (especially women) to freedom of choice, the ability to separate sexuality from procreation (for women, since this separation had always existed for men) and research on more effective ways to regulate fertility.

Contraceptive use in the region varies widely from one country to another, according to variables such as socio-economic stratum, level of education, age, the country's degree of development and prevailing health policies. The methods of contraception currently available are sterilization, medication, intra-uterine devices (IUDs), implants, condoms and vaginal methods. The most widely used traditional systems, according to statistics, are the rhythm and withdrawal methods. It is clear that of these methods, only withdrawal and the use of condoms give men the primary responsibility for procreation, while all the others depend on women. Another means of regulating fertility that is still used in the region is induced abortion.

Of all these systems, the most commonly used over the past decade in Latin America —and in other developing regions as well— has been sterilization of women. Although sterilization of men has begun to become statistically significant, it still represents less than 1% of cases of contraceptive use.

While a wide variety of often conflicting approaches have been taken to contraception by different actors in the region, with the result that the information available is fragmentary, there is undoubtedly an enormous and very explicit unmet demand for methods of contraception. In practice, lack of information and the cost of modern methods have made contraception inaccessible to the vast majority of the region's women.

Among the health problems affecting women, abortion is of special concern because of its high frequency and the physical and psychological harm (or even death) it can inflict, especially on poor women, who must undergo the procedure in very dangerous conditions, since it is illegal. Induced abortion is one of the least understood issues, and also the one that evokes the most ambivalent reactions. Currently, official statistics are compiled only on legal abortion; no reliable data are available on illegal abortion. Cuba is the only country in the region where abortions are practised in the context of official health services.

Clearly, there is a dearth of legislation on this subject, which must be redressed to protect women's physical and mental health. This situation is variously reflected in a number of related phenomena, such as maternal mortality figures and the fact that the number of abortions is higher than estimated because illegal abortions are clandestine and induced abortions are claimed to be spontaneous, apart from the array of problems associated with women's socio-economic situation.

The issue of women's health has become more complex; both demographic changes and the recognition of women's right to control their own fertility have had profound repercussions that must be taken into account in future initiatives. Women's movements in the region have already taken innovative actions in this regard, seeking to influence the definition of health policies to ensure that they effectively meet women's needs.

B. WOMEN'S POSITION IN SOCIETY

1. Women's legal and juridical status

The United Nations first manifested its concern about ensuring recognition of the equality of rights between men and women in its Charter, by expressing the determination "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women", and subsequently in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, by asserting that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status".

Following the formulation of these two instruments, a series of resolutions specifically dealing with women were adopted, based on the conviction that all forms of discrimination against women constituted violations of basic human rights. Thus, women's political, civil, labour and educational rights were progressively recognized, as well as their right to vote, to be elected and to hold public office, to work and to receive equal pay for work of equal value, and to enjoy maternity protection; moreover, it was acknowledged that married women had the right to keep, acquire or change nationalities, to administer their own property and to have independent

careers, among other rights. Although these resolutions were not legally binding on States, they expressed the political will of the member Governments and had a tremendous influence on the measures they adopted later.

In 1967, all of these rights were proclaimed by the General Assembly in its Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (resolution 2263(XXII)), which started a general trend in Member States towards complying with the principles it enunciated. In this first phase, the problem of winning recognition of women's rights in national legislation was approached primarily from a humanitarian, social and cultural perspective.

However, it was only in the 1970s that the issue of women's rights took on a new dynamism, when it was affirmed that women should be involved in development, the quest for peace and international cooperation. These changes began to be reflected more explicitly in 1975, the International Women's Year (General Assembly resolution 3010(XXVII)), when the World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women's Year was formulated and the United Nations Decade for Women was proclaimed (resolution 3520(XXX)). In December 1979, the General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was opened for signature by Member States on 1 March 1980.

In its 30 articles, the Convention elaborated on the principles set forth in the 1967 Declaration, with the distinction that it was a legally binding text on universally accepted rights, and proposed specific measures for ensuring that women received fair treatment and ending discrimination against women in all spheres of society.

