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**CHANGING POWER AND
AUTONOMY OF THE
CARIBBEAN WOMEN**

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SUMMARY

The study first presents a critical evaluation of the theories on women and development that have arisen over the past two decades. The most recent of these theories, the empowerment approach developed by Moser (1989), is then taken as the conceptual framework for the remainder of the study.

The central elements in Moser's approach are the concepts of power and autonomy. She acknowledges the historical origins of gender inequality, recognizes the multiple roles of women in society, and then defines women's practical and strategic needs in a development process that is moving towards gender equality.

The unequal distribution of power and autonomy between the genders has caused, and still maintains, the disadvantaged position of women in comparison to men. Women therefore need more autonomy and empowerment in their lives to reach gender equality in a sustainable way. According to Moser, the current political, social and economic structures that so much reinforce the present situation of women need to be transformed. Such changes necessarily must incorporate a gender perspective.

The study continues with an elaboration of Moser's approach and describes the different types of power and autonomy. The power concept can be subdivided in terms of "power over", "power to", "power with" and "power within". The autonomy concept can be broken up into four constituents: political, physical, economic and sociocultural autonomy (Schrijvers, 1985). These characterizations of power and autonomy are useful to highlight the plurality and diversity of women's roles and the different practical and strategic needs of women in the transformation process.

The second part of the study attempts to put the empowerment approach into practice, illustrating it through a historical and contemporary analysis of the lives of the English-speaking women of the Caribbean.

In this region, the impact of the slave-trade and slavery has been enormous, producing a wide spectrum of inequality. Ethnicity, class and age are just some of the factors that have determined, in a very profound way, women's unequal position.

The current political and economic situation, particularly the structural adjustment programmes and the economic crisis, have further influenced women's lives, their relationships with men, and their positions within the family and within society.

The resulting situation of the English-speaking women in the Caribbean is very diverse and dynamic. Their roles and positions, in productive, reproductive and communal terms, are full of conflicts and contradictions that continuously change, as do the ways in which women perceive these roles. To describe and analyse the diversity in more detail, the four components of autonomy introduced before are used.

It is concluded that, on the one hand, women generally have a certain amount of individual autonomy and power in their lives, acquired through historical tradition, but, on the other hand, do not see this personal autonomy translated into more equality in family or society. Of the needs they perceive, those linked to their economic and physical

autonomy are mainly practical, whereas the changes necessary for political and cultural autonomy involve much more strategic demands.

The study ends with some recommendations for expanding the concepts of power and autonomy into policy instruments and for incorporating the empowerment approach into development policies with a gender perspective.

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades important changes have been observed in the discussion of women and development. One of the most revolutionary and challenging of these was the introduction by Oakley of the gender concept (1972) into the academic debate. This concept emphasized that differences in the relations between men and women are socially and culturally constructed, as opposed to the assumption that they are based on biological characteristics.

The introduction of the gender concept gave rise to a new analysis of the unequal social relations between men and women. Feminists from the South and the North ascribed this to an unequal distribution of power between the genders. In the past 20 years, this concept has evolved from a theoretical approach in the social sciences to a theoretical framework for development policies, one which can be applied to new and existing development policies because it has shifted the focus from research into problems affecting women to investigation of the social relations between men and women in unequal positions.

The development of the gender concept paralleled that of the women-and-development approach (i.e., the integration of women into the development process). During and after the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace (1976-1985), more attention gradually began to be paid to the mechanism which created and maintained the invisibility of women in the development process. The concept of unequal gender relations and power became the central focus of this discussion.

Since the start of the Decade, gender policy makers have refined the gender-power concept further, transforming it into the *empowerment* approach. They have redefined the concept of power from "power-over" to "power-to", bringing a creative element to bear on the transformation of society in the direction of more equal gender relations. The aim of the empowerment approach is i) *the elimination of inequalities between women and men*, and ii) *the transformation of political, social and economic structures for a more humane and democratic society*. It points the way to the achievement of equity between women and men through the provision of greater *autonomy* (i.e., living space) for women stemming from the strengthening of their power base (i.e., empowerment).

The approach focuses on acknowledging i) the plurality and diversity of women's lives and ii) the origin of women's subordination, but also identifies iii) the *practical gender needs* and the *strategic gender needs* expressed by women themselves through analysis and knowledge of their own situation, enabling them to determine their own strategies and programmes.

In a *strategic* sense, in respect of development programmes and models, autonomy for women implies striving to achieve equity and equality, not only in their power relations with men, but also between the countries of the North and the South. It creates opportunities for all individuals to live their own lives and give a direction to their lives. In a *methodological* sense, autonomy is an *analytical tool* for examining the power relations between men and women and how they are changing over time. An analysis of living

space for women shows that it comprises four elements, namely, economic, political, sociocultural and physical aspects.

From this perspective, the present study, which reflects a dynamic interaction between theory, practice and policy, with a central focus on the concepts of empowerment and autonomy, will analyse both the strategic and the methodological aspects of autonomy. Following a discussion of the conceptual framework, special attention will be given to the changing gender (power) relations of *English-speaking Caribbean women*, particularly poor women of African descent. Questions will be raised, including: What is the origin or history of women's unequal status? What are the implications for prevailing gender roles/relations, i.e., how is power distributed between the genders? What are the new opportunities for women and men, respectively? Which instruments are needed to achieve greater equity?

Caribbean women are unique in many ways in terms of their long history of economic self-sufficiency, highly diversified ethnic and racial backgrounds and high prevalence of female-headed households. On the other hand, they display many similarities to women in other developing countries in such areas as high rates of unemployment and underemployment, high concentration in the lowest-paying jobs and increasing participation in the informal sector. They also have a great capacity for survival in difficult circumstances which has enabled them to be important agents for change in the development process.

In addition, Caribbean society has certain social and cultural similarities to industrialized societies, e.g., family patterns as expressed in visiting unions and single-headed households. Or, as Miller (1991) points out, the patterns of social relations in the industrialized countries are becoming more like those of the Caribbean. The Caribbean countries can be perceived as precursors of the social development process.

This study will highlight the fact that development with social equity accompanied by a *gender perspective* depends to a large extent on the social, cultural and historical background of countries, local circumstances and personal situations. It means that every social, economic or political action or change has to be weighed in its specific context, without destabilizing cultures or imposing values foreign to the national culture. As stated, the concept of *gender* will be the key to discussions of development issues since it is a more valid interpretative framework and analytical tool than the concept of *sex*. While sex refers to permanent characteristics of an individual, gender as a concept stresses that what it means to be born male or female varies with time and place, class and culture, ethnicity and civilization. In other words, gender is a *culturally cognitive interpretation* of sex differences and male-female power relations and roles which are deeply rooted in the existing cultural values and norms. These gender roles, with their consequent socially desirable behaviour, are often perceived as destiny. As strikingly illustrated by a Caribbean woman, commenting in an interview on her role as mother, wife and housewife: "That's what we are made for, that's what we women were made for..." (Powell, 1986, p. 87).

The first section of this study deals with the development of various theories concerning women and development during recent decades. Central attention will be given to the most recent theory, namely, the empowerment approach, which comprises an analysis of the origin of women's unequal status, the concept of autonomy and power, the varying needs of women and the multiplicity of women's lives.

The second section applies the empowerment approach to a historical analysis of Caribbean society, focusing on the specificity, dynamics and contradictions of women's subordination as a function of class, ethnicity, age, etc., and such international influences as slavery, world crises, and so on, which have had an extreme effect on the prevailing gender relations.

The following section focuses on the current situation in the Caribbean and presents the gender roles which Caribbean women perform. It further illustrates the differing perceptions which women have and the difficulty of making a clear distinction among the three aspects of women's role.

The final section will apply the concept of autonomy with its various elements as an analytical tool for assessing whether women possess a certain level of power in their lives, where such power is located and where the problem areas are. Lastly, the concepts of power and autonomy will be expanded into a policy instrument for women and development in terms of how to incorporate the empowerment approach into the development process.

Part One

THE CONCEPT

I. DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

A. FROM PASSIVE BENEFICIARIES TO ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Since the publication of Boserup's *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970), much has changed in the discussion of women and development. Her pioneer work on the consequences of the modernization process for women has led to a debate over the need to take women into account in development policies which has been well documented during the past two decades.

However, despite the stated intentions, in practice nothing has changed fundamentally for women, especially poor women. As Antrobus (1989b) pointed out, the status of women deteriorated further following the Decade for Women (1976-1985). The question then arose as to what went wrong. According to Antrobus, women accepted an agenda which abandoned both a structural analysis and attention to women's strategic interests. The failure resided in concentrating on women's practical needs without recognizing that women's lack of power would lead to the non-fulfilment of such needs. What was worse, women would lose their achievements because they did not have the power to sustain them.

The question "*What went wrong?*" has been raised several times in recent years during discussions of women and development. The explanations range from the culturally biased concentration on women's reproductive role to the assumption by policy makers that women must be integrated into development. In the first place, women are fully integrated into their country's development tasks by virtue of the productive and reproductive work which they perform. Because of their unequal status, they have no control over their labour, their bodies or their living conditions. Accordingly, an integration into the existing social structures will marginalize their status, rather than lead to their emancipation (Lycklama a Nijeholt, 1987). Or as Sen and Grown pointed out:

"A development process that shrinks and poisons the pie available to poor people, and then leaves women scrambling for a larger relative share is not in women's interests. We reject the belief that it is possible to obtain sustainable improvements in women's economic and social position under conditions of growing relative inequality, if not absolute poverty for both women and men. Equality for women is impossible within the existing economic, political and cultural processes that reserves resources, power and control for small groups of people. But neither is development possible without greater equity for, and participation by, women" (Sen and Grown, 1987, p. 20).

Secondly, according to the critics, development policies have not given sufficient consideration to the dynamics of relationship between gender, development and culture. For example, in many societies women and men have their own power bases, subcultures and resources which are also affected by the development process. The approaches dealing with women's issues in development could be

characterized as *ahistoric* and non-specific with regard to class, life cycle, ethnic group and culture.

Thirdly, during the past decade and especially following the Decade for Women, policy makers and governments have gained an awareness of women's undeniable role in the political and economic development process. It has been argued that a focus on the major economic contribution made by women to the development process and on the advancement of one group would automatically benefit other groups as well as women themselves (the so-called *trickle-down effect*). Accordingly, special income-generating projects have been implemented to provide women with economic skills on the assumption that greater economic autonomy for women would automatically increase their self-respect and self-awareness, improve their status, enhance their decision-making power and promote more egalitarian relations between men and women. However, many studies have shown that economic autonomy was not automatically reflected in a more independent position overall for women with regard to control over their bodies and greater equality and equity between the genders.

Moser (1993) categorized in chronological order the general trends in Third World approaches to women's issues within broader policies ranging from modernization and growth through basic-needs strategies linked to redistribution to the more recent compensatory measures associated with structural reforms.

