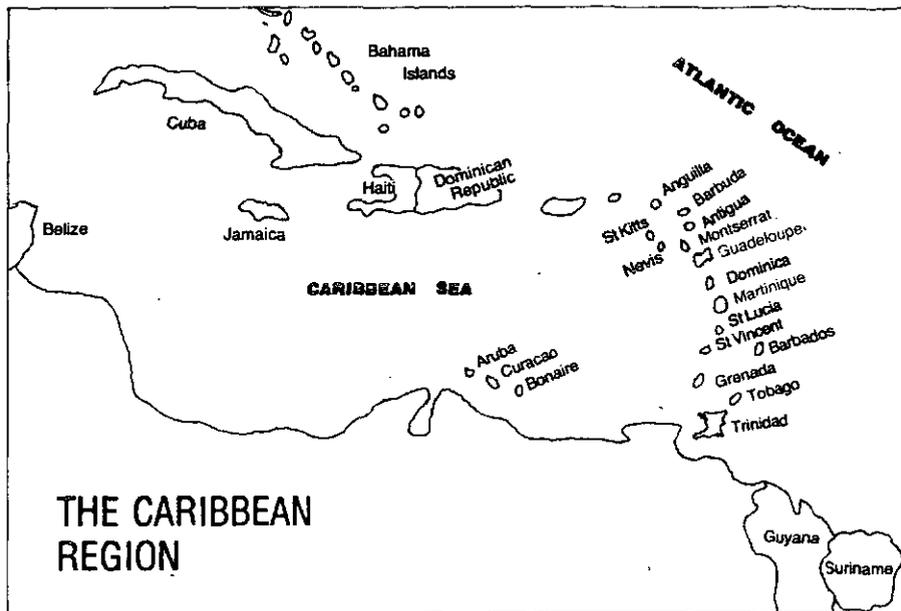


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 to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the  
 United Nations Decade for Women: Equality,  
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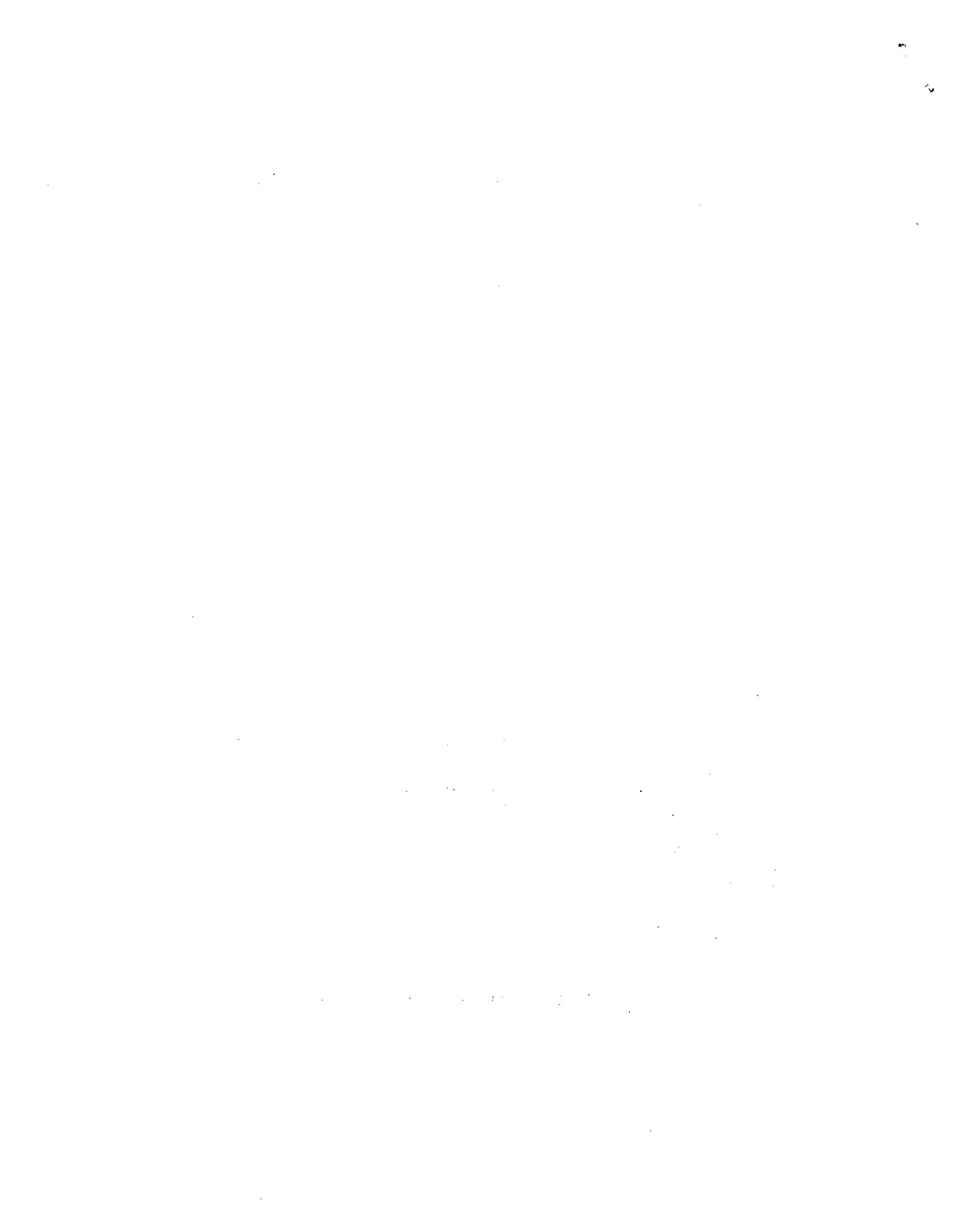


REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS  
 OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN:  
 EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE IN THE CARIBBEAN



**UNITED NATIONS**

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA Office for the Caribbean



CDCC Meeting prior to the Regional Meeting of Latin America and  
the Caribbean Preparatory to the World Conference to Review and Appraise  
The Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality,  
Development and Peace

Review and Appraisal of the Achievements of the United Nations Decade  
for Women: Equality, Development and Peace in the Caribbean

Havana, 18 November 1984

1. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women Acting as the Preparatory Body for the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace on its First Session 25 February - 3 March 1983, recommended and the General Assembly agreed "that Regional Intergovernmental Meetings should be held to review and appraise the progress achieved and obstacles encountered in attaining the goals and objectives of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, with special reference to the sub-themes: Employment, Health and Education, as well as to recommend strategies of implementation for the advancement of women to the year 2000 and suggest practical measures to overcome obstacles towards the full achievement of these goals and objectives". (Conf. 116/PC/9/Add.1)
2. Accordingly, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), is holding its regional meeting in Havana, Cuba (19-23 November 1984).
3. With reference to the above-mentioned meeting, the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) at its Eighth Session held in Port-au-Prince, Haiti (6-12 June 1984), "agreed that one day prior to the meeting in Cuba,

delegations from the CDCC member countries would meet to seek agreement on issues to be raised at the meeting".

4. In considering the issues recommended by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and quoted in paragraph 1 above, the delegations of CDCC member countries may wish to focus on the following:

- A. Progress achieved
- B. Obstacles encountered
- C. Operational Strategies for the Year 2000

#### A. Progress Achieved

1. The development that took place in the Caribbean during the United Nations Decade for Women occurred in the framework of the traditional struggle of the Caribbean people, especially Caribbean women, for individual and collective self-reliance, and self-assertiveness.
  
2. The United Nations Decade for Women coincided with the acceleration of the decolonization process in the region and witness the achievement of political independence by various countries. While accession to statehood has been rather a peaceful process, changes in inherited colonial attitudes have been accompanied by some riots and violence. The Decade for Women was immediately preceded by social unrest which set the stage for social structural changes modifying class and race cleavages within each country and the inherited balkanisation process of the region as a whole.
  
3. The quest for ethnic identity and self-appreciation together with the demands for improvement in the quality of life fomented a reshuffling in the social pyramids. New elite emerged, particularly in the political and administrative ladder, with the avowed intention of giving satisfaction to the new attitudes and aspirations of the Caribbean masses.
  
4. Apart from some discrepancies in a few countries, social indicators in the Caribbean compare favourably with those of other Third World regions. The Caribbean enjoys a generally high degree of health and education and there are no legal barriers to the participation of women in political life. There is no formal discrimination against women in education; maternity leave regulations exist in most countries, and birth control facilities are generally available.
  