Owing to its legal nature, the Convention demanded a commitment on the part of the States that ratified it to follow its guidelines in their domestic laws and to report to a committee —established by the Convention— on the progress made in implementing its provisions at the national level. In essence, the Convention "reflects the depth of the exclusion and restriction practised against women solely on the basis of their sex" and calls for recognition of their equality of rights in all aspects of society's functioning. It covers topics such as women's right to participate actively and fully in political and public life, the shared responsibility of men and women to decide freely on the number and spacing of their children and access to information with which these rights can be exercised. To achieve those objectives, the Convention proposes three kinds of action: the promulgation of national legislation to ban discrimination, the implementation of temporary measures to speed de facto equality between men and women (known today as affirmative-action measures) and action to modify social and cultural patterns that perpetuate discrimination (United Nations, 1979).

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been ratified by all but one of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

During the same period, other actions were taken to eliminate obstacles to women's advancement, such as the convening of the 1980 World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, at which the Programme of Action for the Second Half of the United Nations Decade for Women was adopted (General Assembly resolution 35/136), and the 1985 World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women, at which the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women were adopted (resolution 40/108).

Meanwhile, the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean, a standing body of the countries members of ECLAC, has held five periodic sessions since its establishment in 1977, at which it has put forward recommendations on the implementation of measures to improve the situation of women.

These resolutions and recommendations, in addition to those of the Economic and Social Council and the conventions adopted by ILO, have formed a complete and coherent international and regional framework which, however, has not been fully reflected in reality. At this point, these instruments seem adequate for ensuring women's equality, as long as national legislation is adapted to them and mechanisms are designed to put them into practice and evaluate compliance with them. The fact that this process is only just beginning in the region has given rise to the so-called "gap" between women's *de jure* and de facto equality; in the coming years, every effort should be made to eliminate this gap.

Lastly, as new opportunities for democratic participation are consolidated, unprecedented concerns have arisen, which also must be addressed. Undoubtedly, the most important of these are the elimination of violence against women and the adoption of affirmative-action measures to give women effective equality of opportunity and access to decision-making positions in today's societies.

2. Women's participation in the exercise of power, decision-making and politics

The consolidation of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean is closely related to the processes of implementing a new international investment strategy, responding to the population's aspirations and reforming institutions, particularly at the State level. To that end, it is necessary *inter alia* to provide channels for expression and participation by all social actors, who have diverse needs and demands, in order to build an effective citizenry capable of creating spheres of joint action. To meet this challenge, the formal mechanisms of democracy, political parties and the legislative and judicial branches of government must be strengthened, and other social organizations must be promoted to enable all groups to express their interests and to serve as potential vehicles for action (Ottone, 1991).

In this context, women's access to decision-making positions, the exercise of power and political participation in general have become increasingly prominent issues in the debate on women's integration into society. Although the actions taken in this area are undoubtedly a continuation of the efforts of the women's suffrage movement to secure the right to vote and civil rights, their aims are much broader because today it is understood that economic, social and cultural aspirations

can only be met through full and active civic participation in public life.

Historically, the usual frame of reference for the issue of women's political participation was the demand for civil rights —the right to vote and to be elected to political office— as legal and social attributes inherent in citizenship. This demand was formulated primarily by women's groups linked to political parties. Today, urbanization and modernization have given women new roles that not only involve them in different processes, but also reveal other ways in which they are excluded, in a context in which the concept of citizenship is being redefined and extended.

The idea of modernity, especially after the Second World War, also encompassed the notion of development and development ideology, and the various social entities were structured around this concept. In the post-war period, while modernity was considered important as a form of linkage with the international context, a quest for the Latin American identity was also launched, particularly in connection with the expansion of the middle class, university intellectuals and workers' movements as a result of urbanization (Faletto, 1987a). For women, these events opened up new prospects for participation.

Studies carried out by women's movements have begun to reveal the problems with the current distribution of power in society and to question the issue of participation in the current power structure, which, by nature, does not allow for changes in the balance of power between women and men in society. In the post-war period, priority was given to the need to change that structure.

In the last decade, organized women's groups fell into three main categories: human rights movements (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the Confederation of Widows of Guatemala, the Marías, the Bartolinas Sisa), organizations of working-class women and feminist groups.

Today, the issue has become even more complex and the demarcations between the various positions have been blurred. The higher priority being given to the subject has taken the issue a step further by assuming that women's full exercise of citizenship, along with participation in political activities and decisions, will help them achieve their other objectives. It also indicates a growing concern about the issue in view of the fact that even though a resolution recommending that Member States should guarantee equality of political rights between women and men was adopted by the General Assembly as far back as 1946, it is in this area that progress towards parity has been slowest.