The most recent trend is the *empowerment approach* incorporating past experience. It was introduced in response to the argument that, while some development strategies have paid attention to women, nothing has really changed in terms of their unequal status. In this approach the focus is on the power needed to enhance women's *autonomy* in order for them to achieve equality and equity with men. In comparison with other approaches, this one is innovative in the sense that central importance is attached to i) the origin of women's subordination and ii) the creation of self-determination, self-reliance and autonomy for women. It means, on the one hand, women's struggle for self-determination (economic, political, ideological and physical) and, on the other hand, the mobilization of the rank and file of Third World feminist women's groups and grass-roots organizations.

a) ***The welfare approach***¹

In the first period of development cooperation, during the 1950s and 1960s, women were seen as passive beneficiaries of the development process, with an emphasis on their reproductive role. This approach was based on the Western stereotype of the nuclear family in which the woman is economically dependent on the male breadwinner.

b) ***The equity approach***

The basic hypothesis underlying the equity approach was that women were lagging behind in society and that the gap between women and men could be bridged by specific measures within the existing structures. It implied the absence of an analysis of gender relations and of the notion of power. The approach was current mainly during the Decade for Women (1976-1985).

c) *The anti-poverty approach*

This approach is related to the basic-needs strategy of the late 1970s. It acknowledged that women had an important role in the fulfilment of basic needs. However, this role was defined almost exclusively in economic terms, and within the economic sphere, women's role was mainly confined to that of producers in the context of self-sufficiency. Female poverty was seen as a problem of underdevelopment, not of subordination.

d) *The efficiency approach*

This approach is also known as the "instrumental approach". The basic view was that the integration of women into the development process is important in order to strengthen the national economy. Development must make use of women as human resources. In this approach, women were seen as representing underutilized development potential, to be used as an instrument of development policy. This approach disregarded existing role patterns in society and was based upon the mistaken premise that women could, without difficulty, perform extra work and that women's labour had so far not been of benefit to national development. In Latin America this phenomenon is also known as "the super-exploitation of female labour".

e) *The empowerment approach*

The element common to the approaches described above was that they took too little account of the historically based inequalities of power between men and women in the social, economic and personal spheres. In reaction to that, the empowerment approach was implemented in the 1980s. Arising out of Third World women's groups, it is based on the view that the structural inequality between the sexes can be overcome by strengthening and broadening women's power base.

B. LIVING YOUR OWN LIFE

The empowerment approach and the concept of autonomy² are inseparably linked; they are part of the same process of enhancing women's self-reliance. The concept of autonomy was first related to women and development in Bangkok in 1979, during a workshop on "Feminist ideology and structure for women", organized by the Asian and Pacific Centre for Women and Development. Autonomy was defined as i) the power to control our lives both within and outside the home; ii) having a sense of internal strength and confidence in facing life; iii) the right to determine our choices in life and iv) the power to influence the direction of social change (Carrillo, 1986, in ECLAC, 1992).³

As an instrument of development policy, the concept of autonomy might be regarded as new and challenging, although that is not true of autonomy as a goal of women's lives —witness the fact that throughout history and throughout the world, women have fought, often successfully, for economic and political rights and for control over their bodies and lives.

Autonomy may be perceived as "living space", which means authority, freedom and opportunity for each individual. It implies a basis for gaining control over one's life, body

and sexuality *vis-à-vis* men and the institutions of society. Autonomy requires the creation of space for women in which to realize their own ideas about themselves, humanity and society, thereby making choices and influencing processes of social change. It is therefore closely related to the establishment of *democracy*: a right for all social actors and movements to negotiate within the plurality and diversity of conflicting interests (Vargas, 1992 and 1993).

In order to achieve greater autonomy in their lives, women need the power to transform existing oppressive structures in society. But as Antrobus (1989a) has argued, the word "power" has always been felt by women and men to be highly charged. In general, it has generated more rejection than sympathy. The main reasons for this are negative connotations, ignorance and confusion about the meaning of "power".

For a better comprehension and application of the terminology of "power", feminists⁴ have redefined the concept as consisting of: i) *power-over*, ii) *power-to*, iii) *power-with* and iv) *power-within*.

- i) *Role-power* or *power-over* derives from occupying a particular position of authority and has been defined as "legitimate power". This power is an either/or relationship of domination and subordination.
- ii) *Personal-power* or *power-to*, in contrast, is less formal; it is creative and enabling. It is the essence of the individual aspect of empowerment. People feel themselves powerful in situations where they have solved a problem, understood something or learned a skill.
- iii) *Power-with* refers to people who feel themselves empowered by being organized and united by a common purpose or understanding (CCIC/MATCH/AQOCI, 1991).
- iv) The last element of power derives from the *power within* each person: from her or his maturity, sense of self-acceptance and self-respect, lack of need to gain from others, belief in her or his motives and respect for and acceptance of others as equals (Antrobus, 1989a, CCIC/MATCH/AQOCI, 1991).

In the context of the recent debate over women and development, the positive meaning of power, such as "strength" and "energy" is stressed, in connection with establishing and enhancing the autonomy of women. By being expressed as "*power-to*", "*power-with*" and "*power-within*", the concept of power encompasses the notion that to strive for autonomy is not a privilege of women alone, but rather a prerogative of all subordinated people fighting for their own interests and rights (Meynen and Vargas, 1992).

Schrijvers (1985) analysed the concept of autonomy into four main elements that could serve as important indicators for assessing the position or "living space" of women in society:

- i) *Economic autonomy*: equal access to and control over such resources as labour and other means of production such as credit, land and information;
- ii) *Political autonomy*: a political voice, self-determination and the formation of groups pursuing their own free direction, needs and concerns;
- iii) *Social-cultural autonomy*: positive gender-understanding with a legitimating sense of dignity, the right to an independent identity and self-respect for women;
- iv) *Physical autonomy*: control over one's body, sexuality and fertility.

According to Schrijvers, it is essential to relate these elements to a political vision in which the central focus is on the need for a different, more equal world order. It is important that these four elements should not be considered or applied in isolation from one another. The coherence of these components is crucial and may, in some instances,

be contradictory, in view of the variety of cultures, each with its own norms, values and priorities for the concept of autonomy. Thus, the possibilities for and obstacles to achieving autonomy will be different everywhere.

Besides the variation resulting from social circumstances, such as cultural, religious or political resistance, there are individual variations, such as stage in the life cycle, class or ethnic group, in which each woman chooses her own personal strategy for achieving autonomy. Or, as Lycklama a Nijeholt (1987) noted:

"there exists no blueprint for a transformation of patriarchal societies. Women in their specific situation will have to develop a vision of what kind of development, what kind of society they want and, on the basis of their understanding of their present situation, devise strategies for change and methods to work towards that vision".

In the same vein as the different definitions of power, autonomy is associated, on the one hand, with i) *collectivity*: women must defend the specific interests which they share as women and must have a voice in determining the direction of development. Autonomy, on the other hand, is also related to ii) *individual power*: women want to have control over themselves, make their own choices and have access to such resources as cash income, property and information. As Vargas (1992) pointed out:

"For a woman this means not to see herself as an appendix of men, defined by men or by the society. She has to find her own meaning and values, to recognize the specificity, the individualization she has in society, not seeing herself a second-class citizen but a person possessing social and political citizenship" (Vargas, 1992, p. 27).

The distinction between collectivity and individuality is in practice closely intertwined with the need not to be seen in isolation; the two are mutually reinforcing. For example, in order to achieve a collective change in the status of women, it is often necessary to start at the personal level, to ensure that women have their say or control over their bodies, lives and actions. At the other extreme, it is possible that women may first need a collective impulse before improving their own position.

Autonomy is a complex concept and varies according to political perspective. For example, from a *socialist perspective*, the emphasis is on a more or less autonomous organization of women within a common political framework, whereas from a *liberal perspective*, the emphasis is on individual freedom and equal rights. The concept operates also at different levels. These can be distinguished as: i) personal, ii) theoretical and iii) organizational. In the context of development, the level of theory and analysis and the level of organization seem to be the most important. In this respect, autonomy must be regarded as a method rather than an end in itself. At the personal level, autonomy is an end in itself.

The concept of autonomy is not intended to widen the gap between men and women, which is the most common criticism of its opponents. That gap already exists. Rather, as women's self-confidence and political and economic power increase, they may be able to bridge the gap and take their place alongside of men as an equal interest group and, together with men, give form and meaning to society. Autonomy is a fundamental basis for negotiation and alliances. "The struggle for maximum autonomy for women leads to the creative shaping, together with men, of a society that can provide for basic needs and in which relations of violence, exploitation and domination are reduced to a minimum" (Lycklama a Nijeholt, 1984, in RAWOO, 1986).

Especially during the Decade for Women, when the *equity approach* was introduced, another frequently heard criticism of the concept of autonomy was that it had been adapted from Western feminists, who were responsible for exporting the concept

to the developing countries through development programmes. Yet the opposite appears to be true: autonomy is, in fact, a demand of women of the South, who have been fighting for decades for their own rights and concerns and for self-determination and participation in the development processes of their societies.

As mentioned above, the aim of empowering women is not only to provide them with the capacity for greater autonomy and self-reliance, but also to *recognize the situation* of women, to assess the extent to which they are acting and participating in society as full-fledged citizens.

In recent decades the situation of many poor women often deteriorated despite the focus of development programmes (i.e., the anti-poverty and efficiency approaches) on reducing female poverty. In these programmes, it was chiefly women's productive role that was recognized and emphasized, while their domestic workload remained the same. For instance, there have been cases of employment planning which was primarily concerned with women as paid workers and which assumed the existence of a household support system, thus ignoring the fact that women's participation in the labour force was constrained by their domestic obligations. On the other hand, social welfare focused on women's domestic role, disregarding their income-earning activities.

Experience has now shown that it is inadvisable to separate the multiple roles that women perform. Recognition of women's situation, their different activities and roles and their constraints is a prerequisite for achieving development with gender equity and must be incorporated into development policies as a central objective.

C. MORE THAN A REPRODUCTIVE ROLE

Moser (1989) was one of the first to conceptualize and systematize women's different roles and activities by distinguishing three components thereof, namely, the i) *reproductive*, ii) *productive* and iii) *community management* roles, with the aim of dispelling the myth, believed in by policy makers and governments, that women are responsible only for such traditional domestic tasks as child-rearing, cleaning, cooking, etc.⁵ Household maintenance consists of more than purely reproductive tasks, especially in low-income households. Moreover, women are often the main or secondary income-earners in the family (a productive task), thus guaranteeing or contributing to monetary security.

Women also play an important role in the community or neighbourhood. In the so-called *community management* role, they contribute, to a large extent, to the well-being of members of the community. This is obvious from their participation, either collectively or through individual "political" action, in such activities as ensuring access to adequate water supplies and health care. The community management role is thus related to political action, as well as to the "management" of social activities, such as providing child care to other women. Men are also involved in community activities, but in markedly different ways than women. The spatial division between the public world of men and the private world of women (where the neighbourhood is an extension of the domestic arena) means that men and women undertake different community work. While women have a "community management role" based on the provision of items of collective consumption, men have a community leadership role, in which they organize at the formal political level, generally within the framework of national policies (Moser, 1989).

According to Moser (1989), both the reproductive and the community management roles are often overlooked and undervalued by policy makers because they are non-productive and are thus naturally assigned to women. Moreover, these roles do not have

any monetary exchange value, and are therefore unimportant in the policy-makers' view. This ignores the fact that the economy cannot function without reproduction.⁶ Such undervaluation persists because many women, owing to historically based gender relations, have the same opinion of their roles as the policy makers, which perpetuates the status quo.

The most common criticism of Moser is that the triple-role classification is too schematic and abstract and therefore less applicable to practical situations (Anderson, 1992). In fact there are many roles, each with its own specific features, demands and constraints.⁷ In practice women undertake a multitude of roles, as mothers, wives, sisters, aunts, neighbours, housekeepers, healers, wage-labourers, marketers, entrepreneurs and community leaders. These roles vary widely, being determined not only by the specific socio-economic context but also by the particular class, ethnic and religious structures of individual societies.

Furthermore, the classification becomes more complex when the *perceptions* of women and men are taken into account. For example, some women perceive their reproductive role as economically productive, while others do not. Some view their roles as separate, while others see them as closely intertwined. There are also women who view their different roles as being in harmony while others view them as being in disharmony and conflict. In order to avoid stereotyping in practice, it is necessary to look at women's roles in a more specific sociocultural context. However, in theory, Moser's conceptualization could serve as a clear and useful theoretical framework and a methodological tool for the incorporation of gender issues into policy planning.

