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LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN WOMEN
BETWEEN CHANGE AND CRISIS



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Introduction

Concern with the integration of women into development is part of a broader awareness which has been developing in the modern world over several generations, although it has acquired greatest importance during the postwar period. The process covers problems of economic, technological, social and cultural changes and has expanded in terms of both scope and depth in recent decades.

The result of the thrust given by the United Nations to activities connected with the advancement of women through the declaration of first the year and then the decade dedicated to the topic was a wealth of studies, research and action which achieved considerable dissemination and established connections with almost all contemporary problems, producing a vast spectrum of perspectives, viewpoints, orientations and objectives.

While the links between certain issues emerged quite naturally and with relative ease, in other cases even today it is difficult to establish connections. In casting our eyes backwards over the decade gone by it is necessary to reflect upon events which have taken place, to systematize the knowledge which has been acquired and to develop a more precise commitment to action and strategies.

At the close of virtually two decades of activity in respect of women it has been possible to sift through our knowledge of the subject and to develop greater clarity regarding those areas where knowledge is lacking. This combines with the Commission's concern for the full participation of women in society to form the conviction, which has now been held for over 15 years, that development must needs be integral and equitable, requiring the involvement of all members of society.

Moreover, since the beginning of the 1970s the situation of women has been the subject of assessments in the region. Strictly speaking, several years before the adoption of resolution 321(XV) at the fifteenth session of ECLAC, held in Quito in 1973, and which recommended that the ECLAC Secretariat should prepare a study on the participation of women in the development of the region and the measures to be taken to eliminate discrimination, social and demographic studies had been carried out into the participation of women in various areas of the development of Latin American and Caribbean societies and incorporated into a number of documents written for purposes of diagnosis and evaluation. Subsequently, the Regional Seminar for Latin America on the Integration of Women into Development, with Special Reference to Demographic Factors, held in Caracas in 1975, placed stress on the importance of factors such as the family, education, employment, legislation, health, the mass media and political participation for analysing and evaluating the situation of

women. Consideration of the progress made by the situation of women was incorporated into the regular assessments carried out by ECLAC since 1977, and, following the adoption of the Regional Plan of Action, periodic assessments began through the intermediary of the regional and world conferences.

Consequently, as far as specific assessment of the integration of women into development is concerned, the Fourth Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean actually represents a further phase of this process in which the countries of the region meet to consider the changes which have taken place and to propose action for the future. Attention has been repeatedly drawn to the complex nature of this process, both on account of the difficulty of perceiving social changes over short periods and of the lack of reliable information in respect of such short periods. For this reason, on this occasion, as the decade is drawing to its close and the General Assembly has adopted the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, preference has been given to providing a longer-term perspective. Consequently, both issues and information which have already been the subject of previous analyses have been dealt with together with other unpublished material, in order to gradually complete and specify the actual circumstances and real situation of women in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In order to place this approach in its proper perspective, the document begins with a brief synthesis of the main objectives and ideals which have served as an inspiration to the United Nations in this sphere and which provide direction for its future tasks. Subsequently, an outline is provided of a number of features which characterize the Latin American setting at the present time and which has been profoundly transformed in recent decades and battered by the crisis of the 1980s, whose impact has been far greater than anticipated. An extremely brief review is made of a period covering virtually three decades and conclusions are drawn as to the orientations and significance of the changes, while the topic of the crisis is tackled from the angle of its impact on specific areas and groups. Consequently, an examination has been made of some of the most significant repercussions of the crisis on the situation of women. This has produced an outline of the impact of the major changes in the situation of women in the region with a stress on a number of areas of significance for an analysis of the sector in both the public sphere (employment, education, legislation, political participation) and private sphere through the family. Particular attention has been devoted to particularly vulnerable groups of women and mention has also been made of the principal achievements and obstacles identified in respect of the major orientations and mandates relating to the topic.

Subsequently, a synthesis is provided of a number of observations in respect of policies towards women, which need to be reinforced at the present time in order to prevent the crisis from overturning the progress achieved. An attempt has been made to illustrate how what appears as ambiguity or ambivalence is merely an indication of change and a large number of apparently contradictory situations are simply responses to different circumstances. From this angle, stress is placed on those actual needs which require a differentiated response in order to further real equality among women in the

low-income urban sector, in rural areas, young women, those in charge of households, etc.

Among its conclusions, the document lays stress on inter alia, the relevance of the issue, the need to devote particular attention thereto during this time of crisis, and further emphasis is placed on the importance of political will to achieve the objectives and targets of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women.

Now that the United Nations Decade for Women has come to an end and a fresh period, marked by greater uncertainty and diminished optimism has begun, a combination of greater creativeness and realism is required in order to prepare programmes to facilitate the revival of development with greater participation by women.

This document, which has been prepared as a contribution to the Fourth Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean, only deals with a number of topics which have been chosen on grounds of priority and of their significance for an overall assessment. The choice of topics and the analysis have been guided by the urgent question "what is to be done?", already posed in 1975, as well as by the desire to provide responses to the needs of the population, in a region in which distinct, contradictory and frequently superimposed worlds exist in economic and cultural terms and where apparent contradictions in the situations of women in fact constitute different realities.

I. THE MAJOR OBJECTIVES

The ideal of equality among people appears in the preamble to the United Nations Charter, which reaffirms "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small". The United Nations are committed to the principle of equality of men and women in their dignity and worth as human beings and to equality of their rights, opportunities and responsibilities. Thus, the issue of equality for women is part of the overall principle of equality and of the quest for a more comprehensive justice.

These commitments came into being within the United Nations partly as a consequence of the widespread reaction to the horrors of the Second World War, an experience which gave birth to the conviction of the need to construct sounder international solidarity to ensure international protection for human rights as an essential requirement for peace and progress. Furthermore, there has been a growing and systematic awareness during the whole of the postwar period of the supreme importance of problems connected with the status of women.

There is no doubt that the role of women in society has undergone changes in the course of this century and has earned increasingly widespread recognition. The processes of industrialization transformed daily life by socializing many tasks which had previously been performed in the home and brought into being a new space for work and social participation by women in public spheres which have continued to expand. It is possible that the Second World War gave a further thrust to the process of incorporation of women, by obliging them to take over and on a huge scale responsibilities which had previously been those of men. A number of processes thus took place simultaneously: women incorporated new tasks into their sphere of activity, they began to take their place in areas allowing greater interaction, both among women and between men and women, their presence outside the home became increasingly visible and they developed an awareness of their own potential and of the importance of their role.

The United Nations took these new circumstances into account and developed a permanent, broader and increasingly specific concern with the status of women, although its initial aim had been to promote equality and combat discrimination.

Initially, the issues dealt with by the United Nations were reflected through the norms embodied both in the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Discrimination against women was

considered to constitute a violation of respect for human dignity and constituted an infringement of fundamental human rights. Consequently, a set of political, civil, labour and educational rights to which women were entitled, and which were connected with their role in society and in marriage (the right of a married woman to keep her nationality, to manage property) were recognized. The question of equality for women began to be incorporated into various agreements and conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and a special body was established to deal with the topic: the Commission on the Status of Women.

This first phase was marked by a humanitarian, social and cultural approach, which sought formal recognition by governments of the fundamental principles of the United Nations in respect of women. Simultaneously, this period was characterized by manifold social transformations which changed the real situation of broad sectors of women, while the nature of the changes was grasped by an increasing number of women who began to express demands for an improvement in their circumstances. It is true to say that in reasserting the need for the advancement of women and for a modernization of their role, it was expected that economic and social development would itself allow such progress to materialize.

The Declaration of International Women's Year and of the United Nations Decade for Women initiated the most systematic study of the actual circumstances of women within society together with a more integrated approach. The issue henceforth became at one and the same time more complex and more realistic and it was realized that declarations on non-discrimination and equality were insufficient. Mandates containing more specific measures for the fulfilment of the declared objectives began to be prepared. It was realized that promoting the participation of women in public life without support in family and private life was an inadequate means of achieving the desired results. Furthermore, the cultural and religious factors which perpetuated traditional models proved far stronger and more persistent than the social and economic changes affecting societies, and the rate of change in the situation of women was far slower.