Available figures show that as of June 1993 women in the region held 7.6% of the total number of seats in the countries' legislatures; in the judicial branch, six women have been appointed as justices of constitutional or supreme courts, while the proportion of women in appellate courts ranges from 9% to 30.7%.

Beyond these figures, the debate on women's empowerment has become more complex in recent years, owing both to women's increased participation in social movements during the 1980s and to today's new approaches to the issue of power, which is now studied more as a relative concept —in terms of how it is exercised and what kinds of relations can be established with respect to it—, on the assumption that power and freedom coexist (De Riz, 1994).

Currently, it seems that the demand of women's groups for an end to subordination in the balance of power is not limited to a desire for increased participation by women in the political-institutional system; rather, it sees that participation as part of the conquest of citizenship, which, though formally a right, opens up the possibility of articulating demands in the public sphere.

Other important concerns today include the need to increase women's participation in State institutions and to ensure that the issue is considered in the State structure. A number of countries have implemented so-called affirmative-action measures, sometimes in the context of wider plans for equality and in other cases through specific actions to broaden participation. Their aim is to achieve a representative parity between women and men in decision-making posts. The effects of these actions have been debated at length, but it is still premature to try to evaluate their impact in the region.

Progress in this field has also been reflected in the establishment of special ministries, offices, secretariats or under-secretariats to address the issue. Although these authorities now exist in virtually all the countries, their permanence and funding are not always assured, and they are not always given mandates and political levels that enable them to act effectively.

It is also necessary to broaden and strengthen local organizations by decentralizing both decision-making processes and the execution of specific actions. Considering the role of social movements of women in restoring democracy and the imperative of strengthening channels for citizen participation in order to consolidate democratic processes, efforts should focus on ensuring that the actions of social movements transcend very immediate interests and take on a more politically comprehensive orientation (Faletto, 1987b). This is not exclusively applicable to women's groups, but it is important for strengthening their influence and consolidating their role as political actors. The decentralization of State management can probably be of significant support in this regard. It should be recalled that women's movements are generated by the unfavourable context of exclusion on the basis of gender, which is historically rooted in a region where religion strongly influences the role assigned to women in society; it is also closely linked to private life, and is based on a model of male domination that has been internalized by women as well as men.

Today, consensus seems to have been reached on the need to transcend rhetoric on power and the pragmatism of short-term political interests. A process of reflection should be launched on the current state of politics and on political participation as it is really organized in Latin American societies, in order to define women's potential place in this area. This is vital if women's participation is to be consolidated at all levels of the power structure. Although democratic processes have not been the context in which women's movements have emerged most forcefully, democracy is undoubtedly the only system in which such movements can find a permanent channel for voicing their concerns and politicizing them. Although this task is not easy, it has become more feasible today, since women's opportunities in society have broadened and the boundaries between

the public sphere —considered masculine— and the private sphere —seen as feminine— have been blurred, in addition to the fact that politics itself is now raising new questions.

Given the new role of politics and, especially, the relationship between political experience and democratic choice —if democracy and the rejection of authoritarianism are accepted as social values—, their limits should be determined and possibilities for extending democracy in the economy, in society and in the political system should be explored. In addition, with the end of bipolarity and the abatement of ideologies in contemporary politics, the function of politics in the future and the role women could play in that new context should be considered. If the breakdown of the main ideological approaches persists, it is valid to ask what issues will become the crux of political debate. A look at the developed countries reveals that the "governmental" issues of the various political groupings are quite similar, even though their theoretical platforms are different. Of course, there are differences of emphasis, especially with regard to how big a role the State should play in the social sphere, and perceptions of national and nationalist interests and of international relations often vary. However, it still seems that politics as such is steering in the direction of consensus-building, especially on newly politicized issues such as the environment, ecology, the situation of specific groups (such as young people, women, children and migrants), domestic violence, the family and human rights. Assuming that this phenomenon is even more complex, it is tempting to suggest that although politics is the quintessential sphere of public life, it is now perceived, to some extent, to include many elements that were once in the domain of private life or of interests foreign to politics. This process calls for new approaches, probably based on the expansion of concepts such as citizenship and participation. An important question, therefore, is whether these new political issues, which must be dealt with in new ways, could broaden the range of women's interests in the political arena; in other words, whether the new style of politics will move closer to women by providing them with new spheres of action.

