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Review

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Notes and explanation of symbols

The following symbols are used in tables in the *Review*:

Three dots (...) indicate that data are not available or are not separately reported.

A dash (—) indicates that the amount is nil or negligible.

A blank space in a table means that the item in question is not applicable.

A minus sign (-) indicates a deficit or decrease, unless otherwise specified.

A point (.) is used to indicate decimals.

A slash (/) indicates a crop year or fiscal year, e.g., 1970/1971.

Use of a hyphen (-) between years, e.g., 1971-1973, indicates reference to the complete number of calendar years involved, including the beginning and end years.

Reference to "tons" mean metric tons, and to "dollars", United States dollars, unless otherwise stated.

Unless otherwise stated, references to annual rates of growth or variation signify compound annual rates.

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Review

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The growing presence of women in development

*Miriam Krawczyk**

One of the most far-reaching social changes in the Latin American and Caribbean region in the last 30 years has been the ever-increasing presence of women in public life, particularly in education and the work force. This presence has also been significant in social movements and grass-roots organizations.

The social acceptance of women in public life has had as yet undetermined consequences in their private lives; housework turns into a double shift for the working woman, and child-care raises a crucial issue which society has yet to resolve. However, this acceptance is not based on social policies that take into account those functions typical of the private world; often both worlds, the private and the public, come into conflict. Couples face changes in their relationships based on women's increasing economic independence and autonomy.

The existence within the region of a large sector of women employed in domestic service waters down a good part of these phenomena. On the other hand, the socioeconomic situation of women is highly heterogeneous; for sizeable female contingents, access to birth-control, education and modernity in general is currently impossible.

Nevertheless, change has begun to permeate Latin American societies and to raise new questions. Cultural models, interpersonal relationships, the socialization of new generations, all present new challenges and generate contradictions. There is as yet no clear picture of the world of the future. Perhaps a possibility might consist of the coexistence of different social life projects.

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Introduction

Interest in the integration of women into development is part of an awareness process which the modern world has taken on with greater emphasis since the post-war period. In recent decades this process has widened and deepened to include economic, technological, social and cultural change.

The impetus given by the United Nations to the advancement of women resulted in a great dissemination of studies, research and activities which opened up new perspectives, points of view, approaches and objectives on practically all contemporary issues.

In the Latin American and Caribbean region the situation of women has been the object of evaluations by ECLAC since the early 1970s. Following studies on female participation in the development of the region and measures necessary to eliminate all discrimination, certain factors for analysing and evaluating the issue, pertaining to family, education, employment, legislation, health, social communications and political participation, subsequently became prominent. In 1977 examination of the progress recorded by women was incorporated into ECLAC's regular evaluation activities and, starting from the Regional Action Plan, periodic evaluation exercises have been undertaken at regional and world conferences.

The subject, in turn, gained relevance within the entire United Nations system, exerting a permanent influence on regional and international priorities. Likewise, academic centres, non-governmental organizations and women's groups proliferated in the region and there was a broadening of subjects.

Women's role in society has been modified in this century, and has received ever-increasing recognition. Industrialization processes transformed every-day living by socializing many functions carried out in the home and created new opportunities for work and social participation by women in the public domain. It is possible that the Second World War accelerated this incorporation process of women in Europe, by forcing them to assume on a massive scale those functions which had been

hitherto reserved for men. In any event, the model of the working woman became widespread. In Latin America and the Caribbean the urbanization process exercised a strong influence: women took on new tasks, advanced in domains where they had greater interaction with men, became more visible publicly and aware of their own potential and the importance of their functions.

The United Nations examined this situation and gave the subject of women's condition permanent stature; from the outset this action was essentially oriented to the pressing need to guarantee equality and bar discrimination.

The following pages review the impact of major changes in the situation of women in the region over the last three decades, both in the

public and private domains. The process has been multifaceted and heterogeneous, with major advances in the legal aspects, formal education and recognition of the validity of the subject. It is emphasized that women's policies have to be reinforced in order to ensure that the crisis does not turn back the progress achieved. An attempt is made to show that many apparently ambivalent aspects of women's social participation are an indication of transformation. The concrete needs of women must be satisfied unequally in order to promote true equality among women of the popular urban sector, those of the rural sector, young women, female heads of households, etc. Hence political will will be indispensable in promoting initiatives for the advancement of women.