Thus, regardless of the exact content or labelling of the roles, it is clear that women perform a multiplicity of closely related and often conflicting tasks. This is because of societal acceptance of the notion that women should automatically fulfil these roles, which mean that their lives consist of the heavy burden of responsibility for their households, intensified by long working hours, limited resources, few opportunities and fewer rewards.

D. PRACTICAL AND STRATEGIC NEEDS

In order to strengthen and broaden women's power base, it is necessary to start with women themselves, in order to gain insight into how they perceive their development and the means to that end. The fulfilment of their needs and concerns is highly relevant to this effort.

The growing interest in the various roles of women has also been manifested in increasing attention to the specific needs and requirements of each role. Segregation according to gender roles has, in general, differentiated women's roles from those of men. While in a few societies men perform female-oriented tasks (mainly "outside-the-home activities", such as shopping and gardening),⁸ their contribution has increased significantly in recent years, mainly because of diminished male participation in remunerated labour. At the same time, women have increasingly entered the labour market while maintaining their reproductive activities at the same level. Despite the positive contribution made by men, women's burdens have only increased, and have remained different from those of men. It is therefore easy to demonstrate the differences in their respective priorities and objectives.

This has been done in several studies. Women seem to be more "outward-oriented", taking into account the concerns of family members and society, while men tend to be

more "inward-oriented" and focused on their own concerns. Obviously, these differences are closely related to their gender-constructed roles, as dictated by society's ruling norms and values. When male-dominated needs are met, as is often the case in project planning in developing countries, women's situation and status generally deteriorate because their basic needs are ignored. If women are to participate equally in the development process, it is essential that special attention be paid to their specific concerns, since they are mainly responsible for reproductive tasks on behalf of their families. Such concerns and needs must be specified if they are to have practical implications. Molyneux (1985) conceptualized and prioritized women's concerns as *practical gender interests* and *strategic gender interests*, while Moser (1989) translated these, for practical reasons, into *practical gender needs* and *strategic gender needs*.

Practical gender needs arise from women's actual experience of their *engendered* position within the sexual division of labour. Such needs are oriented basically to human survival (Moser, 1989 and 1993). Nevertheless, critics point out that even these practical interests tend to be subject to preconceptions because of the focus on women's importance to family subsistence, without questioning whether this constitutes equality of development for women (Moser and Levy, 1986; Molyneux, 1985).

The gender division of labour within the household gives women primary responsibility not only for child care, family health and food provision, but also for managing the household, providing basic services and earning income. Accordingly, policies designed to meet women's practical needs must focus on the domestic arena, income-earning activities and the community-level requirements of housing and basic services. Such basic needs as food, shelter and water are, of course, shared by all members of the family. Yet they are identified specifically as being the practical gender needs of women, not only by planners and policy makers concerned with achieving development objectives, but also by women themselves and by men. Both sexes are thus often responsible for preserving and reinforcing the gender division of labour.

Strategic gender needs are those which are formulated from an *analysis of women's subordination to men*, with the aim of promoting an alternative and more equal organization of society and a more humane world than exists at present. The main focus is on the transformation of power relations between the genders, between States and between women.

Strategic gender needs vary according to the particular cultural, economic, social and political context in which they are formulated. Strategic gender needs may include all or some of the following: abolition of the gender division of labour; alleviation of the burden of domestic labour and child care; removal of institutionalized forms of discrimination such as prohibitions on owning land or property or access to credit; the establishment of political equality; freedom of choice over child-bearing, and the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women (Molyneux, 1985).

Strategic gender needs such as the above are often identified as feminist and are therefore not popular with policy makers. However, the major setbacks in the well-being of women and children which resulted from the global economic crisis of the 1980s have forced women and men to recognize that even practical gains are easily reversed if women lack the power (i.e., the strategic tools) to sustain them.

While practical and strategic needs can be differentiated in theory, in practice they are not easily separated. The fulfilment of strategic needs almost always depends on practical needs being met, and vice versa. However, addressing practical needs does not automatically mean more equal relations between men and women. Conversely, increasing women's economic independence or autonomy does not necessarily improve their access to sanitary facilities, better housing and health care.

Assessing the perceived needs of women, especially their strategic needs, is not easy and is often hampered by obstacles, such as cultural resistance and women's lack of self-awareness. The power needed to express their views and interests can be mobilized by grass-roots, and non-governmental organizations which may be assumed to have closer contact with women than governmental and international organizations. Furthermore, it must be kept in mind that the women's needs are different in each culture, as women are not a homogeneous group. For instance, education may be a practical need in one society and a strategic need in another society. Moreover, needs and concerns may vary by group, age, status, class and race (Young, 1991). This is shown by the fact that teenagers in urban areas have different priorities than older women in rural areas. Therefore, it is very important to consider the historical, cultural and social background of women, the better to understand how the difference in their status (including their own needs and priorities) as compared with men and society as a whole has evolved over time.

In line with the theories described above, the historical component of the empowerment approach will be analysed, i.e., the origins, dynamics and structures of women's subordination bearing in mind that women's status is not only a matter of their relations with men, but is also related to neocolonial and colonial history and even to the position which they occupy in the world economy. This analysis will be illustrated by the situation of poor women of African descent in the English-speaking Caribbean.

Part Two

CARIBBEAN WOMEN

II. THE ORIGIN OF CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S STATUS

"Women in the Caribbean have always worked"⁹ is a statement frequently encountered in introductions to studies of Caribbean women. Reference is made to their African descent and to the impact of slavery and colonial and post-colonial oppression on the Caribbean population. While many women were, depending on their racial background, seriously affected by these forms of oppression, they played an important economic role from the beginning and can, therefore, be regarded as fully integrated into the development process of their societies. In addition to their economic role, they act as transmitters of culture (ECLAC, 1991b) in Caribbean society in respect of family structures, ideological perceptions, food habits (CHANGE, 1988) and cultural events.¹⁰

A. FROM COLUMBUS TO SLAVERY

Since the arrival of Columbus in 1492, the people of the Caribbean have been subjected to almost five centuries of colonial oppression which has had an enormous impact on class, race and gender formation in the region. After the extermination of the indigenous population, Africans, mainly from West Africa, were imported to work as slaves on the plantations, producing sugar, tobacco and cotton for the Europeans. At the beginning of the slave trade, only men were transported from Africa, but because of growing resistance by men, as well as their increasing scarcity, women were included at a later stage.¹¹

During the era of slavery, women were often separated from their partners in the plantation system, so that they also had full responsibility for raising children, who were most frequently born within unstable unions:¹² "The plantation system militated against the maintenance of stable conjugal unions among the enslaved population, so that the strongest familial bonds which could be maintained were those between mothers and children (Davies and Anderson, 1989, p. 216).¹³ The responsibility for maintaining and protecting children rested with the slave owner, not the father. Accordingly, the father's place in the family was never secure. He had no externally sanctioned authority over the family or household and could be physically removed from it at any time (Massiah, 1983; Miller, 1991).

The absence of the possibility of forming a conjugal union resulted in a multiplicity of family types such as the "visiting union" or "common-law marriage".¹⁴ Clarke (1957) studied the different family patterns in greater detail and distinguished more than 10 types. These range from *nuclear* to *extended* families with children from the same or different unions, from *single-parent* families to *sibling* households. These types of family formations continued following the Emancipation as did the strong mother-child bond.

With the abolition of slavery, high unemployment rates and the general absence of land ownership among the black population forced black women to seek their livelihood

either by exchanging their labour for wages or by starting their own businesses (Massiah, 1986a). This deeply rooted "independence" of Caribbean women,¹⁶ has led them to opt for their freedom, especially when socio-economic conditions improved (Massiah, 1983) —a trend which is reflected in the high number of visiting unions and in an increased divorce rate.¹⁶

The social and economic instability in women's lives, in addition to other circumstances, such as voluntary and legal separation and death, which imposed on them major responsibility for the family, has been manifested in the appearance of a large number of *female-headed households*. Nowadays, at least a third and, in some countries, such as Barbados and Jamaica, more than 45% of all households are headed by women (Massiah, 1986a).¹⁷

The impact of slavery is also reflected in the high fertility rate of Caribbean women, which is partly due to external forces, because female slaves were encouraged to have numerous children in order to supply cheap labour for the plantation. This was especially true when the slave population in many territories began to decline. It is interesting to note that during the slavery era African women used their children as a means of power; African women were known to kill their children, both before and after birth, as a protest against their condition as slaves.

Another explanation may be found in the heritage of the Ashanti tribe of West Africa, in which having many children contributed to high female status, because without the "gift" of children, the family, the tribe and the nation would die out. According to Chevannes (1993), childbirth is highly valued in Caribbean culture because of the absence of an African rite of transition from one life cycle to another (the "rite of passage"); instead, having a child becomes for Caribbean women a way of asserting their change of status from girl to woman.

Research has shown also that the slavemasters' demand that women should bear many children is reflected in the universal perception that women's relationship is to children, while men's relationship is to women and consists of impregnating them, while remaining exempt from the responsibilities of parenthood. Or, as Hodge noted: "Once a man has proved his virility he feels no continuing responsibility as a parent" (Hodge, 1974, cited in CHANGE, 1988, p. 8). During slavery this male behaviour pattern secured high status for men because of the consolidation of their male power. In turn, many contemporary women still perceive men as having this image.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, large-scale male *emigration* forced increasing numbers of women to assume major responsibility for maintaining their households. The situation improved during the two World Wars when more employment was needed in the sugar industry. The demand for labour attracted not only the local Caribbean population, but also people from other parts of the world, including India and China. This led to a substantial diversification of the Caribbean population.¹⁸

Emigration has become an integral aspect of Caribbean culture in the sense that it is now accepted as a valid life option for both men and women (Massiah, 1983). Emigration presented the Caribbean with another problem, since such countries as Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis and Dominica demonstrated a negative growth rate. In Jamaica natural population increase was reduced by 50%. Another consequence is the "brain drain": educated people are leaving the Caribbean and are therefore not contributing directly to the development of their home countries (ECLAC, 1991c; Boland, 1992).

B. STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT

The world economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s made it necessary to introduce structural adjustment policies which in the Caribbean countries resulted in higher prices for oil and other imported basic commodities, a deterioration in health, nutrition and other social services, reduced subsidies for consumer staples, lower average incomes and the worsening of poverty. These policies also led to an increase in informal economic activities as a result of the scarcity of paid employment in the formal sector. On the other hand, higher wages in more attractive sectors, such as industry and tourism, on islands such as Antigua, led to increasing migration rates.

Women, especially the poor, suffered most from the adjustment programmes, which were based on certain assumptions held by policy makers regarding the *elasticity of women's time*. These assumptions devalued women's reproductive work while exploiting their labour and sexuality in the service of a fundamentally inequitable set of social and economic relations (Antrobus, 1990a).

The current economic situation in the Caribbean is not only the result of the crisis of the 1970s and 1980s; it is also the outcome of long-term dependency on the industrialized countries as a market for exported goods (mainly sugar) and a source of imported necessities. Most Caribbean countries export more than half of their gross domestic product and import an even larger proportion of consumer goods. It is often said that the region "produces what it does not consume, and consumes what it does not produce" (Deere, 1990).

As indicated above, the crisis in the Caribbean was also characterized by a *class bias*. The masses of the region, experienced a much greater deterioration in their living standards than did the middle and upper classes. It was estimated that in 1992 approximately 10 million people were living below the poverty line (ECLAC/CARICOM/UNIFEM, 1994). However, recent information indicates that some segments of the middle class are experiencing downward mobility which, in turn, is causing psychological and family conflicts as standards of living can no longer be maintained (Massiah, 1992).