3. Human rights, peace and violence against women

Experience shows that respect for the civil and political rights and freedoms of individuals cannot be dissociated from their right to achieve higher levels of material and spiritual well-being. Although issues of economic, social and cultural development and issues of individual, civil and political freedom have normally been handled separately, for short-term political reasons, the two sets of issues were linked in the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; more definitively, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) required the States that ratified it to recognize and observe rights related to social security, access to work, the satisfaction of basic needs and a decent standard of living.

Currently, with the consolidation of democratic regimes and of broad-based consensus on democracy, the reasons for addressing these issues separately have ceased to exist. As in other areas, successful progress in this regard hinges on the use of a comprehensive approach that integrates political, social, economic and cultural concerns.

The obstacles to women's exercise of these rights in Latin America and the Caribbean are varied and, as noted earlier, are related to women's integration into the labour market, the messages conveyed by education, access to health care and opportunities for political participation. However, there are also other causes related to human rights, as understood in this context: persistent poverty, armed conflicts and some specific manifestations of gender inequity, such as violence against women.

With respect to armed conflict, it is important to emphasize the progress made in different subregions in achieving peace through negotiated settlements. However, there remain the problems of refugee and uprooted women and men, which usually aggravate poverty.

Violence against women has come to be considered a social, cultural and political problem that impedes development with equity by infringing the principles of respect for human rights and the full exercise of citizenship.

Although the issue is relatively new in the political arena, it has quickly acquired legitimacy and a profile of its own, primarily owing to studies and research conducted in recent years. Efforts to address this problem have come up against two main obstacles: first, until very recently, domestic violence against women was socially accepted and, up to the last century, virtually sanctioned by law; and second, acts committed within the home and family were considered private and were not seen as a social phenomenon.

Undoubtedly, the climate of democratization, broadening of citizens' rights and efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination have greatly helped to shift the issue of violence to the sphere of social concerns. This process was also carried forward, especially in the 1980s, by the various women's movements, whose efforts to achieve different objectives revealed this hidden problem, historically considered taboo, which is closely related to the way in which power is exercised in society.

The magnitude of the problem still has not been effectively quantified, for obvious reasons, and actions to stop it are, as yet, no more than isolated initiatives undertaken by both State entities and non-governmental organizations, with varying degrees of success. The United Nations began to address this issue in 1980, when, at the World Conference in Copenhagen, it adopted its first resolution on battered women and family violence. Paragraph 288 of the Nairobi Strategies contains more specific reflections on the subject; since then, the phenomenon has been considered more systematically. At its fifth session, the Regional Conference adopted a resolution on the topic (1991), and the issue was mentioned at the World Conference on Human Rights (1993). Lastly, in its Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (resolution 48/104), the General Assembly consolidated a uniform instrument for all its Member States.

Although the situation cannot as yet be diagnosed in detail on the basis of available figures, which are still too sketchy, research has shown that the problem exists in all socio-economic strata and cultural models. Researchers have begun to construct a typology of violence against women, including

categories such as violence in the home, in the workplace (sexual harassment) and in educational institutions, and rape as an extreme form of violence.

The actions taken to eliminate this scourge, which appears to be very widespread, have ranged from setting up shelters for battered women and their children to training female police officers to deal with victims who report cases of violence and, in a number of countries, designing legal initiatives and draft legislation to prevent, punish and eradicate gender violence, with emphasis on domestic violence.

It is in this field that the application of policies with an integrated approach and a wide conceptualization of human rights acquires greatest importance. Experiments conducted over a longer period of time in several countries, especially developed ones, show that if, in addition to immediate care, women do not receive vocational training and access to employment, an education that restores their self-esteem, health services which include mental health care, day care facilities for their children, and, in general, the means to lead a decent life, as well as respect for their rights, they will find it difficult to overcome their current situation and will end up resorting on a permanent basis to shelters; on account of the cost involved, these shelters can never provide more than a temporary solution, in any country let alone in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean, to problems of this nature.

4. Women and the environment

In the current conceptualization of development, recognition is accorded to the interdependence of economic, social and environmental factors in the drive to attain sustainable development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). Starting from the World Conference for Women (Nairobi, 1985), the issue of the environment was incorporated into the discussion on the situation of women. The analysis was subsequently enhanced by the gender approach, which contends that the differentiated roles of men and women in society lead them to interact in different ways with the environment and that, in turn, the impact of this is not the same on men as it is on women.