5. A wide range of activities geared toward the advancement of women in the development process have been undertaken by Caribbean governments.

Such activities include: formulation and implementation of government policies in the area of legislation, general regulations to promote more equality for women in society, increased participation in development programmes and the maintenance of peace in the society.

6. Family courts have been established in some countries to deal with the social aspects of child abuse and sexual offences such as rape and incest. Reforms of criminal laws regulating the treatment of these offences have been proposed in several others.

7. National machinery to deal with women's programmes has been established by the governments of the region, indicating the degree of priority granted to the related issues and the readiness to tackle them. Similarly at regional levels, women's desks have been set up to assist the national machineries.

8. Women's Studies Working Groups have been established at several University campuses in the sub-region.

9. Employment, Health and Education have been addressed by both governmental and non-governmental organizations through projects of income generation, information and research, revolving loans and credit facilities, health programmes for rural women, literacy programmes, training workshops for development of skills in both traditional and non-traditional activities, consciousness-building programmes, and training seminars for exchanging skills and experiences among Caribbean countries.

10. Innovative methodologies for popular education in the fields of drama and other arts have been developed within the context of the female quest for ethnic identity, self-appreciation and recognition of the history of Caribbean women. In addition, government initiated or government sponsored artistic activities, shaped by the quest for cultural identity and self-appraisal (Carifesta, Carnivals, musical festivals, village-based cultural pageants, etc.) have granted the opportunity for women to underscore their essential role in the preservation and development of the regional, cultural heritage.

11. Women have profited from opportunities created on the labour market (promotion of export-processing free-zone industries, of small craft production, food processing and preservation) and they have to a large extent capitalized on historically developed skills within their traditional activities to put forward creative responses (in terms of survival strategies), capable of improving their living conditions and those of their families.

12. In the agricultural sector, small producers in subsistence economies have increasingly moved to local and regional markets to sell their foods. Moreover the traditional "higglering" profession which involves women mainly has expanded to include new models, operating beyond national and regional borders, which seek to relieve foreign exchange constraints and the attendant scarcity of consumer goods by developing international barter systems and other forms of counter-trade.

13. The search for new economic opportunities has resulted in the increase of Caribbean emigrants, who through their remittances have assisted in alleviating the lot of the residents at home.

14. In conclusion, during the United Nations Decade for Women Caribbean women have gained a higher degree of self-awareness of their own strengths and potential. Caribbean societies have started to recognize that women have been making significant contributions to social and economic production and to the maintenance of peace in society, and are granting them a more equitable share as far as development benefits are concerned.

15. The United Nations Voluntary Fund for the Decade for Women, guided by the policies of Caribbean governments, has participated actively in this process. Several non-governmental organisations within the region, in particular the University-based ones, deserve special mention for their unrestricted support to the advancement of women.

## B. Obstacles Encountered

16. The Decade has been characterised by an increasingly depressed state of the general economic situation in the sub-region. The overall decline in the international economic situation and its impact on the demand for the exports from Caribbean countries have affected all sectors from the traditional sugar and mineral exports to light manufactures and semi-manufactures.

17. Social negotiations aimed at achieving a more equitable society have not always proceeded with tranquillity throughout the Caribbean, which is facing an increase in street violence, drug abuse and general criminality affecting women in a very special way and limiting their possibility of being their own agents in development. Moreover, violence at election times, food riots, political assassinations, allusions to international gangsterism, and display of military force make it difficult to conclude that the Caribbean is becoming a zone of peace.

18. The decline in general economic activity impacted negatively on an already unfair income distribution, and served to increase the high levels of unemployment prevailing in these countries. These developments affected a) as active participants in some export-production processes, such as sugar, light manufacturing, export-processing and free-zone industries, and b) as reproducers of the labour force in general.

19. Migration continued unabated during the decade and affected the delivery of services to the population in general and to women in particular. The flight from agricultural endeavours and the deterioration of peasant food production increased the burden on elderly rural women, expanding their economically active life beyond normal age for retirement. This most vulnerable sector of the population is not easily reached by existing welfare services and social security schemes.

20. The living conditions of migrant workers, particularly in those recipient countries experiencing a decline of traditional export-agriculture, have worsened considerably. Health, and housing conditions and consequently conditions of family life of migrants, especially illegal

ones are deplorable. The means of transportation of migrant workers, have reached an all time low level with the Boat People. The situation of female emigrants, particularly the emprisonment of mothers and offspring is cause for much concern.