The downturn in economic activity has affected people's lives in a number of ways, and has had a particular impact on poor women of African descent, who are often both caregivers and breadwinners. Most significantly, there has been a decrease in the number of jobs available, especially for young people (whose unemployment rate is from 40% to 60%) and women (whose unemployment rate is double that of men), and a drop in real wages. Women who are able to find paid employment are increasingly concentrated in low-paying manufacturing jobs, e.g., in the assembly industries.

Moreover, both women and men have increasingly been driven into the *informal sector* of the economy, finding work as domestic servants, street vendors and inhome-based production. This sector is characterized by highly uncertain incomes, lack of security and frequently exploitative and competitive circumstances. For women, it represents the only means of survival, since they must have flexible working hours in order to care for children and engage in other caregiving activities. Accordingly, the growth of the informal sector has led to the fragmentation of society and the deterioration of institutions in both the public and the private spheres, further deepening the social crisis.

In order to make ends meet, households are diversifying their *survival strategies* and changing their living and consumption patterns. According to studies conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on the impact of structural adjustment in Latin America and the Caribbean, a growing share of household expenditure is concen-

trated on cheap food products with a low nutrient and protein content. Women and girls are the ones most likely to be affected by declining food consumption, since preferences given to male wage-earners in terms of better food (Deere, 1990; Safa and Antrobus, 1992).

With regard to changing living patterns, women have begun to rely, to an even greater extent than in the past, on family and friendship networks for child-care assistance and social support (Powell, 1986). This is a pattern inherited from the cultural and social norms of extended-family and friendship bonds in African societies. In some societies, families added members of the "out-living" family to their own households in order to spread the income risks and for child-care purposes (Bolles, 1983 in Safa and Antrobus, 1992). The historical tendency towards the formation of the nuclear family has been reversed by this new rise of the extended family.

Another survival strategy of women has been to start relationships with several men. This so-called "serial mating" provides women with increased food, shelter, status, psychological satisfaction (Massiah, 1983; CHANGE, 1988) and support in their old age (Roberts and Sinclair, 1978). This type of survival strategy is especially prevalent among single women and women in visiting unions since, according to Bolles, less than a quarter of the Jamaican women in visiting unions and none of the single women receive regular support from their boyfriends and the fathers of their children (Bolles, 1983 in Safa and Antrobus, 1992).

In practice, "serial mating" usually consists of relationships which occur prior to marriage. Furthermore, many women are deprived of a livelihood and ultimately emigrate. In recent times, the international migration rate among women has seemed to be even higher than among men.

C. THE RISE OF THE PATRIARCHY

The history of Caribbean women shows that their lives have always been marked by a continual struggle against poverty and subordination. Their roles as mother, wife and main breadwinner may be seen as the main factor in this. Nevertheless, their relatively strong and autonomous role in the family was not reflected in a powerful or equal gender position in society. The *rise of the patriarchy*¹⁹ has contributed to a large extent to this asymmetrical relationship to men. The patriarchy has evolved historically and both women and men have their place in it. Caribbean society has its own historic form of patriarchy, influenced by slavery, the plantation system and neocolonialism. This system has been reinforced by the penetration of Western capitalism which, in turn, has largely contributed to the unequal relationship between men and women through the strict separation of reproductive-productive roles and the adoption of Western norms and values. As a result, many traditional, egalitarian societal and economic structures have been eliminated and replaced, with men occupying a more favourable position than women. The current situation is such that women are becoming increasingly marginalized in Caribbean society and are losing their historically strong and autonomous status in the domestic sphere and also to some extent at the individual level. It will be shown below that such naturally occurring autonomy is marked by an ambiguity or dualism which reflects the multiplicity of interactions in women's lives.

In the next section, the varying roles that Caribbean women currently play and the way in which they have evolved over time under changing social, cultural and economic circumstances will be discussed in greater detail.

III. CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S GENDER ROLES

Caribbean women fulfil important roles in their society. They are mothers, housekeepers, healers, agricultural producers, wage labourers, marketers, entrepreneurs and community leaders. In many ways their roles and responsibilities are very similar. However, what women do, how they do it and how they perceive their role varies significantly according to ethnic group, class and culture.

Some of these roles are biologically based, since only women can bear and nurse children. This physical distinction is related to sex. Other differences between men's and women's roles are socially, culturally and historically constructed and are therefore labelled *gender roles*. Unlike sexual characteristics, gender roles can change over time because they symbolize learned behaviour. Gender roles can thus vary substantially within a given society. Factors that affect these variations include age, life cycle, class, religion, ethnicity, regional origin, colonial history, etc. As mentioned above, Caribbean women were from early times the sole economic and social providers of their families, owing to the absence of a male partner. As Clarke (1957) put it in her study of Jamaica, they played the role of "the mother who fathered". This engendered role consisted of symbols of both masculinity and femininity, which meant a strong interaction between the personal and the political, the private and the public arenas, the household and the economy.

Women's various roles will now be discussed in greater detail, using Moser's tripartite analytical framework. It is worth mentioning that, while the different roles will be discussed separately, Caribbean practice involves a continual exchange and overlap between these roles depending on women's social and economic circumstances.

A. THE CAREGIVER ROLE

Regardless of ethnic group, social class or age, all Caribbean women perform reproductive work in one way or another. This includes not only the responsibility for bearing and raising children, but also all domestic work so as to guarantee the maintenance and reproduction of the labour force. As stated earlier, the mother's role in the Caribbean has from early days been dictated by her cultural roots and historical experience; women were supposed to bear children so that they could become valuable workers. Moreover, the mother-child unit was strong because the father's immediate presence was lacking. The task of mothering children was not always assigned to the biological mother; often she relied heavily on the assistance of other slave women. This reciprocal or mutual-need feature can still be seen in the way that women receive assistance in caring for their children, and not only from relatives.

Several studies have stressed the importance which women attach to the role of mother and to mothering as an activity which provides them with significant meaning and

status.²⁰ For example, a study carried out by Smith (1956) in Guyana states: "Being a mother is a source of status and power for women in the household, to the extent that they may even extend their period of effective motherhood by taking over their daughters' children or adopting other children when their own period of child-bearing is over". Caribbean women perceive motherhood, or more specifically, the experience of motherhood (Clarke, 1957), as more important to upgrading their female status than marriage. If a woman does not have children, she must at least parent the children of other women (Powell, 1986). Moreover, a woman who does not have children is "an object of pity, contempt or derision" (Hodge, 1974, in CHANGE, 1988).

In addition, for women, marriage is not necessarily a prerequisite for child-bearing. Although many women, often under the influence of religious institutions, look forward to being married at some time in their life, they feel no urgent need to enter into permanent unions.²¹ The concept of marriage is less valued by women, owing to the existence of alternative types of conjugal unions (visiting unions and common-law marriages), characterized by greater informality and sexual freedom (as well as by greater instability and the possible loss of the partner).

In the Caribbean it is important for many poor women to have children, not only for emotional, but also for economic reasons. Children are considered both a source of cheap labour and an investment for later years. Older female heads of households often rely heavily on their children for support, which sometimes takes the form of remittances. This is one of the reasons why older women often have greater authority and are less dependent on men than women with younger children to support.

The high cultural value placed on child-bearing and mothering entails an acceptance of economic responsibility for children. It also explains the need to work. Therefore, women's self-image is that of both worker and mother, an outlook similar to that of African women (Davies and Anderson, 1989).

The reproductive or domestic roles of Caribbean women are not restricted to child-bearing and -raising. Their *realm of female responsibility* (Durant-González, 1982) is more extensive and entails many other domestic tasks, such as producing, providing, controlling or managing those resources essential to meeting daily needs. According to CAFRA, the burden of reproductive work is so high for women that it not only severely circumscribes female participation in the public sphere, but negates the impact of favourable changes in that sphere (CAFRA, 1994).

Male assistance in reproductive tasks is predominantly absent, a fact reinforced by the cultural definition of domestic work as "women's work". Although men do not have a clearly defined reproductive role, it does not mean that they do not care for their children or that they refrain from assisting their female partners in their domestic work. Nevertheless, in comparison with the time spent on domestic work by women, men's contribution is far from equal to that of women.

However, some studies suggest that women themselves are responsible for the lack of male participation in reproductive activities.

"They discouraged male participation (in household tasks) at an early age, cultivating a kind of relationship in which boys are made to feel like pampered strangers in the household and the girls trained to be hard workers, both inside and outside the home. Consequently, when the males grow up they will expect similar treatment from their wives or girlfriends, who will be trained to give it to them" (Moses, in CHANGE, 1988).

The division of decision-making power in the household is perceived by women as predominantly female-oriented and in some cases egalitarian. In addition, the underestimation of their strength and influence within the family continues to support the perception

that men should be the head of the household and should therefore make the principal decisions, even those concerning women themselves (Powell, 1986).

B. THE BREADWINNER ROLE

The importance of Caribbean women's productive role is a historical fact. They are engaged in productive work both inside and outside the home. The exact nature of this work varies with culture, ethnic group, class and age, but, generally speaking, it can be classified under four headings: i) agricultural work, including food production, marketing and processing; ii) commerce, including the informal sector; iii) household work and iv) wage labour in the manufacturing and service industry (ECLAC, 1991b; Massiah, 1991b).²²

Caribbean women themselves define work as comprising a variety of activities, as was demonstrated in an extended study entitled "Women in the Caribbean" carried out in 1986 by the University of the West Indies (Massiah, 1986b and 1986c). Generally speaking, Caribbean women consider work to be a set of activities functionally necessary for the daily survival of themselves and their households, as well as activities which earn a cash income (Massiah, 1986b and 1986c).

As a result of the crisis Caribbean women are increasingly participating in the labour market. The female labour participation rate is among the highest in the Bahamas (48%) and lowest in Guyana (20%) (Massiah, 1992). Thus, women are moving more and more into the public domain (i.e., entering into formal wage-sector statistics). They are highly concentrated in some sectors of the Caribbean economy, such as public services, agriculture, the informal sector, the export-oriented sector and the service sector. However, this high participation rate among women and their increasing enrolment in the formal and higher education system has not been reflected in status-producing or high-standard jobs; in fact, the majority of women are still employed in the lowest echelons of the sectors concerned.

The productive role of Caribbean women is reflected in stereotypical female occupations, such as teaching, nursing, clerical (sales) work and domestic labour. This can be explained by early socialization within the family, where girls are encouraged to aspire to such service-type professions. Another explanation is that society and the State are providing job opportunities for women only in these fields.

The culturally determined image of woman as "one who gives and cares" contributes heavily to the concentration of women in such jobs. Barrow (1986a) demonstrates this impact also and argues that many older women do not harbour career ambitions because of poor job opportunities,²³ a high domestic workload and lack of education. Nevertheless, they wish for their daughters to have a white-collar job. This wish has recently been concretized in the increasing participation of girls in the secondary education system.

In recent years the rate of unemployment and underemployment for Caribbean women has become higher than for men. In Jamaica, for example, the rate for women is more than twice that for men: 26% and 11%, respectively, in 1989 (Massiah, 1991b). The highest unemployment rate (over 30%) occurs in Jamaica among young women under 20 living in urban areas. The highest labour participation rates occur in female-headed households, which account for more than a third of households in the English-speaking Caribbean. Most of these women are employed outside the home, in contrast to married women or those in common-law unions, who are more commonly housewives

or dependent on home-based production. This last finding suggests that women depend, to a greater or lesser extent, on economic support from their male partner, even if, in reality, such support may not materialize.