Against the backdrop of the processes of democratic renewal in many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, a great number of social movements have sprung up, in which environmental and gender issues have found a sphere conducive to the search for new social models. Within this framework, both issues have received the attention of State institutions, but there is still very little coordination between them and there have been few initiatives which address both issues.

Despite the progress made in this discussion, there is as yet no consensus on the conceptualization of the issue, given the complexity of the interrelationship between women and the environment; on the contrary, a number of theoretical and methodological positions coexist, which consider women variously as "invisible administrators" of the environment, "environmental supports", "an economic resource", "victims", "plunderers" or "saviours of the planet". It is also customary to emphasize the strategic role of women in improving the adverse relationship between the degradation of the environment and population growth, given women's influence when it comes to deciding family size.

The diversity of women in the region is also reflected in their relationship with the environment. One key aspect in this regard is the relationship between the environment and poverty, which is considered the major obstacle in the path of sustainable development. The accelerated growth experienced by the cities of Latin America and the Caribbean has resulted in serious problems of overcrowding, overpopulation, pollution and decay of infrastructure and services. Owing to the gender-based division of work, the daily struggle involving basic services, food, education, potable water, health care and refuse collection falls primarily on women; they also come into more direct contact with environmental pollution. Since they are the ones who bear the brunt of the problems of family survival and health care, they also feel more directly the impact of the deterioration in drainage systems, of air and noise pollution, and of the existence of rubbish dumps; and in having to deal with these problems, they also face an increase in their workload.

The shape assumed by the industrialization process in the region has resulted in problems of air, water and soil pollution, common to all, which adversely affect the health of the entire population, but especially women, who are integrated to a lesser degree into the labour market.

Women in rural areas have been particularly affected by the use of chemical pesticides, which, in addition to polluting the environment, frequently cause poisoning in women and have harmful effects on pregnant women.

The above examples show that the relationship between women and the environment is an issue which still requires greater development and clarification. It is, however, important to insist that the issue be addressed on the basis of an integrated approach and intersectoral policies designed to alleviate poverty and at the same time educate society as a whole in such a way as to inculcate the idea that environmental conservation is the only way of ensuring a viable future, and that as a result the responsibility for this must be assumed and shared by the entire community. Although there is a strong correlation between this issue and poverty, it is undeniable that people's patterns of consumption, including the use of a number of products that are harmful to the environment, are also having a major impact.

Any strategy for sustainable development needs to specify the roles men and women actually play as well as those they should play. However, recognition of the role currently played by women as regards the environment must not transform them into the group primarily responsible for solutions to the problem. Agenda 21 is an essential contribution in this regard and offers wide scope both for reflection and for initiating the design of programmes within the framework of a more organic strategy, which aims to transform men and women into active participants in the attainment of an appropriate living-space both for themselves and for future generations.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

The regional scenario is complex, and instead of specific models, what appears to be emerging is a multiplicity of options. The marked discrepancies concerning progress made in understanding the issue and raising awareness, de facto and *de jure* situations, the stagnation and indeed regression in the field of income distribution and the increase in inequity and poverty, mean that there are more questions than answers. Nevertheless, there is consensus on several matters, which can serve as the basis for specific action in the future.

First, there is the need to summon up the political will to achieve gender equity, within the framework of changing production patterns with social equity, through specific action based on more accurate diagnoses, that make it possible to exceed the current stage of knowledge which is based primarily on regional averages. Apparent contradictions with the situations in specific countries are reflected in a diversity of situations that require different measures. Given the complexity of the problems that exist, there is a requirement today for an integrated approach, which makes it possible to formulate multiple-impact policies, thus opening the way for a range of possible options.

Second, there is a need to design comprehensive intersectoral policies, which address the task of alleviating poverty and include the dimension of gender equity, so that these policies may be truly effective and contribute to social integration.

An effort must be made to complement initiatives for economic integration by cultural integration, that serves to overcome gender inequities and incorporate cultural diversity, through socialization processes which target both men and women, in all spheres, as well as non-sexist education starting from childhood; the aforementioned must be supplemented by affirmative action aimed at the younger generations and adult women, as well as by vocational training for women that seeks to provide them with equality of opportunity. It is vital to overcome the perception that the issue is only of concern to women and to bring the issue to the attention of society as a whole.

The success of these initiatives depends on greater social investment, especially in the fields of education, health and generation of productive employment for men and women. Similarly, there is a need to adopt specific policies, with the greatest possible coverage, so as to address the problem of violence against women and enable women to exercise fully their rights as citizens.

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