The issue of women's rights was given a fresh impetus by the issue of their integration into development, peace and international co-operation, together with the quest for progress in their social status. The successive International Development Strategies (IDS) prepared for the 1960s and 1970s underscored the need for effective participation on the part of the population in development and in the sharing out of its benefits, which was to be one of the main idées-forces directing the objectives, mandates and strategies connected with women for the furthering of human dignity.

These objectives have been the main guideline for the issue of women and have developed a more systematic knowledge of the subject together with a more realistic assessment of the stumbling blocks. The experience acquired in the course of the Decade led to the realization that the problems were extremely complex. On the one hand, the notion that there were different models that could be followed was reasserted; greater respect and understanding began to be found for cultural and ethnic diversity and a search was made for feasible solutions and alternatives in other cultures. On the other hand, it was

confirmed that economic and social changes are not in themselves sufficient to transform the social role of women. Turning towards the future, the Nairobi Strategies continue to provide valuable guidelines. They have made it possible to highlight a number of essential points for guiding the commitments made towards the future. In addition to reasserting their adhesion to the principles of the Decade, they stress the interdependence of the objectives of equality, development and peace and the need for them to be fulfilled as a whole. They highlight the main hurdles and propose measures for overcoming them. Beyond any declaration of new ideals, the Strategies adopt the principles of the Decade which they inspired and focus on their implementation. They do not merely concern themselves with economic and social issues but go so far as to cover specific measures aimed at altering cultural patterns. In addition to promoting the role of women in the public and domestic spheres, they direct their attention to individual features necessary for the advancement of women as individuals in respect of questions such as economic independence, the framing of demands prepared from the angle of women themselves and the reassertion of their role as social actors. Finally, in view of the trying present circumstances, the Strategies put out a warning as to the risks of the crisis leading to a reversal in the effective incorporation of women and of its jeopardizing the principles and the nature of international solidarity which have been so hard to build.

II. BETWEEN THE POSTWAR PERIOD AND THE CRISIS: THE LATIN AMERICAN SCENARIO

A. The past thirty years

There can be no doubt about the significance of the economic and social changes which occurred in Latin America and the Caribbean between the end of the war and the onset of the crisis of the 1980s. Although the rate at which these changes occurred and their profundity varied from country to country, they have a certain amount in common. First of all one is struck by the magnitude of the increase in the population, which by 1985 had grown two and a half times larger since 1950 and came close to four million, with far-reaching consequences for all aspects of the social structure. In addition, the age structure began to change. In all countries but at varying degrees of rapidity, the 0-19 year group has decreased while the 20-59 year group has increased and the over-60 group has increased dramatically. Thus, the persistence of problems associated with a still young population is compounded by the appearance of problems characteristic of an aging population, which are already becoming very significant.

The process of urban growth took the form of a mass migration, which caused the urban population, most of it concentrated in large cities, to grow by 40% to 60%. Although they experienced it in varying degrees of intensity, nearly all the countries passed through phases of the process of transition from agrarian to urban/industrial societies. This spacial mobility of the masses produced gradual cultural interaction between the rural and the urban masses and set into motion the early stages of a process in which the population as a whole is integrated into a system of common values, thereby creating conditions favourable to social interaction, participation and mobilization and increasing the problems stemming from the presence of large socially and politically mobilized population groups.

The extent of the macroeconomic and sectoral changes is evidence of the profound changes which occurred in the countries of the region during this period. Total output increased fivefold in 30 years, and output per capita doubled. Investment levels were very high in some countries, and this brought with it changes in production and technology. The industrial plant in the region expanded and diversified, enabling local production to meet part of the demand for consumer goods and for basic intermediate and capital goods, thereby promoting diversification of exports. Through improved marketing systems and the development of agro-industry, agriculture was transformed, with changes in the orientation of production, use of modern techniques and

expansion of infrastructure, particularly in the transport, communications and energy sectors.

The output of manufactured goods increased sixfold between 1950 and 1987. There was also a considerable increase in oil production, major engineering works were executed and large areas of land were developed for agricultural production through the expansion of the agricultural frontier.

At the institutional level, in 1950 the hacienda in most countries was one of the characteristics of the system, and the family business and artisanry were the norms in industry; planning and development agencies had just been incorporated into the public sector, the banking system remained undeveloped and, generally speaking, the same was true of the financial markets. Thirty years later, the region had modern enterprises, particularly public ones, and the traditional foreign company that exploited natural resources had been replaced by the transnational corporation and in many cases by State-owned companies. In the agricultural and livestock sector, modern enterprises had emerged, and the 1970s witnessed the development of a financial market which was closely linked to the transnational financial system and which ended up playing a key role in the functioning of economies. During this period the role of governments expanded; policies relating to industrialization, agriculture, road systems and energy were elaborated; reforms were introduced in tax, agrarian and tariff systems; public enterprises were established and expanded and the actions of private national producers were supported and complemented by the State.

In addition to the economic changes mentioned above, the occupational structures of the countries in the region had a very significant impact by, inter alia, promoting structural mobility in the society, a fundamental aspect of the social changes that occurred this period. The relative weight of the low-productivity sectors and occupations declined, and, moreover, the modern sectors played a dynamic role in job creation.

The process of social modernization also included demographic changes. For example, fertility and mortality rates were reduced, reaching low and relatively stable levels in the advanced stage of the development of urban-industrial societies. With the exception of those countries which had achieved modernization earlier on, in which these indicators had attained low levels several decades ago, the countries of the region have only in the 1960s and 1970s experienced a drop in fertility rates from high and very high levels. Since the infant mortality rates also decreased rapidly during this period, the working age population reached its maximum historical growth rates in recent years.

Education has played a key role as a vehicle for social mobility between older and younger generations or age groups. In all the countries of the region, the proportion of active young adults with post-primary education increased sharply in the decades under consideration, doubling in all cases and tripling in some, which had a different effect on the job market in countries in the first phase of transition to modernization and in countries where transition was well under way.

The gains achieved by the economic and social processes during the postwar period should not obscure the failures of those processes. From the social point of view, a number of problems stand out which could not be solved in the region even in the years of greatest economic growth. While these problems do not affect all countries equally seriously, their widespread nature, their intractability and the combination of successes and failures make the ambivalence and contrasts of the process notable.

The most acute social problems include the unequal distribution of income, the large number of people living in conditions of absolute poverty and the large numbers of unemployed and, above all, underemployed. Income in the majority of countries of the region has been concentrated within a very small section of the population, and the considerable economic development achieved was accompanied by an increase in the concentration of income in terms of regional averages.

The improvement that took place during the first half of the 1970s was so slight that income distribution did not even regain the already very uneven patterns of the 1960s; and although all income groups increased their average incomes in the period 1965-1975, the richest benefitted much more from the overall increase.

A very limited redistribution was effected as the result not only of the change in the occupation structure, but also of the emergence and consolidation of social movements which pressured governments to secure wage increases and the application of policies of income redistribution. However, this was no indication of a stable participation in the fruits of development for the most disadvantaged majority of the population.

In spite of the achievements and changes, in 1970 there were roughly 112 million chronically undernourished people, many of them illiterate, living in rural shanty towns or in urban slums, virtually without access to medical services and to other important social services; such people represented almost 40% of the population of Latin America.

It is estimated that in 1980 the number of poor people had climbed to 130 million, and there had been a shift in the areas where they lived; the share of the poor in urban populations increased from 42% to 49% between 1970 and 1980, and the proportion of the poor in rural areas continued to represent more than 50% of the rural population.

Although the gross domestic product per capita rose during those years by an average of 3.4% per annum, the percentage of poor people was reduced by only about 3%, and their absolute numbers increased by about 18 million. What is more, regional averages conceal substantial differences in national averages, which vary from country to country, with some countries having less than 10% of their population below the poverty line while there are others where that percentage varies between 37% and 65% of the total population.

The productive absorption of the labour force is the clearest manifestation of economic development. The developments in the region in respect of the employment variable over the three decades preceding the current crisis show the apparent paradox of a considerable increase in the

capacity to absorb labour in modern non-agricultural sectors taking place at the same time that underemployment persisted or declined very slowly.

The general factors which explain the problem of the persistence of unemployment and underemployment and which, in most of the countries of the region, acted as a brake to a more dynamic absorption of the labour force into modern sectors of the economy include the change in the occupational structure which took place in the region within the framework of a dramatic increase in the non-agricultural labour force, increases in the rate of participation in the economy and the natural increase in the urban population itself. Thus, the supply of manpower exerted pressure so great that it could not be totally absorbed by the rapid creation of employment in modern sectors. To a large extent, this relative insufficiency of employment explains the development of informal activities in which the majority of the urban unemployed are engaged.