While Caribbean women have always worked, recent economic developments have rendered their productive role more important and more complicated. Because of wage cuts and higher food prices, women are forced to work longer hours in order to maintain their households. They are losing jobs because of the "last hired, first fired" principle. Even young women are leaving school because of the increased cost of education and the need to look after younger children and to assist their mothers in reproductive activities. In turn, the economic crisis is now having serious consequences for women's upward mobility.

C. THE EXTENDED CAREGIVER ROLE

The community structure in the Caribbean has evolved out of the region's history and culture. It symbolizes the reconstruction of human communities following the dehumanizing experience of slavery, the destruction and rebuilding of the African family and the specific realities and requirements of the local economy (Deere, 1990, p. 70). Because of the insecurity and instability in women's lives, the existence of a community became very important to them. Women maintain a deep bond with their kin and community, which do not consist only of blood relatives or immediate in-laws. This extended family plays a significant role in the lives of women, partly because of the absence of legalized unions and partly because of a deep sense of responsibility for caring for relatives and other members of the community (CHANGE, 1988). This concern is reinforced by religious traditions and the economic and emotional needs of survival.

Caribbean women are active in a wide range of community-improvement activities, local political activities and social organizations; their outlook varies from a welfare to a feminist perspective. While such groups have different orientations, they may all be classified as woman-centred, in that they are concerned with "female" issues such as health, children, etc. Women's participation in social organizations is mostly a reflection of the concerns deriving from their engendered role. However, participation in such organizations is fragmented, unstable and frequently low.²⁴ Due to recent severe economic and social conditions, women have increasingly begun to protest the measures taken. In Jamaica, women's groups undertook a consumer campaign aimed at improving the food situation. In Dominica, women protested the imposition of a sales tax (Massiah, 1991b). These and other women's groups will be discussed in greater detail below.

The actions taken by women in the Caribbean community have not only a collective significance but also an individual one. Their contributions are reflected in care for the sick and elderly and for children. While, women's support for the community does not have significant exchange value, it has a use value which is becoming more and more important with the increasing cutbacks in health, education and nutrition budgets. In fact, the State is relying more and more on women's unpaid labour and on the elasticity of their working hours.

The multiplicity of roles played by Caribbean women and their corresponding heavy workload is an outcome of social norms, values and beliefs as to how women should behave. In these engendered roles, women are functioning according to a script which reads, "give first to others and then to yourself". As this role is accepted both by society and by women, changes aimed at achieving a more equal division of roles between the

genders are difficult to implement. This is true both for reasons of economic efficiency and because of the State's fear of interfering in private domestic matters in which the existing values and norms have the strongest influence. Consciousness-raising among both men and women and recognition and full incorporation of this multiplicity of female roles into development programmes are prerequisites in this area. Such recognition may be only an interim solution on the way to a more democratic society in which men and women play an equal role as social actors in the sharing of domestic workloads and other responsibilities.

The changing gender position will be discussed in greater detail below. The following questions will be posed: How are women's roles reflected in their current social status and how has this status been changed by recent developments in the Caribbean? How does this, in turn, reflect changing gender relations and women's asymmetrical relationships to men and the State? Lastly, ways for women to acquire greater power in their relations with men and society will be discussed.

IV. THE AUTONOMY AND POWER OF CARIBBEAN WOMEN

Caribbean culture is not immutable; it takes various forms which are linked to the interests of different groups and their adaptation to the natural, economic and political environment. It is a continuing process of collective production, use and transformation of symbolic systems. The same is true for the members of the cultural system: their lives, power relations, norms and values are subject to constant change and are permanently evolving, rather than remaining static, which is often how developing societies are characterized.

In the past the lives of Caribbean women have been in constant flux. Their status has evolved from that of independent and powerful²⁶ member of an African tribe, to a dependent and powerless Caribbean slave, from mother, wife and member of a kin group to principal income-earner and single head of household. All these roles, with their different levels of autonomy, can be regarded as interchangeable and not mutually exclusive, depending on a woman's social status and class. Another important feature of women's lives has been the severe poverty which called forth in them the power, strength and creativity required to survive in the most difficult circumstances.

The level of autonomy and power which Caribbean women currently possess is unquestionably in a transitional phase. This changing status naturally varies according to the local society, ethnic group and class to which they belong. It can also vary considerably depending on age or marital status. In general, it can be stated that changes in a woman's power status imply changes in the degree to which she has access to essential resources and, accordingly, the degree to which she can be autonomous in strengthening her position. Essential factors are at issue, such as whether she can support herself or have control over her body; whether she can defend her interests by taking part in political decision-making; and the degree to which she can act independently and acquire self-respect.

As mentioned earlier, while the position of women in sociocultural systems has never been static, recent events have had a serious impact on their lives and a catalytic effect on the way in which women have obtained access to and control over basic resources. Two main events in particular contributed significantly to such recent changes in the Caribbean: i) the economic crisis, with its concomitant structural adjustment programmes, and ii) the formation of new women's organizations under the influence of the United Nations Decade for Women.

Taking these circumstances into account, the changing power relations between the genders will now be discussed, through an analysis of the four elements of the concept of autonomy. This concept will be used as an *analytical tool* in order to provide an overview of these complex relationships and an estimate of the degree to which Caribbean women have empowered or disempowered their relations with men or have not obtained a position equal to that of men. Data are provided for each of the four elements, some of which are measurable and quantifiable, while others are of a more qualitative nature. A diagnosis of the problem areas and indicators for action follow.

It should be noted that the four elements of autonomy, i.e., economic, political, sociocultural and physical autonomy, must be considered in close relationship to each other and not in isolation. As Postel (1992) stated, explaining the interdependency of the concept of physical autonomy: "Reproductive freedom is a precondition for women's autonomy in other fields. The reverse is also true: women will not be able to gain control over their bodies as long as they have no access to and control over resources such as land, income, knowledge, education and a positive self-image" (Postel, 1992, p. 8).

It is also important to realize that in practice these elements of autonomy do not give equal priority to women in terms of their necessity, impact and feasibility. There is a dynamic interaction among these elements which is strongly dependent on a woman's personal and socio-economic situation and the situation of the country and even the region.²⁸

A. ECONOMIC AUTONOMY

Equal access to and control over labour, property, knowledge, information, financial resources and positions of power are essential in order for women to enhance their economic autonomy. Such autonomy refers to power not only at the individual level but also at the societal level. It concerns the way in which society distributes power and thus influences, indirectly and directly, the degree of economic autonomy for women. Various aspects are at issue, such as unequal gender relations, socio-economic and political circumstances, cultural values and norms, gender ideology, stereotypes, etc.

Caribbean women have a considerable degree of economic autonomy in that they are willing and able to have *control over their own financial resources*. Such "personal" economic autonomy is explained more by an economic need than by a social one or by the desire to be financially independent of male partners. This is especially true for poor women of African descent. While a corresponding increase in domestic authority and self-esteem is a logical outcome of economic autonomy, it is not the highest priority in women's lives, since economic survival is more important than emotional or social uplift.

While Caribbean women have historically had economic autonomy, and have recently attained a high level of education, the gender *division of labour*, and working conditions (wages), remain unequal and generally favour men (Davies and Anderson, 1989; Safa and Antrobus, 1992). This combination of personal economic autonomy and the lack of "public" economic autonomy shows that power is distributed unequally between the genders. In general, women as social actors mobilize economic resources in order to attain their goals. However, not all actors have equal access to such resources. Society's resources are distributed in an asymmetrical way in accordance with a pattern of domination based on class, gender, etc., which perpetuates dependency relations.

As in other parts of the world, the female labour participation rate in the Caribbean has significantly increased in the past two decades. One of the reasons for this is lower fertility, but other possible factors include time-saving devices, smaller homes and families and higher levels of education and divorce rates. Moreover, cultural factors are involved, such as the increasing participation of men in household tasks and the increasing acceptance of women working outside the home. This last factor was never really at issue between the genders in the English-speaking Caribbean, as compared with the Spanish-speaking part of the region, where machismo impedes women's economic mobility (ECLAC, 1992; INSTRAW, 1990).

In addition, under the influence of women's organizations and governmental measures, women in recent years have increasingly entered the public arena, moving into well-paying jobs with decision-making power, even though most of these are in "female-centred" areas such as health, education, child welfare, women's issues and personnel matters. On the other hand, recent data from Jamaica show that growing numbers of women are being recruited for professional and managerial jobs in "male-centred" sectors. This is partly because of Jamaican legislation prohibiting sex discrimination and providing for equal pay for equal or comparable work (the Employment Act of 1975) (ECLAC/CARICOM/UNIFEM, 1994). Another factor contributing to increased labour participation is maternity leave, which in some countries, such as Bahamas, Barbados, Grenada and Guyana (Massiah, 1992), has already become law. This provides women with an important opportunity to continue their careers following the birth of a child.

The growing attention to women's entry into the labour market has created among some educated men a sense of displacement, expressed as "Women are taking over society". This sense has become so strong that men have started to insist on their own affirmative action in the labour market, as they can no longer fulfil the roles of father and partner. In other words, their traditional, authoritarian role-power is diminishing. Accordingly, younger men especially see themselves as failed providers who have been deprived of their future prospects. The increase in violence and drug use among young men has been attributed to this phenomenon (Van der Hel, 1991).

Nevertheless, recent socio-economic changes in the region are leading to high unemployment rates for women, higher than for men. The unemployment rate even exceeds the labour participation rate (Safa and Antrobus, 1992). In fact, women's ability to maintain their personal economic autonomy has generally been eroded; this now threatens their upward mobility.

Poorer women, and to a lesser degree also some middle-class women and men, are responding to the uncertainty in the labour market through increasing participation in small-scale enterprises, despite such problems as a credit shortage, the rising cost of credit and cultural prejudices against their obtaining *credit, loans and information*. Studies reveal that the majority of loans and credits in the public sector are granted almost exclusively to men (ECLAC, 1991a). As a reaction to this unequal distribution of resources, poorer women are managing, through creativity and the assistance of women's groups, to obtain financial support from governmental or non-governmental institutions in order to launch their own businesses in such fields as the making of preserves, handicrafts, jewellery-making, basketry, etc. In addition, it is estimated that in 1992 more than 30% of all small-scale enterprises were owned by women (ECLAC/CARICOM/UNIFEM, 1994).

High unemployment and increasing pressure on household maintenance have forced women into the informal sector, which is characterized by long working hours, unstable incomes, lack of social security and an antisocial environment. In the Caribbean, the rate of participation in the informal sector is over 25%. This sector is not recognized by government agencies and therefore is not subject to their protection or control. Women's participation in this sector, in which most women are over 40 years of age (Safa and Antrobus, 1992), often does not contribute to their economic autonomy; because of the uncertainties involved, it frequently increases their dependence on the financial support of a male partner, which in turn does not promote gender equality.

The economic autonomy of Caribbean women can also be explained by their *access to property* in the form of a house or land. Most Caribbean women in rural areas share access to family property, with the rights thereto being passed on from one generation to the next. Women can therefore inherit land from their parents or husbands and decide

on the allocation of labour resources. This equal or "legal" access to resources for men and women in many cases promotes greater equity in gender-power relations. However, traditional patterns of male land ownership and control persist; it is difficult for women to purchase land ownership directly (Massiah, 1992). In addition, in the case of land reform, land is legally distributed, not to households, but to the heads of households; this implies that the heads of households are men. Land ownership is thus mainly a male, not a female, prerogative, regardless of the high incidence of female-headed households. While the importance of agriculture in most rural areas of the Caribbean is diminishing on the whole, access to land remains a symbol of security, self-esteem, identity and solidarity (Chevannes, 1993) for both men and women.