I

Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: elements for a diagnosis

1. *Demographic aspects*

Changes in recent decades have affected all sectors of the population, but it is probable that women and youth reflect them the most. In the case of women, the importance of these changes transcends the economic and social sphere and produces transformations which begin to modify cultural behaviour. Although, given the magnitude and diversity of these changes, it is impossible to indicate their development or to measure their impact precisely, mention should at least be made of some significant phenomena. Advances in medicine, and in particular the spread of antibiotics, apparently had an influence on perceptions on childbirth. Risks associated with maternity markedly decreased, with a lengthening of women's life expectancy. While life expectancy of the regional population increased from 55 years in the 1950s to over 70 in the 1980s the increase was more significant among women.

Subsequently, advances in birth control methods, supported at times by demographic policies and widespread use of contraceptives,

caused a marked drop in fertility. This decline has social consequences over and above being a purely quantitative phenomenon. That sexuality can be separated from reproduction and that the latter can possess quite a high safety margin is a new phenomenon. Although this decrease is particularly visible in middle echelons with high levels of education, it is more frequent in countries with greater modernization, and the situation begins to be generalized in all strata of all countries. These demographic changes in Latin America and the Caribbean are even more spectacular if one remembers that they occur in a domain in which different religious practices prevail and where certain traditional socialization models still remain strong.

One impact of urbanization on the situation of women is reflected in a fundamental change in family, i.e., the trend towards smaller households. In general, it can be pointed out that a lesser number of children favours entry into the working world, but, at the same time, and in the absence of other adults, this factor imposes greater responsibility on the couple *vis-a-vis* their children than in an extended family household.

Likewise an increase in female heads of households is observed, particularly in the last decade. According to partial figures for 1982 this varies from 18% to 23% (Lima and Panama City), which is quite significant. These figures vary for the Caribbean between 24% and 46%.

Urbanization, and in particular, life in the big cities, allows for greater anonymity; therefore, there is less social control over women's private lives. Not all social spheres open up, but those in existence appear less narrow than in the past and with new contradictions.

Besides, during the urbanization process, sizeable contingents of young women migrated to cities to take jobs, for the most part, in domestic service. Numerous studies have focused on this topic in recent years.

In Latin America, the overall fertility rate shows great heterogeneity, as indicated by figures from the CELADE *Demographic Bulletin* No. 41, January 1988, for the five year periods 1950-1955 and 1985-1990. Thus, it is possible to distinguish five groups of countries. In first place are those with low fertility in both periods, such as Argentina (3.1% and 3.1%) and Uruguay (2.7% and 2.8%). These are followed by countries with medium-low fertility rates in the first period and low in the second (Cuba, 4% and 2%) or medium-high and low respectively (Chile, 5.1% and 2.8%). On the other hand, there are still countries with high fertility rates in the first five-year period and medium-low in the current one; this is the most numerous group and includes Brazil (6.1% and 3.8%), Colombia (6.7% and 3.9%), Costa Rica (6.7% and 3.5%), the Dominican Republic (7.4% and 4.2%), Mexico (6.7% and 4.2%), Panama (5.7% and 3.5%), and Venezuela (6.5% and 4.1%). The fourth group of countries involves those with high fertility in the first period and medium-high in the current period and includes Ecuador (6.9% and 5%), El Salvador (6.5% and 5.2%), Haiti (6.1% and 5.1%), Paraguay (6.8% and 4.8%) and Peru (6.8% and 5%). Lastly, the fifth group includes countries with high fertility in both five-year periods and are Bolivia (6.7% and 6.2%), Guatemala (7.1% and 6.1%), Nicaragua (7.3% and 6%) and Honduras (7% and 6.2%), which still have not completely stabilized their indicator trend, and experience relatively lower declines in overall fertility rates.

2. *Participation in the work force*

Although characteristics vary according to specific situations that differ between developed and developing countries, it is a fact that women's incorporation into the work force has reached magnitudes that were inconceivable 30 years ago: working women in the world today total 815 million; in the decade 1975-1985, 15 million women were incorporated annually into the labour market. The female work force in Latin America tripled between 1950 and 1980, increasing from 10 to 32 million.