An examination of the historical development of the countries of the region in the postwar period reveals the uneasy coexistence of two opposing trends. On the one hand there are trends towards the concentration of wealth, which seek to maintain the internal economic, social and political inequalities in which they are rooted. On the other hand there are trends that promote technological progress and its benefits. Particular attention should be paid to the more spontaneous of these trends, arising from the changes which the impetus of economic development itself effects in demand, in the structure of the labour force and in its productivity and income levels, and to the more deliberate trends which have been promoted, particularly within the State apparatus, by social movements and groups which seek to share the fruits of development.

The opposition between these two trends, towards the concentration of wealth on the one hand and towards greater homogenization and democratization on the other, explains to a large extent the contrast in the development picture of the region; it also lies at the root of most of the conflicts that have taken place in the region and shows that the social problems exemplified by the distribution of income, poverty and unemployment are the most visible manifestations of deep-seated root causes and that a permanent solution to those problems will only be possible if their root causes are addressed.

B. The crisis: Are we moving from utopia to despair?

The scale of the crisis is apparent in the evolution of aggregate economic indicators after 1981. From this year onwards a decline occurred in the sustained rate of growth which gross domestic product had maintained for almost four decades.

The impact had by the crisis on per capita domestic product between 1980 and 1987 is even more striking in that it dropped by slightly more than 5%, falling back to the levels attained in the region in 1978. Since net payments of profit and interest abroad increased sharply during this period, the decline in per capita national income was even sharper, the crisis dragging the population's average income back to levels it had reached a decade previously.

The impact of the downturn in economic activity was particularly strong on capital formation so that the crisis not only affected present living conditions but also jeopardized possibilities for growth and for higher standards of living for the population in the future.

In view of the high rate of growth of the labour force in most of the countries of the region, the shrinkage in economic activity went hand in hand with an increase in rates of open unemployment and a rise in underemployment, and this was aggravated by a very considerable deterioration in real remunerations. In addition, the rate of price increases rose in most of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean during the crisis.

These discouraging trends in the evolution of domestic variables were linked to the adverse developments in the external sector, and in particular to the region's swollen debt, which is the factor which most jeopardizes the future development of Latin America and the Caribbean. The debt rose from less than US\$100 billion at the end of 1976 to over US\$330 billion at the end of 1982. Private creditors represented a growing proportion of the debt, whose financing was marked by floating rates of interest and relatively short repayment periods. This brought about an explosive increase in debt servicing while the debt continued to grow --although at a lower rate-- until 1987, when it represented approximately US\$410 billion.

The role played by external factors has been particularly notable in the Caribbean countries, whose small economies are more dependent than ever on relations with the economy of the rest of the world. This situation is in part the result of these countries' historic roots as colonies of their respective mother countries, but due to their small size, it also represents an imperative. Thus, economic events in the outside world have a strong repercussion on the development of the economies of these countries, and an understanding of what occurs in the subregion is necessarily rooted in the flow of economic events in the industrialized countries. A comparison of economic indicators suggests that the Caribbean economies were very much depressed. There was a decline in income, and the fiscal deficit rose as did that in the balance of payments. Around the middle of the decade, open unemployment expanded; and when export earnings fell, the gradual increase in the external debt began to give rise to problems as to how it was to be serviced in the near future. Perhaps the only aspect of the economy which was not deteriorating was the situation as regards the inflation, the slower growth rate of international problems causing consumer prices to rise at more moderate rates.

The effects of the crisis on the labour market in Latin America and the Caribbean included a slump in the rate of job creation, changes in the type of employment created and a drop in wages. Between 1980 and 1985 non-agricultural employment grew at a cumulative annual rate of 3.3%, which was insufficient to absorb new members of the labour force who enter the market each year, and led to an increase in open unemployment. During the period, the number of unemployed rose at a cumulative annual rate of 8%, signifying a large expansion in the number of unemployed between 1980 and 1985.

As for the changes in the structure of employment, they reflect an increase in the proportion of jobs characterized by the greatest degree of

underutilization of labour, as manifested in informalization, tertiarization and an increase in employment in the public sector. The most noteworthy consequence of the deterioration is seen in the rapid expansion of employment in the informal urban sector. This is indicative of a worsening of the employment situation mainly affecting the lowest income sectors of the population.

In most of the countries, the real wage indicators available indicate significant drops in the 1980-1987 period. This is due to the high and increasing rate of inflation which brought down real wages, to the increase in unemployment and in employment in low productivity sectors, which weakened the bargaining power of organized wage-earners, and to the effect of the adjustment policies implemented in the majority of countries in the region.

The decline in real wages during the crisis surpassed the fall in per capita product and was greater in almost all sectors than the decline in gross per capita income. This suggests that the burden of readjustment was mainly born by workers, particularly those with lower incomes, with a consequent deterioration in income distribution.

The social impact of the crisis in Latin America and the Caribbean has been very diverse. The deep differences between countries prior to the crisis, the varying scales of impact of the debt, the divergent rates of dynamism or stagnation in production together with the various social consequences of the adjustment policies implemented in countries combined to bring about considerable divergences in the social indicators available for countries relating to the early years of the crisis.

As far as the vast majority of countries in the region are concerned, however, the available data indicate, that, as a whole, there has been widespread deterioration in the social conditions of the population and in the social services provided by governments. The share of social services in total expenditure fell in the majority of the countries between 1980 and 1985.

The increase in both unemployment and underemployment and the fall in wages as a consequence of the crisis resulted in even greater inequality in income distribution and an increase in the proportion of the population living in poverty.

In addition, the share of the agricultural population has once again started to grow, as a result of the slump in employment in cities. Moreover, in contrast with the growth of the sector of poor peasants and agricultural labourers, agricultural entrepreneurs seem to have been inordinately successful in appropriating the benefits of the increase in agricultural production. Furthermore, real income corresponding to the characteristic occupations of the urban middle classes fell during the crisis.

In a number of countries, policies and programmes attending the needs of the most vulnerable groups successfully avoided reversals, for example, in the historical reduction in the rates of infant mortality. In others, however, the declining historical trend ceased, and this key indicator remained stable during the crisis or even rose.

The evolution of nutrition indicators was extremely complex since the currency crisis severely restricted imports of food, a consequence of which was a drop in the food available in the majority of countries.

Although in a number of countries there seems to have been an overall improvement in the health and food situation in recent years, the most disquieting feature is the worsening of the food and health situation of the poorest sectors, a situation which appears to persist as a result of the increase in inequality in access to goods and services meeting these basic needs.

A further phenomenon, which is just as serious as the fall in resources needed for education and the probable deterioration in the quality of education thereby involved, is the increase in the number of drop-outs from primary and secondary school detected in several countries. This phenomenon, which overwhelmingly affects the poorest sectors is clearly linked to the impossibility for families in those sectors to meet the school costs and their reliance on the economic contribution of minors for the survival of the whole family. This latter feature is reflected in the increases in the rates of economic activity among children and young people of school age.

In short, the crisis of the 1980s has to a large extent been the last manifestation of a deferred social crisis. At present the outlook for the economies of the region remains uncertain. In 1987 the foreign debt continued to grow, and the total interest paid by the region as a percentage of exports tended to stabilize. Also during 1987, the region continued its substantial negative net transfer of resources, and investment continued at levels far below those of the period prior to the crisis.

The projections of the crisis and of its social consequences support the hypothesis of the existence of a crisis of the social systems in the region, in the sense that it is impossible to restore a social rationale of development identical to that which prevailed from the postwar period up to the end of the 1970s. Thus, the challenge that faces the region is indeed immense. With fewer resources than in the past, it has to grapple with problems which, apart from having changed in magnitude, have also undergone a change in quality. The current processes, economic, social, demographic and cultural, constitute in their interaction a new dynamic of structural change, which in turn generates new tensions and contradictions.