In addition, in view of the economic and social value of property which enhances economic autonomy, many urban women have begun to aspire to home ownership. "Having your own house" has evolved into a catch-phrase in some parts of the Caribbean, even though mortgage payments may constitute a heavy burden. There have been cases of women in Barbados who were willing to spend more on mortgage payments than on providing food for their families.²⁷

Since the onset of the crisis, another phenomenon has threatened women's economic autonomy, namely, increasing individualism. The limited opportunities to obtain sufficient financial resources, growing competition among the unemployed and rising consumer prices mean that people are less willing to share their hard-won means of subsistence. In this context, the relative autonomy which women, especially poor women, have acquired is in danger, their freedom to work is constrained by the lesser availability of assistance from family members. Child care is becoming a more and more urgent need for women, and a few countries have begun to take the initial legal steps to provide it. While this is a positive development for women's autonomy, child care is seldom linked to the father's responsibility. The labour market needs to be organized in such a way that child care is the responsibility of society as a whole, not only of women. This requires that men also be involved.

In sum, the economic autonomy of Caribbean women has dynamic, interrelated and conflicting aspects. On the one hand, women, especially the poor, have historically had a measure of control over their financial resources, which provides them with commensurate freedom to make choices in other spheres of their lives. Nevertheless, such freedom has not necessarily resulted in greater gender equality. This is because the economic relations between men and women continue to be unequal; women earn less, work longer hours and have less favourable working conditions and higher levels of unemployment than men. Women require more equal access to economic resources, including the means of production, and an equal share of power in the labour market; accordingly, the State should create opportunities for better skill and vocational training for women, provide child care, ensure equal access to credit facilities and land and equal gender representation in jobs with decision-making power; it should also promote gender-sensitive training so as to create greater self-awareness among women. Training women to perform traditionally male jobs and striving to achieve the sharing of domestic workloads by men and women will help women to attain greater economic autonomy.

B. POLITICAL AUTONOMY

Women who wish to *create a power base* in order to achieve a higher degree of *self-determination* must be organized so as to have a *political voice* and *acquire power within*

the political system. If women are to be able to defend their own interests, there must be equal gender participation in the political process at all levels, from the community to the State.

While Caribbean women are strongly involved in kin and neighbourhood groups, they are manifestly under-represented or unrepresented at the higher decision-making levels of political parties, cabinets, legislatures, local government bodies, etc. (ECLAC, 1991a; Safa, 1986). Several reasons have been put forth for such lack of active participation by women in political bodies dealing with both the public and the private spheres. These include women's commitment to home and family, which is said to be incompatible with the demands of a political career, women's feelings of inadequacy when it comes to public speaking and the lack of encouragement from men (Powell, 1984).

Since the 1980s, women have been moving to the forefront of conventional politics, although in very limited numbers. Women's parliamentary representation is around 10% (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1993), while in 1992 approximately 22% of government posts were held by women (ECLAC/CARICOM/UNIFEM, 1994). Such posts are nearly always limited to female-dominated areas such as education, administration, health and child welfare (Anderson-Manley, 1994). Those who occupy key positions in decision-making structures are mainly middle- and upper-class women with high levels of education. Thus, women's absence from the decision-making process is determined not only by gender but also by class (Clarke, 1986). It has also been shown that even where women are represented, their influence over decision-making is limited. This, has to do with women's own lack of awareness concerning female-development and gender issues and concepts (ECLAC/CARICOM/UNIFEM, 1994).

The low rate of participation by women extends also to the decision-making bodies of public and private enterprises. While the overall numbers of female managers and directors are slowly rising (the estimate for Latin America and the Caribbean is from 20% to 30% (United Nations, 1991; ECLAC/CARICOM/UNIFEM, 1994)), the gender gap remains wide partly because of a lack of interest and ability on the part of chief executives, with regard to implementing affirmative-action measures, which are obviously closely linked to the gender politics of the State. This, in turn, largely contributes to the absence of qualified female candidates for such powerful positions, despite their high level of education. Under-representation is a matter not only of qualifications, but also of prevailing stereotypes and prejudices against women. In response, several organizations have implemented management training programmes for women. While participation in the middle-management and financial-management programmes is fairly high (around 50%), in the top-management courses it remains low (less than 10%) (ECLAC, 1991b).

However, despite the invisibility of women in conventional politics and the business world, women's contribution to grass-roots organizations and social movements should not be underestimated. Since the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985), new women's organizations have emerged which have an explicitly feminist focus, aimed at the positioning and empowerment of women and are closely linked to a network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).²⁸ They are attempting to challenge traditionally male-dominated structures and to put forth alternative development strategies with a focus on women's strength, concerns and perspectives (Antrobus, 1986; Deere, 1990). Attention has mostly been given to women's social and economic relations with men. Several organizations have been very successful in redressing inequalities between men and women or, at least, stimulating gender awareness among governments, political parties, traditional women's organizations and, most importantly, women themselves.

These feminist organizations have influenced government policy to a certain degree through the establishment of women's bureaux²⁹ and political-party platforms, as well

as traditional women's organizations, such as welfare and church groups. Throughout the region, demands have been made for legislation in such areas as rape and incest, paid maternity leave, vocational training, access to employment and health care, etc. In Barbados, for instance, the Women's Forum has worked for recognition by governments and health-insurance providers of the rise in cervical cancer. The Trinidad and Tobago working women group has discussed female exploitation in the export processing zones. In Guyana the Red Thread Collective is establishing income-generating projects for women in order to alleviate poverty. In Jamaica, the Sisters Theatre collective is highlighting the complexity of gender issues through drama, journalism and the arts.

Other regional NGOs were established to promote women's issues and implement development measures through technical assistance, training, research and seminars. Several NGOs and feminist organizations, such as the Women and Development Unit (WAND) of the University of the West Indies, Barbados, and the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) have successfully built on the creation of gender awareness and the empowerment of women in the region. They aim to secure not only women's rights, but the rights of all oppressed people in society through emancipation and the transformation of existing structures of domination. In addition to promoting gender issues, they have been successful in bringing together feminist researchers and activists, women's organizations, grass-roots organizations, NGOs and national governments (Deere, 1990).

In conclusion, women are under-represented in traditionally male-dominated decision-making bodies; however, they have, in their own way, created various feminist institutions in order to express their concerns and work towards greater equality through social, political and personal change. Or, as Barriteau Foster put it:

Caribbean women "refuse to await political change [derived from conventional political organizations] and instead actively seek to introduce it, infusing this change with a feminist perspective... The outstanding characteristic of these groups is their autonomy. They are not the arms, wings, or women's division of dominant (male) groups. They are motivated by the belief that women's activities arise from their self-determination agendas and are significant in themselves... These Caribbean women's groups are propelled by the search for autonomy" (Barriteau Foster, 1992, pp. 30-31).

C. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AUTONOMY

The ideology of masculinity and femininity, or the way in which women and men are perceived by society, is a fundamental and almost a decisive factor in a development process focusing on social equity. The roles that women and men perform and their self-images (their personal identity, nature and possibilities) are culturally, historically, economically and even politically determined and are, like culture, undergoing a dynamic process of transformation.

The characteristics of gender types are based on power relations between the sexes and provide a structure for people's lives. At first glance it might seem that these characteristics are complementary, i.e., rational-emotional, aggressive-passive, culture-nature, public-private, etc., but applying these dichotomies the realities of gender shows that women are assigned the socially inferior characteristics.

The universal Caribbean gender stereotype is that of "the male breadwinner bringing home the bacon and the female housewife keeping house and caring for children" (Miller,

1991). Men are expected to "mind" their children, that is, provide them with economic support, while women are expected to "care" for them, that is, provide them with emotional support (Powell, 1986; Chevannes, 1993). Extensive research carried out under the Women in the Caribbean Project (WICP) (Massiah, 1986b and 1986c) shows that women themselves support such gender stereotyping: women are economically vulnerable, lack self-esteem, leave prime decisions to male partners, define their role as that of mother and wife, accept male supremacy, etc.

However, despite such stereotyping, various contradictions and dualities can be seen in the roles of women and men which reflect the multiplicity, dynamism and complexity of the power relations between them.

In contrast, several studies have highlighted women's increased participation in the economic, social and cultural spheres; women make a significant contribution to household income, participate increasingly in decision-making processes both within and outside the home, outnumber male students in the secondary schools and universities and are growing more and more assertive, decisive and aware of their status, etc. This shows that there is a world of difference between the idealizations and the realities of women and men in society, who do not complement one another but contain within themselves all the closely interwoven elements of a human being.

Furthermore, public efforts have been made to eliminate negative female stereotyping, that is, female-unfriendly images in education and the media. It is interesting to note that, despite such official efforts, discriminatory images of women are increasingly being discriminated by the media, as occurred recently in Barbados. There is a difference not only between idealized and real women, but also between idealized and real customs and social attitudes concerning men's behaviour towards women. This is a striking illustration of the fact that governmental efforts have a limited impact on negative images of women so long as traditional norms and values are maintained. Changes should therefore be encouraged in the private sphere.

The ambiguity of socially and culturally constructed images of men and women in the Caribbean can also be explained in part as a consequence of the dual influence of African and Anglo-Protestant (or European) influences. The lifestyle of black Caribbean women is derived, on the one hand, from African models, as reflected in such characteristics as the search for economic autonomy, assertiveness, resourcefulness, female-headed households, extended-kin networks, different forms of relationship and, occasionally, shared patterns of earning, spending, saving, property-owning and creativity in survival strategies (Barrow, 1986b). On the other hand, elements of the Anglo-Protestant or European model can be detected, such as passive dependency on men, male-headed households, individuality, submissiveness, passivity, confinement to the home and conservatism. The latter behaviour pattern is associated mainly with the middle and upper classes, while the former pattern corresponds mainly to the lower class (Barrow, 1986b). This explains why even poor women may defer nominally to men although they carry the major financial responsibility and take most decisions affecting the household (Safa, 1986, p. 17).

While the two models reflect several valid assumptions about women's daily lives, some researchers perceive them as too rigid and static and therefore not suitable for explaining the complexity of the Caribbean situation. Women interact, either voluntarily, in striving for social mobility, or involuntarily, out of economic need, with the social and cultural environment; such interaction is dynamic, fluid and ever-changing (Barriteau Foster, 1992). Moreover, women's interaction and image are affected by social realities, such as class, ethnic group and sexual identity. The constructed image of Caribbean women is thus derived partly from the two models, but has also developed

autonomously as a result of specific historical (slavery), economic (international trade relations, debt crisis) and cultural (migration of other ethnic groups) circumstances.

Clearly, if women's engendered image is changing, the same is true of the "gendered construct" relating to men. As pointed out earlier, a new discussion has emerged recently among both women's and men's groups with regard to the "marginalization of men" in the Caribbean. In Latin America, this phenomenon is also known as "*the erosion of machismo*" (de Barbieri and de Oliveira, 1991). Miller (1991) ascribed this development to i) changes in family structures, such as the increase in the number of female-headed households; ii) increasingly high levels of education among women and iii) increasing representation of women in better-paying and high-status jobs, e.g., white-collar jobs. Hence, rising self-awareness among women is challenging their social roles as mothers, etc., stemming from the system of patriarchy and male authority (ECLAC, 1993a).³⁰ In addition, as women move forward, men must take a step backwards; however, it is universally acknowledged that this is difficult, especially when men have always been at the forefront.

Nevertheless, women have, consciously and unconsciously, defined new gender roles which have caused increasing disorientation among men as to their formerly dominant, active and goal-oriented roles. The emerging perception of men among both men and women is predominantly negative. Because of high unemployment, men can no longer meet their families' financial needs; this also weakens their social and cultural status. In Jamaica, where young women increasingly believe that it is difficult to find eligible men, many women now prefer to live alone or with a child. The matrifocal forms that once characterized the lower strata of society have now become common among the middle strata as well. This trend pertains not only to single women; married women are tending to divorce earlier, since divorce has become more socially acceptable (Barbados, National Commission on the Status of Women, 1978).