The characteristics of female economic participation in the region reflect the diversity of their social and economic insertion and the degree of modernization of the countries, but some main trends may be pointed out. In particular, the high speed of incorporation observed during this period is one of the most evident. In effect, growth rates of the female work force increased more than those of males, although they continued to be low; as a result, overall participation grew by almost 18% in 1950 to slightly over 26% in 1980. If one takes into account the various countries of the region, rates vary, for example, from 6.2% in 1950 to 7.0% in 1980 in the Dominican Republic and from 19% in 1950 to 22.8% in 1980 in Uruguay. Perhaps one of the variations causing the most impact is that of Mexico whose refined rate for female participation varies from 8.3% in 1950 to 17.3% in 1980, or else that of Cuba, where variation rises from 9.2% in 1950 to 22.3% in 1980. Women's incorporation into the work force is strongly influenced by what stage they are at in the life cycle. In general, participation by singles is greatest; however, at post-secondary education levels the effect of marital status is nullified, and participation is high, independent of marital status. The age-group with the greatest participation is that of ages 25 to 29; in this bracket the lowest participation in 1950 was 11.5% shown by the Dominican Republic, and the highest was 36.9% recorded in Uruguay. In 1980, although in the Dominican Republic the rate of this age group was 14.0%, in the majority of countries it was over 20%, reaching 49.2% in Cuba.

Extensions in education coverage, increased social security, the family and reproductive cycles all tend to be mentioned as factors having an

effect on the working age of most women between ages 20 and 29. In terms of the permanence of women in the labour force, although economic factors are paramount among popular sectors, higher education and higher degrees of modernization of the country also exert an influence among medium sectors.

Within this economic participation, the service sector maintains its predominance, with the tertiarization process thus becoming strengthened. Figures for various countries show that towards 1980, between 38% and 55% of all working women were concentrated in this sector. Although their content varies, personal services continue to be important, while at the same time social services increase. In the majority of countries, female office workers are the second group in numerical importance and they continue to grow.

Household surveys available from 1970 onward show that for this period women's incomes have continued to be lower than those of men, and that occupational segregation continues. According to the same source, this occurs despite the fact that the average educational level of working women is higher than that of men.

In the Caribbean countries, and particularly in English-speaking ones, there has generally been no major social and cultural prejudice against women actively participating in economic activities. However, these women tend to be concentrated within a narrow range of economic activities, such as the clothing or service industry, or in professions providing assistance to others, such as nursing, where wage levels are lower than those of other sectors, in which men, such as technicians and construction workers, predominate. This fact has more to do with attitudes, images and conditioning—as manifestations of existing social relations with respect to the genre—than with legal or institutional barriers imposed on women. Upon examining rates of female participation in the work force in some of these countries, it is seen that for the period 1980-1988, the proportion varies between 31% in Cuba and 46%-47% in Barbados, Jamaica and the United States Virgin Islands.

In general, incentive policies towards economic participation by women have not

existed in the region; increases in such participation are related more to urbanization, modernization, the education process and changes in perception *vis-à-vis* work. Likewise, statistical data should be viewed with caution, since their comparability is dubious. On the one hand, there is an under-recording of female work and, on the other hand, measurement of the insertion of sizeable contingents of women into the modern area of the economy has improved. It is important to highlight improvements in statistics as being one of the achievements in recent years that allow for greater precision in the measuring of female labour.

Lastly, recognition has begun for work carried out by housewives. In effect, in various countries, between 30% and 50% of women over 25 do unpaid housework. Although no consensus has as yet been reached as to the most appropriate way of dealing with this matter, there is deeper understanding on usage of time, economic value of work done and variations in intensity of domestic work, which result from the incorporation of new technologies and the changing role of women within the family.

3. Education

Mention should be made of the enormous expansion of formal education and the growing access to it by women. Based on the principles of universalization of primary schooling, equalization of its distribution and constant expansion, mass education came about, and there was a marked increase in the training of working population. Between 1950 and 1960, the number of students in primary and secondary levels of schooling doubled and again between 1960 and 1970. At tertiary levels, there was also an increase, although less spectacular, and in 15 years (1970-1985) the proportion of women in them rose from 35% to 45%.

However, there are major differences between countries and between rural and urban areas. Likewise, in some countries illiteracy rates reach 90% among elderly women, while in the age group between 15 and 19 they do not exceed 15% and are similar for both sexes. For example, in some countries of the region, this rate varies from 4.5% to 23.2% for women in the urban sector (Argentina, Bolivia) and from 15.1% in

Argentina to 68.5% in Bolivia for those in the rural sector. Illiteracy rates among the 15 year old female population, according to the UNESCO 1988 Yearbook, vary from 6.4% in Argentina, 3.8% in Cuba up to 66.5% in Haiti.