The crisis of the social system poses a set of new socioeconomic problems in the region, in addition to the economic problems. A more favourable socioeconomic evolution will depend on the countries' achieving a greater international presence in those spheres in which decisions are adopted concerning the debt and trade, on new economic "motors" of industrialization and export and on the discovery of more effective ways of increasing employment and labour productivity in the marginated sectors and new rules of the game regarding distribution. Additionally, there will be a need for the creation of new forms of material and non-material satisfaction in terms of participation and equity, which will partly replace social mobility and the expansion of consumption as supports for the legitimacy of development models.

III. LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN WOMEN: ELEMENTS FOR A DIAGNOSIS

A. Demographic aspects

While the changes of recent decades have affected all sectors of the population, their impact has probably been most deeply felt by women and young people. In the case of women, the significance of the changes goes far beyond the economic and social spheres and has made itself felt through far-reaching qualitative and quantitative transformations which have altered cultural behaviour and began to leave their mark on ethical considerations and on values. While the scale and diversity of the changes makes it impossible to precisely indicate their orientation or to measure their impact, it is at least possible to highlight a number of significant phenomena to provide an illustration of the situation.

For example, medical progress and in particular the widespread use of antibiotics has had a profound impact on the perception of childbirth, as the risks associated with giving birth have diminished considerably and the life expectancy of mothers has increased. While the overall life expectancy of the region's population increased from 55 years in the 1950s to over 70 in the 1980s, that of women increased even more significantly.

Subsequently, progress in birth control, occasionally supported by demographic policies involving the distribution of contraceptives helped to bring about a marked decline in fertility. The social consequences of this decline represent far more than a mere quantitative phenomenon. The possibility of separating sexuality from a reproduction together with the high level of reliability of birth control is a new phenomenon. While the decline is particularly apparent among middle-income strata where it coincides with high levels of education and is more common in countries where modernization is more advanced, the phenomenon is becoming increasingly widespread throughout all strata in all countries. These demographic changes in Latin America and the Caribbean are even more striking if it is borne in mind that they have taken place within an environment marked by different religious practices and where traditional models of socialization remain deeply rooted.

One of the consequences of urbanization for the situation of women is reflected in a fundamental change in the family with the trend towards smaller households, a trend which affects women in various ways as well as having distinct implications. Generally speaking, and merely by way of example, it can be pointed out that a smaller number of children facilitates entry into work, although at the same time, as a result of the absence of other adults,

it places a greater burden of responsibility on the couple for the maintenance of their children than in a household made up by an extensive family.

In connection with the above phenomena a rise has been noted in the number of female heads of household, particularly during the last decade; partial figures for 1982 show that the percentage fluctuates between 18 and 23% (Lima and Panama City), which is a fairly high percentage. In the Caribbean countries the figure fluctuates between 24% and 46%.

Urbanization and, in particular, life in large cities facilitates greater anonymity and as a result less social control is exercised over the private life of women. This does not mean that all spheres of society are slackening their constraints, but those which do exist seem to be somewhat looser than in the past and are marked by fresh contradictions.

Furthermore, in the course of the process of urbanization large numbers of young women migrate to cities and enter, for the most part, domestic service. Many studies have devoted their attention to this phenomenon in recent years and have revealed the specific set of problems which have emerged in this sector.

B. Participation in the labour force

While the characteristics vary in accordance with specific circumstances which are different in the developed countries from those in developing countries, it is undeniable that the incorporation of women into the labour force has occurred on a scale which was unimaginable 30 years ago: in the world today the number of working women has attained 815 million and during the decade between 1975 and 1985 alone, 15 million women joined the labour force each year. The female labour force increased threefold in Latin America between 1950 and 1980, and rose from 10 to 32 million.

The characteristics of women's participation in the regional economy reflect the diverse nature of their social and economic insertion as well as the different levels of modernization of countries, although it is possible to pinpoint a number of main trends, one of the most noteworthy of which is the high rate of incorporation observed during the period.

The rates of growth of the female labour force rose faster than those of men, although they remained low. Consequently, overall participation rose from almost 18% in 1950 to slightly over 26% in 1980. The incorporation of women into the labour force was heavily dependent on which phase in their life cycle they had reached. Generally speaking, participation is greater among single women, although at post-secondary levels of education the impact of civil status disappears and the level of participation is high regardless thereof.

The expansion of education, the extension of the social security together with family and reproductive cycles are usually put forward as factors to account for the fact that the age bracket during which most women work ranges from 20 to 29. Moreover, although economic factors are of fundamental importance among low-income sectors, in the case of middle-income sectors a

higher educational level and degree of modernization also account for the presence of women on the labour market.

The services sector remains predominant in such economic participation, thereby continuing the process of tertiarization. Towards 1980, the percentages of women involved in this sector fluctuated between 38 and 55% of the total number of active women. Although their makeup varies, personal services remain important, while social services have increased. In most countries, office employees constitute the second most numerous group, and continue their gradual increase.

Information from the household surveys available since 1970 reveals that during the period women's incomes have remained below those of men and occupational segregation has persisted. According to the same source, this is so despite the fact that the average educational levels of women in the economically active population are higher than those of men.

Broadly speaking, in the Caribbean countries, and in particular in the English-speaking Caribbean, there have not been any deeply-rooted social and cultural prejudices against active participation by women in economic activities. Nevertheless, women tend to be confined to a narrow range of economic activities, such as in the clothing industry or in services, or in providing assistance to others, as in nursing, where the level of wages is lower than in other sectors in which men predominate, such as in technical trades and in construction. This has more to do with attitudes, images and conditioning, reflecting the existing social relations in this respect, than with any legal or institutional impediments affecting women. Examination of the female activity rates available in respect of some countries reveals that between 1980 and 1988, the rate fluctuated between 31% in Cuba and 46 to 47% in Barbados, Jamaica and the United States Virgin Islands.

In general no policies to promote economic participation by women have been pursued in the region; their higher participation is rather connected with urbanization, modernization, the educational process and changes of perception in respect of work. Furthermore, caution is necessary in interpreting statistical data, as they are of doubtful comparability. On the one hand, female work is underrecorded and, on the other, the insertion of large numbers of women within the modern area of the economy has been better measured. Nevertheless, it is important to underscore that one of the achievements of recent years has been the improvement in statistics which has made it possible to measure the female labour force with greater accuracy.

Finally, it is impossible to disregard the work carried out by housewives. In the various countries between 30 and 50% of women over 25 performed unpaid domestic tasks. Although no general agreement has been reached as to an appropriate way of tackling this issue, there is now deeper knowledge regarding the use of time, the economic value of the work performed, the change in the intensity of domestic work resulting from the incorporation of new technologies and the changing role of women within the family.

C. Education

In respect of education, it is first of all necessary to stress the huge expansion which has taken place in formal education together with the growing participation of women therein. On the basis of the principles of universal primary education, equal access thereto and as a result of its constant expansion, education has become a mass phenomenon and a considerable increase has taken place in the training received by the economically active population. Primary and secondary levels increased twofold between 1950 and 1960, and again between 1960 and 1970. Tertiary education also increased, although less spectacularly, and during the 15 years between 1970 and 1985 the percentage of women enrolled rose from 35% to 45%.

However, there are major differences between countries and between rural and urban areas. In addition, in a number of countries the level of illiteracy among elderly women is 90%, while in the 15 to 19 year old age group it is below 15%, and similar to that of men.

In Latin America and the Caribbean the greater or lesser coverage provided by the educational systems has partly depended on global development strategies. It has also reflected the different possibilities of distinct social groups gaining access to and remaining in educational systems. Thus, in some cases coverage remains extremely limited, in others it is broad although not complete and finally, there are cases in which access is virtually universal. Whatever the case, even in the most egalitarian systems inequality is to be found on account of social origin, of the "devaluation of education" which generally goes hand in hand with mass education and of the stratification of educational establishments in qualitative terms, which tends to coincide with social and other forms of stratification.

Despite this, a huge expansion has taken place in education, particularly among the female sector of the population, who have enrolled in vast numbers. Greater equality of opportunity has come about in high-income levels, while the greatest inequality has persisted among poor rural groups and the disparity between "highly educated" women and illiterates has remained. Furthermore, the contents of education for women, particularly higher education, remains connected with skills considered as more suitable in cultural terms for women, although there is no doubt that women are increasingly beginning to educate themselves for work and not merely to perform a social function.