The growing inability of men to fulfil their traditional role has resulted in frustration, loss of identity, insecurity in social interactions and gender relations (ECLAC, 1993b) and mental stress. This has been reflected in increasing alcoholism, the revival of the Rastafarian or dreadlock culture, the formation of urban neighbourhood gangs, drug use and trafficking and possession of guns, the increase in public and domestic violence against women, child abuse, rape and sexual harassment (Miller, 1991). Even the high incidence of teenage pregnancies has been ascribed to the declining image of the dominant male (Peters, 1991).

In short, some Caribbean men have an increased sense of marginalization. This might lead to the development of more egalitarian gender relations and new types of male-female, female-female, and male-male relationships.

While it might appear that women are advancing rapidly in their quest for economic, political, physical, social and cultural autonomy, the fact remains that women, especially the poor and the young who have low levels of education, lack the power to create their own living space. This is reflected in a lack of self-esteem and an unwillingness or inability to fight for their rights. Gender relations and the distribution of power between men and women remain asymmetrical. Women still occupy a disadvantaged position in all social spheres.

In the light of these realities much greater social transformations are needed if equal and more human gender relations and the right of all social actors to participate in and receive benefits from society are to be established. Both genders must realize that power must be equally shared between them. What is needed is a reorientation of gender roles and gender stereotypes, enabling each individual to have an independent identity and self-respect.

D. PHYSICAL AUTONOMY

By strengthening their physical autonomy, women will achieve greater control over their bodies, their *fertility* and their *sexuality*, as well as recognition of their specific *health issues*.

Control over *fertility* refers to the opportunity for women to decide on the number and spacing of their children; it depends on the degree to which they have access to contraceptive methods and/or are able to abstain from sexual relations. In this context, physical autonomy clearly requires that women have greater control and authority over their bodies and lives. Such control, however, cannot be absolute; men also need to be involved and to have an equal share of reproductive responsibility. If there is no possibility of equal decision-making, women should decide on issues relating to fertility.

Since the beginning of the United Nations Decade for Women, Caribbean women's control over their bodies and *fertility* has improved significantly. This trend has been strengthened by the higher level of education among women and the improvement in women's health care, including the greater availability of contraceptives. However, greater availability has not necessarily meant greater use, since studies have shown that the high value placed on having children and the fear of temporary infertility has lowered the rate of contraceptive use (Safa, 1986; Powell, 1986). Recent data show contraceptive use ranging from 54% in Grenada to 55% in Jamaica and Barbados (ECLAC/CARICOM/UNIFEM, 1994).

Another factor contributing to greater control by women over their lives and bodies is economic and financial independence. It is generally recognized that access to their own financial resources raises women's status; this is reflected in higher self-esteem and an increased capacity for decision-making in such areas as physical and mental health and fertility.

Control over fertility largely depends also on the status of the conjugal relationship. Caribbean married women perceive decision-making in the area of fertility as mainly egalitarian, while women in common-law unions perceive such decisions as mainly female-dominated. Powell (1986) pointed out that the degree of egalitarianism varies with the country. In Antigua, for instance, half of all married men participate in decisions concerning contraception, while in Barbados women perceive such decisions as female prerogative. The absence of "men's share" in that country derives from the cultural belief that women are responsible for children both before and after birth and in the broadest possible sense. A related tendency can be seen in the higher incidence of sterilization among women than among men, who are afraid of losing their masculinity.

In line with the above, most legally married women believe that men participate equally in deciding on the number of children to have, while women in common-law marriages feel that they have greater responsibility in this area, whether or not they have children. A study by Powell (1986) indicates that, for women, the desired number of children is four, a figure higher than the current fertility rate (2.0 in Barbados, 2.9 in Jamaica and 3.8 in Saint Lucia) (Fertility Survey, 1990). In this context, it should be noted that 7 out of 10 women describe their most recent pregnancy as unplanned, and more than half do not want any more children (CHANGE, 1988).³¹ This implies that birth-control methods remain unsatisfactory and overly "woman-centred".

In the Caribbean there is substantial religious, social and cultural opposition to abortion. In general, abortion is illegal and is treated as a criminal offence. It can be practiced legally only under very limited circumstances. Barbados is one of the few Caribbean countries to have introduced an Abortion Act (1980). In other countries it

is permitted only when the mother's life is in danger. However, illegal abortion is widely practiced in the region, especially among teenagers, as well as professional women.

While *sexual education* is provided in the schools, starting at an early age, the incidence of *teenage pregnancies* is still high and is considered one of the major female health problems in the area.³² The teenage pregnancy rate has been reduced considerably, from 33% 10 years ago to 23% currently, but remains disturbingly high (Peters, 1991). One of the reasons for adolescent pregnancy is the absence of employment opportunities for women. Young mothers in particular turn to men for support; this often results in yet another child (one fourth of births among 20- to 24-year-olds are third-parity births) and greater vulnerability (Antrobus, 1988; Boland, 1992). Other reasons include ignorance about sexual matters among parents and teenagers and the lack of attention from churches and schools to such matters (Peters, 1991).

Recognition of and attention to the specific *health problems* affecting women, such as breast and cervical cancer, has increased significantly. The same is true for diabetes and obesity. Recent surveys show that the incidence of obesity is three times higher for women than for men (ECLAC, 1991b).

Moreover, because of severe poverty, women are increasingly suffering from mental stress and hypertension, a phenomenon which is generally underestimated.³³ Furthermore, sexually transmitted diseases, especially human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), are a growing concern in the region. It has been suggested that the economic recession and structural adjustment programmes have aggravated the transmission and spread of HIV infection and rendered its control more difficult. This has been done directly through increased urban migration, poverty, powerlessness among women and prostitution, and indirectly through decreased health services (ECLAC/CARICOM/UNIFEM, 1994).

The crisis has resulted also in increased *physical violence* against women within and outside the home. This is not to overlook the fact that, historically, the Caribbean has been characterized by high levels of violence between members of the same sex and different sexes. The evolution of many women into more independent and self-reliant individuals has created ambivalence among men because their traditional authority over their female partners has diminished (ECLAC, 1993a and 1993b). Men's frustration, impatience, lack of understanding and, above all, inability to cope with the new situation is increasingly expressed in physical and verbal abuse. *Sexual harassment* and *rape* are therefore a growing concern in the Caribbean; they restrict women's freedom of movement, access to resources, etc. In Trinidad and Tobago it is estimated that from 1970 to 1980, the number of men charged with rape rose by 134% in the context of a population increase of 28% (United Nations, 1991).

Violence is also strongly influenced by the media, inadequate socialization in the home and women's insecurity in relationships. There have been cases of women deciding to have another child in the hope of stabilizing a relationship or securing male support. Moreover, in addition to their reproductive tasks, women are expected to provide men with emotional and economic support; the lack of such support has resulted in physical violence (CHANGE, 1988).

In most Caribbean countries, it is now recognized that there is a significant level of violence against women. In response to this, governments have adopted specific legislative and protective measures (ECLAC, 1992; ECLAC/CARICOM/UNIFEM, 1994). In Jamaica, for example, abused women receive financial aid, special housing and peer-group support. Moreover, the most important factor in eliminating violence against women is proper socialization within and outside the home, centred on human values and

dignity. Women must also develop the strength and self-esteem to stand up for their rights and fight back against abuse.

E. INTERESTS, PRIORITIES AND NEEDS

The degree to which women can enhance their autonomy in each of its dimensions —economic, physical, political, social and cultural— provides an indication of women's needs and concerns and shows where the problems lie. Greater autonomy requires the empowerment of women with a view to their enhanced decision-making, self-determination and self-reliance without, at the same time, oppressing or dominating other women, men or children. Establishing equal participation by women in the development process means transforming unequal gender relations. It is important, therefore, to examine women's specific needs and action priorities.

In order to assess women's priorities, their needs should be classified into strategic and practical needs. This often means that women's immediate practical interests must be addressed before long-term strategic issues. However, this is not always the case.

Women in the Caribbean are becoming slightly more autonomous because of their increased participation in various sectors (the labour market, education, health care). However, this does not mean that women's issues or needs are becoming less urgent. On the contrary, since the onset of the crisis, even more practical concerns have emerged, and only a few have disappeared. For Caribbean women, the most pressing practical needs involve, first, increasing their economic autonomy and, secondly, increasing their physical autonomy. This can be broken-down into the following actions (Massiah, 1983, 1991b and 1992; ECLAC, 1991b and 1991c; Peters, 1991; ECLAC/CARICOM/UNIFEM, 1994; Safa and Antrobus, 1992; CAFRA, 1994):

- . Establishment of basic infrastructure guaranteeing access to food, water and electricity in poorer countries such as Guyana;
- . Creation and protection of jobs for women;
- . Establishment of income-generating projects;
- . Establishment of production and marketing cooperatives;
- . Improvement of working conditions (equal pay for equal work, minimum wage, maternity leave, child care);
- . Provision and upgrading of job skills and vocational training;
- . Promotion of direct and independent access by women to credit, loans, land and technology;
- . Improvement of working conditions in free trade zones and the informal sector;
- . Upgrading of public transport;
- . Elimination of maternal mortality, cervical and breast cancer, unsafe abortions, domestic violence and sexually transmitted diseases and promotion of immunization;
- . Implementation of public health educational campaigns (sexuality, stress management, contraception, women's health);
- . Implementation of nutritional campaigns (preparation of locally available foods);
- . Promotion of public education concerning structural adjustment programmes (objectives, implementation, implications);
- . Amendment of legislation governing domestic violence, rape and incest;
- . Elimination of gender-based discriminatory practices and attitudes.

Strategic needs, on the other hand, can be broken down as follows (Antrobus, 1990a and 1990b; ECLAC, 1991b and 1991c; ECLAC/CARICOM/UNIFEM, 1994; Massiah, 1991b and 1992; Peters, 1991; CAFRA, 1994):

- . Incorporation of a gender perspective into all aspects of economic and social development;
- . Implementation of the measures required to achieve economic growth with social equity;
- . Implementation of alternative models for economic and social development which promote gender equity;
- . Activities to raise women's and men's awareness of gender issues and changing gender roles;
- . Provision of grass-roots education to promote self-respect, self-esteem and self-reliance and to reduce vulnerability and exploitation;
- . Political mobilization of women; equal representation of women in senior posts in foreign affairs, administration and management and in political bodies with decision-making power;
- . Strengthening of women's organizations at the governmental (national machinery) and non-governmental levels to promote solidarity and action;
- . Increased economic security, independence, options and opportunities for women;
- . Sharing of responsibility for reproductive tasks between men and women and between individuals and the State;
- . Greater control by women over their fertility and bodies;
- . Evaluative (monitoring) and action-oriented research on gender issues;
- . Establishment and updating of a statistical database on the status of women;
- . Increased ability of women to improve their children's lives and futures;
- . Establishment of more humanistic and equitable development processes.

The fulfilment of such needs would contribute substantially to the achievement of economic and social development with gender equity, enabling women to become equal negotiating partners. In order to establish action priorities for the short and long term, women themselves must create new opportunities to participate in different ways in the power structures and to transform the nature of power.

From this standpoint, women must develop a vision of what type of development and what type of society they want and how to achieve these goals. Such a vision, and strategies for implementing it, cannot simply be imposed from the top down; they require participation at the grass-roots level. What can be done from the top down is to create favourable conditions through the enactment of legislation to benefit women and the provision of financial and institutional support to women's organizations concerned with gender equality and equity.