In Latin America and the Caribbean the greater or lesser expansion of educational system coverage depended in part on overall development strategies. Likewise, it reflected the different opportunities of various social groups to gain access to those systems and remain within them. Thus, there are situations in which coverage is still very limited, others in which it is broad but not comprehensive and, finally, those with practically universal access. In any case, even in the most egalitarian systems, there are inequalities deriving from social origin, from the "educational devaluation" which tends to accompany mass education, from the qualitative stratification of educational establishments that tends to coincide with social stratification, etc.

Despite this, educational expansion was very great, particularly among the female sector of the population. Greater equality of opportunities occurred at high levels, while greater discrimination continued among poor rural groups, and differences persisted between "very educated" and illiterate women. Besides, the content of female education, particularly higher education, continues to refer to capacities culturally recognized as being more appropriate for women, although it is evident that, increasingly, women are beginning to be educated to work and not only to fulfil a social function. Thus, there are marked differences in the proportion of women in teaching and in engineering careers. While in the former, women reach up to 88.0% (Argentina), in the latter the maximum is 26.4% (Colombia).

4. Legislation

The objective of equality, which is one of the broadest of the decade, has already been interpreted during the United Nations Decade for Women, by the World Conference on Equality, Development and Peace, held in July, 1980, in Copenhagen, not only in the sense of legal equality—the elimination of *de jure* discrimination—but also equality of rights,

responsibilities and opportunities for women to participate in development as a beneficiary and as an active agent.

In terms of legislation, major achievements have been recorded in the region. First, over half of the countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, thus expressing their commitment on the matter. Likewise, the majority have adopted domestic legislative measures which favour this objective.

It could be said that by the 1980s there was no discrimination in Latin America and the Caribbean regarding political rights inherent in citizenship. In other legal areas, for example regarding married women, in various countries their capacity is still affected by marital authority, by the system of administration of property in marriage and by paternal authority over underage unemancipated children. Although there has been a positive evolution in this matter, there is still discrimination in some legislation. In penal law there is still unequal legal treatment in many countries, especially when dealing with adultery or parricide. Likewise, crimes related to infanticide, abortion and rape are penalized differently.

In labour laws, practically all national legislations have accepted the principle embodied in Convention 100 of the International Labour Organisation on equal pay between the sexes for equal work. Differentiated regulations for women refer to night work or work that is unhealthy and to the protection of maternity.

Since the causes of discrimination arise essentially from *de facto* situations, from the maintenance of socio-cultural stereotypes and from lack of awareness, in recent years, the majority of governments of the region have established specialized agencies for promoting the status of women and have adopted plans and policies intended to ensure equal opportunities. These national mechanisms are assigned to certain ministries in the category of under-secretaries' offices, general directors' offices, governmental divisions in the areas of family, social welfare, education, culture, labour, planning, economic development.

In terms of legislative reforms, various countries have developed projects geared to

modifying provisions that discriminate against women, particularly with regard to paternal authority over under-age unemancipated children and filiation, reforms of rules on the family, divorce, equal rights and duties in marriage, family rights, etc. Likewise, in some countries, programmes for the advancement of women deal with training, child care and attention, family participation and dissemination of women's rights and issues. It is interesting to note that new legislative demands have arisen out of women's movements and groups, regarding family violence and assistance to battered women. These incentives have already found certain acceptance in some countries.

A more precise evaluation requires research to provide adequate information on the ratification of international agreements and their incorporation into domestic law; levels of participation by women in international forums; provisions promulgated that guarantee equal rights for men and women and prohibit sex discrimination; the revoking of discriminatory standards as a result of co-ordinated action; the incorporation of unregulated provisions (e.g., family violence); and the establishment of legislative reform commissions. It would also be important to analyse those agencies concerned with the status of women (structure, functions, decision-making authority, territorial scope, insertion into government structure); mechanisms established to disseminate rights in force and, resources to render them effective; the treatment given to women's issues in national development plans; and efforts made to change socio-cultural stereotypes in education, work, communications, etc.

It would be interesting to study women's participation in decision-making, both within the domain of governments and non-governmental organizations and in political parties, as well as their incorporation into different levels of education and work.