D. Legislation

The objective of equality, one of the decade's broad objectives, has already been interpreted by the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, held in Copenhagen in July 1980 as signifying not only legal equality --the elimination of de jure discrimination, but also in terms of all rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women to participate in development as both a beneficiary and active agent. Legislation, which has been considered to be one of the main features affecting discrimination against women in the past, constitutes a fundamental basis for achieving equality. Consequently, both the United

Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights express the concept of equality between the sexes, and explicitly acknowledge the political, civil, labour and educational rights of women and consider that discriminatory measures against them constitute violations of respect for human dignity.

There is no denying that in the region considerable progress has been made in the field of legislation. First of all, more than half the countries in the region have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, thereby expressing their commitment to this issue and most of them have also adopted domestic legislative measures to comply with the objectives of the Convention.

Towards the 1980s it became clear that in Latin America and the Caribbean no discrimination existed in respect of the political rights inherent to citizenship as long as women remained single. As far as married women are concerned, in several countries their capacity is still affected by marital authority, the system of administration of marital property and by paternal authority. While the trend in this respect has been satisfactory, discrimination still persists in some legislations. Many countries have maintained unequal legal treatment under penal law, particularly in respect of adultery or parricide. Furthermore, the crimes of infanticide, abortion and rape are still punished differently.

As far as labour law is concerned virtually all national legislations have accepted the principle laid down by Convention 100 of the International Labour Organization concerning equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value. Distinct regulations concerning women relate to nightwork and work in unhealthy working conditions as well as to maternity protection.

As the roots of discrimination essentially lie in de facto circumstances, in the maintenance of social and cultural stereotypes and in a lack of awareness, in recent years most governments in the region have set up specialized agencies to promote the advancement of women and have adopted plans and policies designed to ensure equal opportunities. These national mechanisms are attached to specific ministries with the status of undersecretariats, general administrations, governmental divisions in the sectors of the family, social welfare, education, culture, work, planning and economic development. In respect of legislative reforms several countries have drawn up projects designed to change those provisions which discriminate against women, particularly in respect of paternal authority and affiliation, reforms to the system of family law, divorce, equal rights and responsibilities within marriage, family rights, etc.

In addition, in a number of countries programmes have been introduced for the advancement of women through training, child care attention, and awareness of women's rights and problems and family participation.

Finally, it is worth drawing attention to the emergence from organized movements and groups of women of new demands in respect of legislation relating to family violence and assistance for maltreated women, which have already found a certain degree of acceptance in some countries.

In order to carry out a more precise assessment, research should be promoted to provide adequate information on the following topics: ratification and incorporation of international treaties into domestic law; the level of participation of women in international meetings; provisions made to ensure equal rights for men and women and to prohibit gender-based discrimination; discriminatory norms which have been repealed as a result of co-ordinated action; the incorporation of provisions which were not subject to regulation (e.g., family violence) and the creation of legislative reform commissions. It would also be worthwhile to analyse the agencies responsible for the situation of women: (their structure, functions, decision-making power, territorial coverage, insertion within the government structure); mechanisms established to disseminate existing rights and the resources to bring them into effect; the treatment given under national development plans to the problems affecting women; and the efforts made to change social and cultural stereotypes in the fields of education, work, mass media, etc.

In both the government sphere and in that of non-governmental organizations it would be extremely valuable to investigate the political participation of women at the decision-making levels of the State and of political parties, together with their incorporation into the various levels of education and work.

E. Participation

Full participation by women in all spheres of social activity has been one of the principal objectives of the international community, as can be observed from international and regional mandates resulting from decisions taken by governments. At the beginning of the decade stress was placed on the advancement of women as a basic factor in the development process as well as on the pressing need to bring about changes in the economic and social structures so as to ensure full participation by women.

Throughout the decade the objective of participation has gradually become more specific as a result of the clarification of the different issues which need to be tackled. Thus, the idea of women's participation in development underscores her role as an active agent in the process which subsequently takes the form of a political, economic, social and cultural process.

When examining the social participation of women, reference has traditionally been made to their political participation, their participation in political parties, unions, or in other bodies, and in every case attention has been directed to their presence in organized groups. Consequently, women's participation has been perceived as being extremely low, virtually in-existent in the spheres of leadership or management and in the best of cases they have constituted a minority on committees and at the centre of political parties. However, women have traditionally participated in spheres closer to their day-to-day activities, ranging from organizations of upper-class women providing social assistance and benefit projects, such as charities, or helping in hospitals, old peoples homes and asylums, to for example, active participation by young working class women in sewing groups.

The transformations of recent decades have also brought about changes in the region in the role of women in this area. The process of modernization itself has led to an increase in the presence of women in social movements, and to their forming their own movements, a process regarding which it is as yet hazardous to advance any conclusions. It is possible that the new social movements organized by and for women reflect crises within traditional forms, although they may also point to new nodes of conflict and contradiction. Women, particularly those in the middle-income and to a lesser extent the high-income groups organized themselves during the first half of the century to win the right to suffrage, education and work. Subsequently, they channelled their demands through feminine and feminist organizations, in respect of human rights issues, claims relating to their status as women or in support of grass-roots organizations sharing their aims. Their centres have gathered qualitative information on the situation of women, and carried out reflections and studies both in respect of their own stratum, and for the benefit of women from the low-income sectors. Their networks have helped to disseminate information and knowledge and exchange ideas on the topic of women and have also developed further knowledge of the topic.

A considerable proportion of the new social movements which have emerged in recent decades in low-income districts of major cities is composed of and led by women from the same sector. They occasionally form mothers' clubs, take part in church assistance programmes, take the lead of movements to demand day-care centres or health installations; they constitute pressure groups to obtain housing or infrastructure services.

These organizations are heterogenous and difficult to assess. They generally form part of what is known as grass-roots participation and are frequently considered as part of the survival strategies of this sector, complementary to those of men. There is normally no place for them in the political sphere and the most radical groups occasionally consider them to be a new form of conservatism in that they are organized to defend their own interests.

Participation by women in social movements and as a social movement in its own right seems to point towards a broader cultural transformation linked to new forms of political activity, whose framework of reference is necessarily different.

Whatever the case, this participation is giving rise to new more or less articulated demands both for an improvement in living conditions and for protection against family violence, as well as for infrastructure support for working women and demands connected with respect for their image and identity.

Women's movements and organizations make necessary a reinterpretation of politics and a reassessment of its social dimension. More than any other issue the emergence of and demands put forward by these groups casts new light on the relationship and interdependence between the family and society, between the private and public spheres.

F. The family

Since systematic studies were begun into the situation of women in Latin America and the Caribbean, the central role of the family, be it that of origin or that which they found, in women's social activity has been repeatedly highlighted and analysed. Stress has also frequently been placed on the persistent de facto and indirect discrimination linked in particular to civil or family status. The Nairobi Strategies place special emphasis on the need to repeal those laws which in particular discriminate against married women and stress the need to develop complementary strategies to ensure that domestic responsibilities are shared by all members of the family, as well as the need to acknowledge the unstructured and invisible economic contribution made by women to society.

While all the instruments adopted by the United Nations since the promulgation of the Charter have essentially sought to expand the social role of women, their position within the family has been the subject of constant concern and an underlying factor whose presence has been felt with varying intensity in the debate, without its having been successfully integrated therein. The link between the family and society, between the private and the public spheres, the role of women in the home and in the social sphere are still new issues seeking to bring new relationships into being and permeating all aspects and strata of present-day societies. In Latin America and the Caribbean, moreover, family units vary from one society to another depending on which socioeconomic stratum they belong to; they differ in terms of life strategies, social and organizational models and life cycles, all of which offers women the possibility of leading different lives and of adopting a distinct form of economic and social participation.

In addition to socioeconomic and cultural differences, in recent decades families have diversified on account of the process of modernization, particularly connected, in this respect, with urbanization.

Families in the region have been faced with changes of contrasting and dual origin. At least theoretically, the family has continued to constitute a hard core of resistance to change, while on the other hand, on account of the overall processes taking place, the family has in actual fact undergone a transformation. While the impact of these changes has been felt differently by the various families, a number of clear common trends could be detected. The first significant phenomenon was the fall in the size of households which of necessity required a redistribution of roles. Furthermore, the incorporation of vast numbers of women from the rural sector into the urban environment disturbed many family and cultural patterns and moreover incorporated large numbers of women into salaried work. While a conservative and authoritarian attitude towards the family has remained in place, particularly among low-income sectors, the performance of functions different from those laid down by custom gives rise to contradictions and intensifies conflicts. The generalization of education together with the impact of the mass media have weakened the socializing role of the family and altered the relationship between parents and children. The number of households with female heads has grown on account of the breakup of the couple and the networks of solidarity characteristic of broader and more complex families have broken down.