V. TOWARDS GREATER AUTONOMY FOR WOMEN

The United Nations Decade for Women resulted in major advances for large numbers of women throughout the world. It succeeded in raising their awareness of their status as a neglected group of second-class citizens. Nevertheless, limitations and obstacles in the way of achieving equal opportunity in the development process remain, especially for poor women. In response, feminists from both the South and the North have introduced new issues into the development debate, arguing that the disadvantages which women face derive from their sex and gender roles, and that such dimensions as class, ethnicity and inequitable political and social structures at the national and international levels largely contribute to the subordination of women (and men).

Accordingly, if women's lives are to be changed in a sustainable way, there is a need to i) acknowledge the multiplicity of women's roles; ii) mainstream women's needs and perspectives; and iii) provide women with a power base and autonomy.

Against the backdrop of social and economic development plans which focus on economic stabilization, technological progress and labour productivity, a new challenge has emerged: the achievement of a sustainable and democratic human development. For economic growth depends not only on capital, technology and market-oriented production, but also on the physical, psychological and intellectual capabilities of the work force (Antrobus, 1989b). For this reason, it is necessary to incorporate into development plans a *holistic* framework which places people at the centre of development, taking into account not only economic, but also social, political and cultural factors (Antrobus, 1989b) and recognizing women's contribution to the development process.

Development models based on the equity principle must therefore include a *gender perspective* and a gender-oriented approach, stressing the enhancement of women's power and autonomy in all spheres of life, as well as an analysis of the causes, dynamics and structures of women's subordination to men and society.

The value of the empowerment concept is that it takes into account the different forms of subordination which women experience in accordance with their ethnic group, class, colonial history and current niche in the international economic order. As noted in connection with women of the English-speaking Caribbean, their African heritage and subsequent colonial and neocolonial oppression, as well as macroeconomic policies, have shaped their lives and power bases; this is especially true of the poor. The resourcefulness and creativity of Caribbean women have enabled them to acquire a measure of economic autonomy which has provided them with a degree of personal autonomy, or decision-making power, in their home. At the same time, this has not translated into significantly enhanced power and autonomy in public life, a fact which reflects the unequal distribution of power between the genders.

The concepts of empowerment, autonomy and gender are important tools in the integration of a gender perspective into development plans. Expressed through political mobilization and public-awareness campaigns, empowerment also means organizing for a new social agenda. It means moving beyond economic self-sufficiency towards political

self-reliance. Women's voices must be heard in the definition of development and the making of policy choices. Or, in accordance with the alternative vision of the world formulated by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN):

"A world where inequality based on class, gender and ethnic group is absent from every country and from the relationships among countries. Where basic needs become basic rights and all forms of violence are eliminated. Where women's reproductive role will be redefined... and where the massive resources now used in the production of means of destruction will be diverted to areas where they will help to relieve oppression both inside and outside the home" (Sen and Grown, 1987).

It is equally essential for women's groups to form alliances or networks with other groups and institutions, including those of men, for both women and men must be committed to human emancipation and the transformation of society in such a way that people will no longer be oppressed and exploited. For development policies with a focus on equity, this means the decentralization of decision-making, planning at the grass-roots level and the strengthening of community-based organizations. Training in gender analysis and gender awareness among groups coping with local structures and formulating demands and concerns are important tools in this process.

The promotion of autonomy for women is a lengthy but worthwhile process which requires changes in the behaviour and attitudes of both genders, and in the gender ideologies of societies. Since gender is a socio-cultural construct, it can be changed, as can the distribution of power between the genders and within society. Like women, men are also involved involuntarily in this distribution of power. A new debate is needed in order to redefine human relations both in the home and at the societal level (the State's role), focusing on the equal sharing of responsibility and its implications.

Notes

¹ The "welfare", "equity" and "anti-poverty" categorization is based on the work of Buvinic (Moser, 1993).

² Autonomy derives from the Greek word "autonomous" which means independent, self-determined, governed by one's own free will.

³ During the 1985 World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, held in Nairobi, the concept was also briefly mentioned in the Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women as follows: "... special measures designed to enhance women's autonomy, bringing women into the mainstream of the development process on an equal basis with men..." (United Nations, 1986, par. 111).

⁴ In the 1960s and early 1970s, feminist studies were using "power" in the sense of dichotomizing relations between the genders; men were the users of power and women were its victims. Women from the South, in particular, rejected this opposition because their picture of reality was different. Furthermore, under the influence of this debate, the concept of power at the end of the 1970s acquired more positive connotations; the role of women as victims was transformed into that of women fighting for their rights (Davis and Leijenaar, 1991). At the end of the 1980s, feminist studies were focusing on the differences between women in terms of power and its intersections with gender, race and class (Moore, 1988).

⁵ *Productive work* involves the production of goods and services for consumption and trade (farming, fishing, employment and self-employment). Both women and men can be involved in productive activities, but for the most part, their functions and responsibilities will differ according to the gender division of labour. Women's productive work is often less visible and less valued than

men's. *Reproductive work* involves the care and maintenance of the household and its members, including bearing and caring for children, food preparation, water and fuel collection, shopping, housekeeping and family health care. Reproductive work is crucial to human survival, yet is seldom considered "real work". In poor communities, reproductive work is labour-intensive and time-consuming. It is almost always the responsibility of women and girls. *Community work* involves the collective organization of social events and services, ceremonies and celebrations, community improvement activities, participation in groups and organizations, local political parties, etc. This type of work is seldom taken into account in the economic analysis of communities. However, it involves considerable volunteer time and is important for the spiritual and cultural development of communities and as a vehicle for community organization and self-determination. Both women and men engage in community activities, although a gender division of labour prevails here also (CCCI/MATCH/AQOCI, 1991).

⁶ Recent studies have demonstrated that if women's unpaid housework and family care were counted as productive outputs in national accounts, measures of global output would increase by 25% to 30% (United Nations, 1991).

⁷ Several attempts have been made to typify these roles. The International Labour Organisation for instance, identified seven types; i) occupational, ii) maternal, iii) conjugal, iv) domestic, v) kin, vi) community and vii) individual, thereby underestimating the extent to which various roles overlap. This is reflected in activities like "cooking", which belongs simultaneously to different roles. It seems that the women's activities are complex, manifold and difficult to conceptualize because of the tension between theory and practice.

⁸ See United Nations (1991).

⁹ According to Miller (1991) and Clarke (1957), this statement needs qualification, since it has been proved historically that in the post-emancipation period women withdrew from paid employment. During this period a non-working wife was a status symbol throughout the region. In the past 50 years the working wife has become the rule rather than the exception.

¹⁰ As a consequence of the crisis, women have seen their power diminished and their cultural identity undermined. In Jamaica, for example, some women have turned to a search for their roots through an African spiritual heritage, such as West African mythical practices (CHANGE, 1988).

¹¹ It is estimated that 10 million Africans were brought overseas during a period of 150 years.

¹² In the British Caribbean, slavery established the importance of women as workers and providers, roles which were not seen as incompatible with their reproductive roles as mothers and wives, unlike in the Hispanic Caribbean (Deere, 1990).

¹³ These female-centered domestic groups are also known in anthropological terms as "matrifocality".

¹⁴ A visiting union is a family unit consisting of a woman and her children, with a man visiting occasionally. He may or may not cohabit with the family for a certain period. A common-law marriage is a stable union in which the partners are not married (Hoetink, 1974 in ECLAC, 1991c).

¹⁵ However, recent investigation reveals that while men were largely absent from households during the slavery period, fewer than one third of households remained female-headed following the abolition of slavery (Massiah, 1983).

¹⁶ The divorce rate in Barbados increased from 1.4 per 100 marriages in 1948 to 6.2 in 1960 and 12.9 in 1975 (Massiah, 1983).

¹⁷ The prevalence of female-headed households is higher in countries with a large black population than in countries like Guyana and Trinidad; a larger number of individuals in these countries are of East Indian or native American descent and have a different historical and cultural background.

¹⁸ "East Indians today constitute almost half of the population of Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana: the majority of East Indians continue to live in rural areas and are often farmers" (Deere, 1990).

¹⁹ In the field of anthropology, the use of the term patriarchy or patriarchal has given rise to some discussion. Originally it referred to absolute male supremacy within the family, as was the case in traditional Chinese cultures or among the Old Testament tribes. According to some anthropologists, the term patriarchy is restrictive, because it does not indicate changing power relations and the different power bases of men and women.

²⁰ Some studies have stated that Caribbean women's preoccupation with having children is responsible for the low incidence of contraceptive use. Data show that, under the influence of extension campaigns and higher education, contraceptive availability and use has increased in recent years.

²¹ This is an important difference from Latin America, where more than half of women 25 years of age and older are married, as compared with less than a third in the Caribbean, with the exception of Haiti (61%) and Guyana (48%) (United Nations, 1991).

²² The value of women's productive labour has gone largely unrecognized; this, in turn, has been criticized frequently by gender experts in the past decade. One difficulty is the complexity of the concept of "work". The conventional or economic definition is "paid work outside the home", which makes the concept of work inapplicable to many situations involving women's role in the domestic and community spheres. Nevertheless, work is not only a matter of earning money; it is also remunerated through social value or worth in a given cultural context (Moore, 1988). In the definition of work as having exchange value, informal-sector activities are included. In turn, homebased activities do not have an "exchange value" but a "use value" which is important for the survival of society. As an analytical tool for development policies, the productive role can be redefined as "all the activities performed in or outside the house which possess a monetary value".

²³ It is interesting to note that, according to Barrow (1986a), some women perceive greater discrimination in terms of age, class and race when it comes to job opportunities than in terms of gender. Women see themselves as being in a similar position to men. In particular, there is a greater perceived contrast with socially mobile, educated young women who are able to take advantage of increased opportunities to obtain a well-paying job.

²⁴ Church groups have the highest participation (95% of the Caribbean population is religious) and feminist groups the lowest (Clarke, 1986).

²⁵ African myth and history contain many examples of women in powerful positions. For example, women of the royal households of Dahomey were in charge of national taxes, which gave them great national influence. The Ashanti Queen Mother occupied an especially high rank and, by ancient tradition, wielded extensive financial and political power in the royal household (Barbados, National Commission on the Status of Women, 1978).

²⁶ In Latin America, for example, physical autonomy has long been one of the topics discussed by women's groups; yet, because of the economic crisis, greater priority is now being given to the economic aspects of autonomy (Vargas, 1992).

²⁷ "Having your own house" is therefore important not only for economic reasons; it also symbolizes the uncertainty in women's lives, namely, unstable incomes and relationships. Having their own, permanent home is important to these women in order to compensate for such instability.

²⁸ Prior to the Decade, gender subordination in the Caribbean was a secondary issue in national politics, as greater priority was given to social welfare (Antrobus, 1986) and class and racial oppression (Deere, 1990).

²⁹ National machineries are often hampered by insufficient financial and human resources and lack essential power to change policies (Anderson-Manley, 1994). Furthermore, in some government departments, women's issues have fallen out of fashion; policy-makers believe that they have disposed of these issues by setting up such machinery. This has been reinforced by the deterioration of the economy; other urgent issues, such as poverty and sustainable development, have shifted attention away from women's issues.

³⁰ While such "marginalization of men" appears to be of recent origin, some studies (Clarke, 1957; Smith, 1956; Smith, 1965) indicate that the weak male image existed as far back as the era of slavery. New developments since the 1980s have simply had a catalytic effect on the process of marginalization of men, accelerating and strengthening it.

³¹ In Barbados there has recently been an important change in the law concerning authority over minor children; where formerly this was the exclusive prerogative of the father, the law now confers joint authority on both parents.

³² For further information see Boland (1992).

³³ Underestimation of physical and mental health problems affects men also; for instance, the danger of prostate cancer is widely ignored.

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