21. The increase in the number of job seekers further inflated by the influx of legal and illegal migrants have negatively affected working conditions of persons actually employed. Female workers became more exposed to ill-treatment and varied forms of discrimination which in this situation of labour surplus, escape the notice of those institutions responsible for implementing the laws.

22. Prostitution in the region sparked by the very causes which sparked the labour migration to the oil fields and banana plantations, may have expanded with the higher degree of geographical mobility of recent times and the deterioration of economic life. Accompanying this "profession" are the usual risks and abuses as well as health hazards for prostitutes and the population in general.

23. While rising unemployment is an obstacle for the normal functioning of the institutions regulating the hiring of the labour force, the underprivileged of the Caribbean, among them the female sector, are facing additional difficulties in appealing to these institutions because of language barriers. This situation affects their self-reliance, self-concept and self-assertiveness and perpetuates certain cleavages which have not been overcome by an improvement in the educational system.

24. This has resulted in a lack of skills for grass root participatory work and middle level management of projects and programmes aimed at alleviating the situation of women. Conversely these cleavages demand from persons dealing with women and development, more time and experience to overcome the erroneous perception of women as an homogeneous interest group.

25. Several activities particularly those of a cultural nature, in which women play a significant role have not received consideration from national and international agencies, possibly because their immediate economic impact is not apparent. In consequence various opportunities to strengthen self-reliance and self-assertiveness have been missed, while patronage and assistance at all levels have remained insufficient.

26. External financing to counteract the present economic situation of the sub-region has been made available by several donors though in insufficient amounts. Most of this assistance has been directed exclusively towards resolving the economic aspects of the situation to the detriment of social development. In fact, within social projects those dealing with women and development are only one among many priority areas.

C. Operational Strategies for the Year 2000

27. In considering the "Report of the Group of Experts on the Operational Strategies for the Advancement of Women up to the Year 2000", it may be useful from a Caribbean perspective to examine the treatment to be given to the sectoral themes of Health, Employment and Education in the framework of regional economic development.

28. In view of the difficult economic situation already referred to earlier, most countries of the Caribbean have designed stringent policies for adjustment and recovery. Nonetheless it may be advisable to formulate a strategy for Caribbean countries, emphasizing self-reliant and participatory activities at all levels.

29. It is anticipated that public investments and external financial assistance for social projects in general and for Women's affairs in particular will not grow significantly. There will be need for the strictest monitoring and planning of scarce resources. Priority could be given to on-going efforts relating to women as recipients of services from resources allocated in the national budgets, with a view to maximize the participation of women in development planning.

30. Given the small size of Caribbean societies, projects oriented towards ensuring in the society at large a level of awareness on women's issues, similar to that acquired by the female population during the Decade, could stimulate self-reliant initiatives and facilitate the implementation of programmes in the sectoral fields of Health, Employment and Education and the achievement of higher levels of peace and security in society (erradication of all forms of violence against women).

31. Any strategy for self-reliance must stimulate those activities already under the control of the female population and which show potential for growth. Commercial undertakings constitute one such area. Priority could be given to action-oriented research and projects aiming at eliminating the obstacles impeding the development of "higglers" and "hucksters" and at applying the skills acquired in these endeavours to other economic activities.

32. The multiplier effects of the NGO's and semi-public institutions such as the Academic centres, cannot be overstressed in a strategy based on self-reliance. Their activities in the collection and exchange of information, in the development of theoretical and action-oriented research, in the dissemination of information to the public at large and in training and other concrete developmental activities, are fundamental for the advancement of women.

33. Increased initiatives for the advancement of women demands a strengthening of the co-ordinating government machineries at national and regional levels. This will result in closer relationships between governmental and non-governmental institutions and in a more efficient use of the scarce resources available.

34. Finally to operate with more assertiveness in the context of scarce financial resources, national and regional institutions dealing with the advancement of women will need to strengthen further their contacts with the outerworld. Therefore delegations from the Caribbean may wish to give serious consideration and support to the Final Recommendation of the Group of Experts on Operational Strategies for the Advancement of Women up to the year 2000, on "the extension of the Decade in order to guarantee the transition from the stage of consciousness-raising to the stage of action".



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