The traditional family model exists, and indeed persists, particularly among high-income traditional sectors and in its specific form within indigenous communities, although the prevailing trend is different.

A considerable proportion of what had hitherto been considered as belonging to the private sphere became socialized. A large number of functions connected with food processing, domestic, educational, cultural and recreational tasks are nowadays carried outside the home environment. The family has opened itself up to society and most of its members spend a considerable proportion of their lives outside the home. The new articulation between the family and society is not as yet clear and can be discerned rather through the disorganization and destabilization affecting most family models which had prevailed in Latin America and the Caribbean. At the same time, a reassessment of the private spheres is taking place among certain sectors and this trend may continue to develop. There is every likelihood that the new family models which are taking shape as a result of the present changes will emerge over the coming decades. It is to be hoped that they will integrate the measures proposed by the Nairobi Strategies, by introducing greater flexibility into the relationship between the family and society and greater sharing within the family itself.

G. Vulnerable groups

It is not women alone who are affected by their circumstances and problems, as they reflect the problems of the society within which they live. Consequently, it is necessary to analyse their situation against the global economic and political developments in the region. This approach to the issue provides a basis for pinpointing specific and significant groups of women, either in terms of their particular vulnerability or their real or potential contribution to the development efforts.

The economic growth of recent decades has been characterized by an unequal distribution of resources which became more pronounced as a result of the oil crisis in the 1970s and the more global crisis which took place towards the 1980s. The deterioration which has taken place in the living conditions of middle-income and low-income sectors in Latin America and the Caribbean on account of the crisis and of the adjustment policies adopted creates a pressing need for measures to provide, in the short term, relief for the situation of the most vulnerable groups.

The most vulnerable groups of women include those in the low-income urban sector, poor rural women, most of whom are women in ethnic minority groups, and young women. Other major groups of women could also be included: housewives, domestic employees, adolescent mothers, female heads of household, and others, although it has been decided that these three groups make it possible to illustrate, albeit inadequately, the main problems, alternatives and requirements of the most vulnerable groups of women, taking into account the crisis and their possible contribution as agents of development.

It should be pointed out that tackling the problems of a specific sector of women, either in terms of their social and economic, geographic or ethnic situation or in terms of age in no way prevents them from being considered in

terms of the problems affecting other women; on the contrary, it provides a complementary approach which makes it possible to examine the problems of women from different angles and to put forward policies which are suited thereto.

1. Women in the low-income urban sector

The low-income urban sector in the region is extremely heterogeneous although it is marked by one common denominator: its essential concern is with satisfying its basic needs and with developing survival strategies for the group. Women also perform multiple functions therein, although in spite of their high level of participation in paid and unpaid work, their position in the family is generally marked by dependence. In addition, their excessive burden of tasks partly or totally restricts their already difficult participation in society. They mainly work within the informal and services sector, particularly in domestic work.

As a number of studies have pointed out, women in this sector are relatively younger in comparison with women as a whole. In addition, female heads of household are more frequently encountered in this stratum, as are unstable marital relationships. The level of education of women in the sector has improved over recent decades, although marked differences remain in terms of access to the educational system, reflected in exclusion or relatively lower levels of enrolment and in the persistence of large numbers of women who fail to reach secondary education.

The level of participation of women from this sector in work is higher than in other strata, a fact which is attributable to force of necessity. The range of occupations is restricted, and the largest contingent is made up of domestic employees, many of whom are rural migrants. Their presence in the informal sector, where home work is fairly important, is also significant. A new type of work which makes intensive use of labour is "sub-contracted assembly", covering activities such as clothing, textiles, electronics, etc. Generally speaking, these jobs are extremely low paid and lack social protection. Moreover, organizational difficulties hinder the formulation of claims by workers. In Latin America and the Caribbean the process of urbanization is a relatively recent phenomenon and as a result part of the low-income urban sector is new in the sense that it is largely made up of migrant women. Other occupations are to be found within this group, including that of street trader, which is characteristic of the informal sector. Street traders are usually of rural origin and frequently from indigenous communities. Andean peasant women sell their own products, meals and craft items. In other countries, some groups emerge as a result of the breakdown of their communities, sometimes accompanied by families and sometimes without them. Another type of rural trade more characteristic of the Caribbean involves intermediaries and long absences for women.

The crisis has compelled women and families in low-income urban sectors to alter their life strategies. This change has initially been reflected in an intensification of their work, both paid and domestic. Simultaneously, other members of the family, in general minors, have been obliged to take part in

the search for sufficient income for the family to subsist, a fact which is also apparent in the clear increase of mendicity and child prostitution.

Among groups belonging to the low-income urban sector, perception of the social role of women is extremely conventional, notwithstanding their major economic role. However, women, and in particular housewives involved in organizations seeking to improve their living conditions play an extremely active role. Although their level of participation has always been high, only rarely does it extend beyond the district and immediate community and only recently has its fundamental role in connection with human settlements and grass-roots organizations in general begun to be acknowledged.

2. Poor rural women

The situation of rural women remains extremely underprivileged, and has probably worsened on account of the upheaval resulting from the modernization of the structures of family and social life, which sparked off the crisis of traditional forms without bringing new ones into being. This is not a homogeneous group, as its members are to be found in sectors of the agricultural economy where capitalist development is advanced, in peasant economies whose population is of hispanic early mestizo origin, and in peasant economies whose population is indigenous and established in native communities.

While there is no question that Latin America and the Caribbean is now predominantly urban, at the present time the female rural population represents 60 million individuals and continues to grow. Within this sector "creole" peasant women in poor households represent approximately 40 million individuals with a percentage of between 20 and 25% of female heads of household and there are approximately 13 million indigenous peasant women, mainly found in the Andean countries and in Central America.

The economic participation of peasant women is generally mediatized by the family, which is the unit which actually defines the survival strategies. Furthermore, domestic work in this sector is far more extensive than that carried out by urban women, as it includes subsistence agricultural activities and the processing of food in addition to ordinary domestic work. The productive work of women in agriculture largely depends on the cultural tradition, but even more so on the crop pattern. In the case of livestock women are generally involved in dairying and cheese making in the case of large and small livestock and in the care of poultry. Their work in agricultural production is heavily influenced by family factors, the type of farm, whether they are the head of the household, etc. In the case of the Andean agricultural system the complementary roles of men, women and children throughout the whole of the production process is worthy of note.

A further type of paid activity carried out by women is that linked to production for the market. This ranges from caring for small livestock and producing craft products to sporadic employment in services.

The presence of rural women in salaried work became more visible with the onset of agricultural modernization. Changes in agriculture set large numbers

of peasant families before two choices: sale of their labour or emigration. Although there is little data on this topic, it is important to draw attention to female agricultural workers or day labourers who are normally unorganized, highly productive, low-paid and in many cases also heads of household.

Another sector which at the present time absorbs a considerable amount of female labour is the export sector marketing flowers, fruits and fresh vegetables. This sector, which requires a large amount of female labour, faces similar problems to the previous one and although it does not seem to have developed on a large scale there is so far no systematic information available on the activity.

Finally, a significant characteristic of rural women, which became particularly marked as from the 1940s is their predominant place in migration. Those women who migrate are generally young single women between the ages of 10 and 24, many of whom are the elder daughters of rural families and large families. Although precise data are not available, it is estimated that migration has slowed down, probably discouraged by the crisis.

Rural women undoubtedly constitute one of the most vulnerable groups in the population on account of the fragile nature of their insertion within society resulting from their dependence on a family system which is breaking down and which used to provide them with protection and define their role in society. In the eyes of national society they possess a different set of skills, which make them unsuitable for salaried work, their level of education is extremely low and their set of codes has little in common with that of society at large.

3. Young women

Concern with young women springs from their vulnerability to the rapid changes which have occurred in the region in recent decades.

Within the female sector, the group made up by young women represents from 30 to 40% in the different countries. More than one fifth of women between 15 and 24 have formed a couple and only a slightly lower percentage is or has been married between the ages of 15 and 19. Knowledge of the problems affecting them is particularly scant, despite the fact that Latin America and the Caribbean is a young continent: 75 million individuals are aged between 15 and 24, approximately half of whom are women.