5. Participation

One of the main objectives of the international community has been full participation by women in all spheres of social life. In effect, in

the early 1980s emphasis was placed on women's advancement as a basic element of the development process, and on the pressing need to undertake economic and social change to ensure their full participation.

Throughout the decade, the idea of women's participation in development emphasized their nature as active agents of the process, which was subsequently specified as a political, economic, social and cultural process.

Traditionally, when talking about social participation by women, reference is made to their participation in political parties, labour unions, etc., but always alluding to their presence within structured groups. As a result, their participation in leadership has been perceived as being extremely low, practically non-existent, and in the best of cases, as being minor within party committees and nuclei. However, traditionally, women have participated in other spheres of civil life, from upper class women's organizations in social charities and assistance projects, such as patronage or aid to hospitals, orphanages and asylums, to active participation by young women in sewing unions, for example.

Transformations in recent decades have also brought about regional changes in women's role in this domain. Modernization itself has caused an increase in the presence of women within social movements as well as women forming their own movements. However, it is still risky to venture conclusions. It is possible that new social movements organized by and for women reflect a crisis in traditional forms, but it is also possible that they uncover new foci of conflicts and contradictions. Women, particularly those in middle-income groups and, least so, those in upper-income groups, organized themselves in the first half of the century to obtain suffrage, education and work. Subsequently, they oriented their demands through female and feminist organizations, around such issues as human rights, relative recovery of their situation as women, or else in support of popular support organizations. Their centres have gathered qualitative information on the status of women undertaking activities of study, reflection and services for various social strata. Through the media they helped to disseminate information, knowledge and ideas on the subject of women.

Of the new social movements which emerged in recent decades in the popular neighbourhoods of major cities, an important part is constituted and led by women from the popular sector. Sometimes they form mothers' clubs, participate in church-run assistance programmes, lead recovery movements to obtain day-care or health facilities, form pressure groups to obtain housing or infrastructural services. Examples of these are the "Bartolina Sisa" Peasant Women Federation of Labour in Bolivia, the Mothers' Committee in El Salvador, etc.

These are heterogeneous organizations that are difficult to evaluate. They tend to come under the denomination of popular participation, and often they are considered to be part of survival strategies in this sector, complementing male ones. Normally, there is no room for them in political areas, and more radical groups sometimes consider them to be a new form of conservatism.

Participation by women in social movements and as a social movement seems to indicate a broader cultural transformation, tied to new forms of political activity.

In any case, this participation is generating new, more or less articulate demands, both for improved living conditions, as well as relating to protection *vis-à-vis* family violence, infrastructural support for the working woman and respect for women's image and identity.

Women's movements and organizations force a reinterpretation of political practice and a reassessment of their social dimension. More than any other subject, the emergence and demands of these groups sheds new light on the relations and interdependence of the family and society, of private and public life.

6. Family

Ever since systematic studies were begun on the status of women in Latin America and the Caribbean, the fundamental importance of the family—whether original or constituted—in social life has been repeatedly emphasized and analysed. Likewise, on various occasions persistent *de facto* and indirect discrimination has been highlighted, particularly that tied to marital status or to the family situation. In the

Nairobi Strategies oriented to the future advancement of women (resolution 40/108 of the United Nations General Assembly of 13 December 1985, emphasis is placed on the need to revoke discriminatory laws, especially against married women, and it is requested that complementary strategies be prepared to bring about the sharing of domestic responsibilities by all family members, as well as recognition for the invisible and unstructured economic contribution of women to society.

Although all United Nations instruments approved since the promulgation of the Charter have essentially promoted the broadening of women's social role, the latter's position in the family has been a permanent cause for concern and a backdrop projected with varying intensity on the debate (without achieving a final conclusion on the matter). Family-societal ties, private-public life, women's role in the home and in the social domain are still new topics which touch on all aspects and levels of current societies. In Latin America and the Caribbean, on the other hand, family units vary from one society to another, depending on which socioeconomic strata they belong to; they differ in strategies for living, socio-organizational models and in life cycles, all of which open up different possibilities for living and economic and social participation by women.

In recent decades, in addition to socioeconomic and cultural differences, families diversified, in particular, due to the urban modernization process.