As mentioned above, women's participation in the labour force, particularly between the ages of 20 and 29 continues to rise and has done so over the last 30 years while the overall activity rate has declined. The growth of that sector of the labour force made up of young women has mainly taken place within the tertiary sector, and ranges from women working in domestic service to those employed by the most modern areas of activity.

Unemployment is of growing importance for young female workers. The possibility of providing employment for young people in most countries of the region has reached a critical stage. It is assumed that the problem is even greater than revealed by figures, as a large number of young women who declare

that they are in charge of the home are in fact no less than hidden unemployed who, on account of the ideological connotations of so-called "domesticity", conceal the fact.

In the Caribbean countries late abortions are a serious health problem, particularly in respect of young women, whose number is rising. It needs to be remembered that approximately half the population of the region is below 15, and that 50% of them are women. In spite of improved educational opportunities, adolescent pregnancy is a widespread phenomenon for many reasons, including ignorance with regard to sex, peer group pressure and high levels of unemployment.

It is changes in education which have the greatest impact on the group of young women. The generalization of secondary education has probably been the most significant feature of the expansion of education, together with a significant rise in the number of women in higher education. Furthermore, women are characterized by extreme polarization in educational levels. On account of the high cost of education in most countries exclusion is more often the case than discrimination, as large numbers of both sexes are unable to gain access thereto.

The information available makes it possible to assert that young women in Latin America and the Caribbean constitute a culturally heterogeneous group, marked by social and economic inequality, whose common feature is perhaps their acute vulnerability. They frequently withdraw into the private sphere and participate little in social activity.

If being young is taken to mean belonging to a group which is still in the process of formation, either in biological or cultural terms, and which does not as yet bear all the responsibilities of adulthood, clearly not all young women can be considered as forming part of this category. The possibility of them behaving as young people is affected by their ethnic group, cultural formation, social class, economic and social circumstances, the degree of modernization attained by the country, the hold of traditional and religious cultural standards, cultural definitions regarding the role of women in society and their access to education. In most cases motherhood is considered to mark the end of youth. A number of studies have identified a sharp increase in adolescent pregnancy, a feature which renders young women even more vulnerable.

There is considerable doubt as to what the future holds in store. The deep and lasting economic crisis has given rise to imbalances and uncertainty. In circumstances which require the organization of more egalitarian societies in the future, young women, who have entered society with the expectations characteristic of the 1960s, possess fresh capacities and innovative potential which sets society before unfamiliar problems.

H. Achievements and hurdles

During the whole of the postwar period until approximately the 1980s, Latin America and the Caribbean experienced significant changes in their societies with major repercussions for the situation, living conditions and social role

of the region's women. These changes, most of which are difficult to assess, nonetheless had visible repercussions in terms of the social or public role of women. Despite sharp contrasts and differences between socioeconomic strata, countries of different levels of modernization and between women of rural or urban origin, women became increasingly present through their economic activity and shared the generalized impression of upwards social mobility. Many of them had fewer children and benefited from greater life expectancy. While the predominant pattern of employment was compatible with their traditional role, their autonomy and economic independence increased and began to be positively perceived as values in themselves.

As a result of the popularization of the cinema, of television and of mass education, a different form of socialization began to spread. New socializing agents came into being in addition to and occasionally in place of the family, opening up new spheres for women's activity. The gap between educated women and uneducated women widened, as did that between older and younger women, thereby constituting truly superimposed worlds.

Little is known of the private sphere and of the changes therein. A number of qualitative studies indicate that changes have taken place in family roles and that the private sphere has become more open to the public sphere, particularly in respect of the socialization of the members of the family. Furthermore, some issues are no longer matters for the private sphere and have become part of the debate within society: domestic work and violence within the family are two of the most prominent. The increase in violence against women within Caribbean society is of concern both to governments and to non-governmental organizations. The measures taken include research into the phenomenon, measures designed to develop an awareness of the acute nature of the problem by means of meetings, radio and television programmes, the establishment of hostels for the victims of violence, together with legal and other measures. It is possible that in certain countries and among certain strata these changes have been more widespread than among others. It would also appear that the value of the private sphere in providing the affection which men, in particular young men, also need is being acknowledged.

It is difficult to make any generalizations or predictions in this field although major transformations are apparent. Perhaps the best indication that changes are taking place is to be found in their contradictory and ambiguous nature.

While many features are not yet clear enough to be considered as proof that the objectives in respect of the role of women have been achieved, there are several that deserve mention. A growing social consciousness opposed to the persistence of any type of social discrimination based on sex has undoubtedly emerged. Similarly, there is a virtual consensus over the right of women to play a fuller role in society. In most countries in the region the State has played a key role in the development of mass education and in respect of legislative reforms which have opened up new spheres to women. In addition, within the State bureaucracy and the public sector of teaching significant work opportunities have been provided for women. In recent years, specialized offices for the advancement of women have been established within the State apparatus.

The role of non-governmental organizations has been decisive for the acquisition of new knowledge regarding the situation of women and their needs. They have also provided support for specific projects to allow women to earn income, to provide them with training and to mobilize them. In some countries they have worked in conjunction with State agencies while in others, on the contrary, they have set up alternative spheres of activity.

The main stumbling blocks to women's participation lie in the persistence of cultural stereotypes regarding the role of women, in unfavourable economic circumstances affecting large sectors of women, in the maintenance of legal restrictions over their role in the family, in their still inadequate level of education and training and the lack of sufficient and suitable employment.

These circumstances reflect the ambivalent nature of the region's social development, marked by considerable formal progress and basic problems which have been heightened by the crisis.

The impact of the crisis on women has begun to be studied in depth in recent years, and while it is difficult to draw any definitive conclusions regarding the phenomenon, a number of factors are worth mentioning. The crisis has undoubtedly not affected all women to the same extent and in the same manner. There is no question that women in low-income sectors are one of the most vulnerable groups and their work opportunities range from further domestic work, to begging, delinquency, and prostitution. Within the rural sector, large numbers of women have become seasonal wage-earners in agricultural export firms. Generally speaking, there is a further increase in the excess burden of paid and unpaid work borne by women and which constitutes the cornerstone of a variety of collective and solidary survival strategies adopted by their groups, such as communal kitchens, craft workshops and bakeries. It is commonplace to observe that the crisis among low-income sectors has brought women out of the home and has led them to taking over that communal space where the problems of survival and satisfaction of basic needs are solved. In contrast, among the middle-income sectors the crisis is normally tackled "behind closed doors", by cutting back on many factors which provided women with support in their work and by diminishing family consumption.

Although the figures are inadequate, they make it possible to emphasize that unemployment and underemployment have increased more in the case of women than in that of men, and that many women are to be found in submerged economies, in new forms of servitude, with extremely low wages and no legal protection.

The crisis has no doubt brought new contradictions into being for women. Recent decades gave rise to expectations of new opportunities, education, employment, new possibilities for participation, which it will be hard to stifle. The crisis may possibly lead to the revival of more conservative and traditional models in an attempt to encourage women to return to the home, in order to ease the demand for employment. Furthering the integration of women into society is both a recent and fragile process. The crisis represents a significant factor which needs to be taken into account in order to adopt the necessary precautions to prevent the process of integration from coming to a halt. The approach adopted by the region in committing itself to the

advancement of women was to establish links between the problems of women and those of society at large and to acknowledge their structural nature. Only determined political will and the reassertion of this approach will prevent the status of women in Latin America and the Caribbean from experiencing a reversal. The crisis alone is not capable of setting back or of reversing the progress made by the role of women in society. On the contrary, it may constitute a tool for forging new development models involving more active participation by women. Success in this respect is more connected with the alternative adopted in order to tackle the crisis than with the economic situation itself.

IV. GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

A. Women and development

The current situation of and prospects for women in Latin America and the Caribbean are closely linked to the development of the countries of the region. The Regional Plan of Action, the official instrument adopted in 1977 to orient the activities of the Decade on this topic, expresses this relationship from two perspectives: the situation of women does not affect exclusively this sector but the society as a whole and the improvement of that situation requires the full integration of women into the process of development in the region.

In various recent documents, ECLAC has drawn attention to the seriousness of the current crisis and to the external and internal factors that constitute obstacles to economic growth, and stressed the need for urgent measures to be adopted, at both the national and international levels, in order to place the societies back on the path of development. These measures include the transformation of the international trade and financial system so that it would stimulate and not impede development, the modernization of the productive structure in order to better satisfy the needs of the population and to achieve a more comprehensive insertion in the international economy, the undertaking of a major domestic programme of capital accumulation, and substantial improvements in the levels of employment, income and, in general, in the living conditions of the poorest groups in rural and urban areas. This constitutes an enormous task on whose successful outcome the future of the vast majority of men and women in Latin America and the Caribbean depends.

While in this undertaking the least privileged groups require preferential treatment, not only because of their long-standing needs but also because they have been particularly affected by the crisis, within such groups women are the most vulnerable.

Three factors contribute to this vulnerability. Firstly, the exclusive responsibility of women for work in the home. The burden of such work depends on the number and ages of children and on the material difficulties in performing it. In addition to her housework, working class women are generally involved in other activities in order to increase family incomes, and thus often do a double day's work. Secondly, since the ability to reproduce is an attribute of women, very frequent pregnancies, together with poor nutrition and the lack of rest, lead to debilitation, malnutrition and fatigue. Moreover, this fact, in the case of the precocious pregnancies of adolescents,

which show an upward trend, and that of induced abortions, which are very numerous and for the most part clandestine, entails risks to life. Thirdly, women in many cases are forced to become heads of households, through emigration or desertion by the husband or partner; in such circumstances the mother in fact bears the entire responsibility for the maintenance and survival of the children.

A different problem is posed by mothers, childless women and single women who live in rural and urban areas. The heaviest burden of work is borne by mothers, whether single, heads of household or mothers with partners, but who at the same time are workers in urban or rural areas.

These situations, which are particularly serious, require the urgent implementation of a set of measures designed to improve the living conditions of mothers and their children. Such measures are particularly concerned with the areas of employment, health and education.

In the field of employment the principal measures are: a) to formalize informal employment, particularly in jobs such as those performed by non-live-in domestics, women who work at home and rural workers, which will require the regulation of contracts and working days, the establishment of a system of payment in which remuneration would be based on each day's work instead of on a piece-work basis, etc.; b) to provide own-account workers with access to social services to cover the risks of illness and to give them the right to retirement benefits; c) in the formal sector, to regularize special situations such as that of live-in domestic employees, with a view to eliminating all features of servile work, through the establishment of maximum working hours, minimum wages, the right to off-duty days, vacation, etc. The working conditions of women employed in assembly plants also require similar improvements.

Finally, the burden of the double work day of women must be relieved by the introduction of a community element into some of their activities, particularly those related to the upbringing of children, through the establishment of nurseries, day-care centres and networks of low-cost laundries, the provision of cheap meals in work places, etc., measures which would help to relieve the burden of housework.

In the area of health there are at least four guidelines for action which must be followed and which are concerned with: a) the nutrition of nursing infants and mothers which requires the expansion, or establishment where they do not exist, of programmes to provide milk to pregnant women and wet nurses, milk to nursing infants, school breakfasts or the provision of a glass of milk to pre-school age children living under conditions of extreme poverty, which represent the highest risk categories; b) the protection of women during the pre-delivery and post-delivery periods, provided through the establishment, particularly in rural areas, of health outposts that offer basic gynecological services; c) the type of education which should be given to women and to men on the topic of human fertility and the methods of controlling it to give them the ability to decide on the number of children and to prevent abortions; d) the protection of migrant single women in cities, through the establishment of homes and refuge shelters while they seek

employment, particularly so as to prevent them from falling into prostitution.

In the field of education, the principal guidelines are concerned with specific training to enable women to enter the job market with some skill, so that they can qualify for better jobs and higher wages; or, in the rural areas, to fulfil their role as agricultural producers with technical knowledge that enables them to undertake more profitable activities; at the same time, it is essential to carry out campaigns to definitively eliminate illiteracy, particular among young indigenous women.

B. Women and equality

Though necessary, economic and social development is not sufficient to eliminate the generic differences that exist within society.

The search for equality between the sexes makes it necessary to attach greater importance to the role of women in society as well as to stress the urgency of devising and implementing specific measures for their benefit, which lead to full equality of opportunities and rewards for men and women.

The particularity of the situation of women places them in the apparently paradoxical situation of being a focal group without being a minority. This particularity derives from the peculiar nature of the social insertion of women as producers and reproducers of lives and goods, which poses various types of challenges and makes it necessary to consider women from various points of view: as social actors who demand specific measures; as the consumers of goods and services; as those responsible for work in the home; as a growing labour force; and as those responsible for introducing new generations into society.

Much of the difficulty encountered in achieving equality between men and women is due to social, economic and political factors, but particularly to discriminatory stereotypes based on preconceived attitudes and ideas about the role of women in society. A genuine cultural change must be brought about in order to achieve equality since culture is the area in which the elements that create and recreate the subordinate role of women in society are most persistent and rooted.

Simultaneous measures to change the situation of women in society need to be adopted in three spheres: the regulatory, the cultural and the socioeconomic; these aspects have all been covered in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In terms of legal norms, it is essential to eliminate all forms of legislative discrimination, in civil, criminal and labour law. Particular importance should be attached to all legislation concerning married women which discriminates by virtue of nationality, marital rights, patria potestas, inheritance, control of property, place of residence, etc. Special attention must also be paid to the rights of women who are heads of households and of unmarried mothers and their children. In the field of labour law it must be ensured that women receive equal pay for work of equal value, and that

legislation is adopted to cover all forms of informal work; piece-work, work in the home, subcontracting assembly, etc. Steps must be taken to promulgate laws in areas such as family violence, particularly to prevent and punish the ill-treatment of women, and sexual violence, in order to ensure respect for the dignity of women. Such legislation must also establish the mechanisms of assistance and support for the victims of this type of violence. The discriminatory treatment of women in situations of adultery, parricide, infanticide, abortion and rape must be removed from the penal code.

However, as long as the mechanisms to monitor the implementation of such legislation are not established de facto discrimination will continue to exist, which makes it necessary to disseminate information on the legislation in order to acquaint women with their rights as well as with the instances to which they could appeal to ensure compliance.

The greatest difficulties in the way of change are to be found in the area of culture in which forms of discrimination against women persist, which then spread to all other areas of social life. In the cultural sphere, many discriminatory values and stereotypes persist and these contribute to the appearance of new and more subtle forms of discrimination. An end to this situation requires the public dissemination of values aimed at the society as a whole without distinction of sex, but particularly at women, to make them conscious of their dignity and capacity as persons and of the social contribution which they make as workers and mothers. Cultural type measures require small outlays of financial resources and may have great impact.

The stereotypes about the different value of men and women in society are formed on the basis of different types of socialization, and a special effort is thus required to bring about an egalitarian form of socialization which does not subordinate women. Such socialization must be undertaken both in formal education --eliminating discriminatory content-- and in informal education, particularly in the programme content and images disseminated by the mass communications media, and must promote the propagation of alternative models of women based on the real roles they play in society.

As regards the socioeconomic field, as long as there continues to be a differentiation between the productive male world and the reproductive female world, it will be difficult to remove the sources of discrimination. The recognition accorded to the household work undertaken by women has represented an important step forward in recent years; however, as long as women continue to do a double day's work, they will be facing men on the job market under unequal conditions and there will be a continuation of the segregation of women, who will continue to perform the lesser jobs which are considered feminine. The recognition that both production and procreation are the tasks of men and women --indeed, of the society as a whole-- will represent a major step forward along the path to equality. In this regard, there is need to strengthen all the measures designed to socialize domestic work and to encourage the involvement of both men and women in it.

Participation is an essential component of development and equality since it confers on these processes the indispensable quality of accomplishment and self-sufficiency. In the case of women, whose degree of participation has traditionally been less, the fact of participating in the making of decisions

on their future and in the search for alternative solutions transforms them from objects of altruism into social actors. Indeed, any policy whose implementation does not require the mobilization and effective participation of those for whom it is intended, runs the risk of producing consequences which contradict its stated aims.

The full participation of women under conditions of equality cannot be achieved without stable and lasting peace. Consequently, all obstacles to peace at the national and international levels must be removed. This means following the principles and guidelines for strengthening peace recommended by the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women.

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