The family in the region faced changes that were antagonistic and double in origin. Although theoretically it continued to be a nucleus that was highly resistant to change, in fact, it changed due to overall processes. The effects of this change were felt differently among different families, but there were very marked common trends. The first phenomenon of importance was the decrease in household size, which forced a redistribution of roles. Besides, the incorporation of large contingents of the rural population into the urban world caused structural breakdowns in many cultural and family systems, and in addition, incorporated numerous women into wage-earning labour. Although conservative and authoritative discourse has apparently continued on the

family, especially among the popular sectors, the undertaking of roles different to those formulated generates contradictions and increases conflict. Mass education and the impact of communications weakened the socializing role of the family and altered father-son relationships. The number of female-headed households grew due to the breakdown of couples, and support networks typical of extended and complex families weakened.

The traditional family model persists, especially among upper echelons and, in its specific form, among indigenous communities, but the prevailing trend is otherwise.

A large part of what was traditionally considered to be private space was socialized. Numerous functions tied to food preparation, domestic, educational, cultural and recreational tasks are today carried on outside the home. The family opened up to society and the majority of its members spend a large part of their time outside the home. The new articulation of family and society is as yet unclear, and rather, there is a disorganization and destabilization of the majority of family forms which had been most common in Latin America and the Caribbean. Together with this phenomenon, in some sectors, there is a growing re-evaluation of private space, and possibly this phenomenon will heighten. It is probable that in the next decades new family forms that are currently under gestation will be modelled. It is to be expected that measures proposed in the Nairobi Strategies will be expressed in them, in the sense of the relations between family and society becoming more flexible, and life in the bosom of the family becoming more shared.

7. *Vulnerable groups*

Among the most vulnerable groups of women are those in the popular urban sector, the rural poor, which for the most part includes women of minority ethnic groups and young women. Doubtless, other important groups could be added: housewives, maids, adolescent mothers, female heads of households, but it was thought that, although insufficient, the first three groups allow one to exemplify the main issues, options and needs of the most vulnerable female sectors,

as well as their possible contribution as agents of development.

To deal with the problems of a specific sector of women, whether because of their socioeconomic, geographic, ethnic or age situation, does not exclude consideration of them with regard to issues affecting other women; what is involved is a complementary perspective which permits one to examine women's issues from different angles and to propose adequate policies.

a) *Women of the popular urban sector*

The popular urban sector of the region is very heterogeneous, but it has one common characteristic: it is essentially oriented to meeting basic needs and to developing group survival strategies. Here too women fulfil multiple functions, but despite their high participation in paid and unpaid labour, their position in the family tends to be markedly dependent. Besides, the excessive tasks they undertake partially or totally limit their social participation, which in itself was very difficult. They work primarily in the informal and service sectors, particularly in domestic work.

As some studies indicate, women in this sector are relatively young. There is higher frequency of female heads of households, accompanied by instability of marital unions. Educational levels of women in this sector have increased in recent decades, but marked differences persist in access to the educational system, which translate into exclusion or lesser relative incorporation and persistence of sizeable contingents of those who do not have access to secondary education.

Participation in work by women of this sector is higher than in other sectors, since it is governed by the logic of need. The range of occupations is limited and maids prevail, many of them rural migrants. Also, their participation in the informal sector is significant, where domestic work has a certain importance. A new mode of labour-intensive work is the assembly line, which covers industries such as clothing, textiles, electronics, etc. All these jobs are normally very low paid and lack social protection. Difficulties in becoming organized hamper the submission of work claims. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the urbanization

process has been relatively recent; for this reason, the urban popular sector tends to be new, composed largely of migrant women. Other occupations appear within this group, among which the female street-hawker is typical of the informal sector. These women normally come from the rural sector and often from indigeneous communities. Andean peasants sell self-produced wares, food and handicrafts. Some groups appear as a result of community breakdown, sometimes with their families. Another type of rural commerce, more typical of the Caribbean, is that done by intermediation and implies long absences by women.

The crisis has modified survival strategies of women and families of popular urban sectors. Women have intensified both their paid and domestic work. Simultaneously, other family members, generally minors, have had to become incorporated into the search for income necessary for the family's subsistence, which is also manifested in a visible increase in child begging and prostitution.

In groups belonging to the popular urban sector, the perception of women's social role is traditional, despite their important economic role. However, they participate actively, especially housewives, in organizations that seek to improve their living conditions. Only occasionally does this participation transcend the sphere of the *barrio* and community, but already a fundamental role begins to be recognized in terms of human settlements and popular organizations in general.

b) *Rural poor women*

The status of rural women continues to be very unfavourable, and it is probable that it has even worsened due to the modernization of family and social life, which ended in the crisis of traditional forms, without crystallizing into new models. We are not dealing with a homogenous group, since its members are inserted into agricultural economic sectors of advanced capitalist development, into peasant economies with populations of Hispanic and early mestizo origin, and in peasant economies of indigenous populations rooted in native communities.

Economic participation by peasant women tends to be mediated by the family, which is the

unit that in fact defines survival strategies. On the other hand, domestic work in this sector is broader than that of urban women, since it includes subsistence farming activities, preparation of foods, in addition to regular domestic work. Their productive work in agriculture depends to a large extent on cultural tradition, but more so on crop patterns. In cattle-ranching they tend to be present in dairying and cheese-making; in sheep-ranching in the care of domestic poultry. Their work in agricultural production is heavily influenced by family factors, type of farming, status of the head of household, etc. In the case of the Andean agricultural system, complementary participation by men, women and children in the entire productive process is noteworthy.

Another type of paid work carried out by women is tied to production for market, from care of sheep and production of handicrafts to sporadic work in services.

Ever since the modernization of agriculture the presence of rural women in wage labour became more visible. Although there is not much information on the subject, it is important to mention the female farm worker or labourer, who is normally unorganized, has high productivity and low wages and in many cases is also head of household. The other sector, that of export, based on the trading of flowers, fruits and fresh vegetables, currently absorbs large amounts of female labour. This sector poses similar problems to the previous one and although it appears to be considerable in magnitude, there is as yet no systematized information on this activity.

Lastly, an important characteristic of women in the rural sector, particularly notable from the 1940s onward, is their prevalence in the migration process. Those who tend to migrate are young single women, between the ages of 10 and 24, many of whom are the eldest daughters of rural families and of numerous families.

c) *Young women*

This group of young women (ages 15-24) accounts for between 30% and 40% of the population in various countries. Over one fifth of women between the ages of 15 and 24 have formed couples and only a slightly lower percentage between the ages of 15 and 19 are or

have been married. Very little is known about issues pertaining to them, despite the fact that Latin America and the Caribbean constitute a young continent: 75 million persons are between the ages of 15 and 24, of which approximately half are women.

As has already been mentioned, work participation by women, in particular between the ages of 20 and 29, is rising continuously with sustained growth over the last 30 years, as the overall rate of participation has decreased. Growth of the young female working sector has occurred particularly in the tertiary sector, from domestic service to the most modern occupation areas.

Unemployment is a subject of growing importance for the young female sector. The situation is critical in the majority of countries of the region. One may suppose that the problem is even greater than figures indicate, since many of the young women who claim to be in charge of the household are not but are concealed unemployed persons (by virtue of the ideological component of the so-called "domesticity", they conceal their situation).

In Caribbean countries, late abortions constitute a serious concern in the area of health, especially with regard to young women, whose numbers are increasing. It should be remembered that approximately half of the regional population is under 15, of which 50% are women. Despite greater educational opportunities, teenage pregnancy is very widespread, for various reasons, among which are ignorance about sexuality, peer pressure and high unemployment levels.

Changes in the education sector have had greater impact on young women as a group. Mass secondary education has probably been the most relevant characteristic of the expansion of education, in addition to the significant increase of women in higher education. On the other hand, the female sector shows great polarization in education levels. Due to the high cost of education, in the majority of countries there more often tends to be talk of exclusion rather than discrimination, since the sectors that do not have access to it are broad and of both sexes.

From the information available one can state that young women in Latin America and the Caribbean constitute a culturally heterogeneous group, socioeconomically unequal, which perhaps has their enormous vulnerability in common. The group also shares its orientation towards the private world and its low participation in the social scene.

If being young is taken to mean being part of a group that is in the process of biological and cultural formation and whose members do not as yet have all the responsibilities of an adult, it becomes clear that not all young women fit this category. Ethnicity, cultural formation, social class, socioeconomic conditions, the degree of modernization of the country, the deep-rootedness of traditional and religious cultural norms, the cultural definition of women's role in society and their access to education, all come into play in terms of their possibility of having youthful behaviour. In the majority of cases, maternity tends to be considered as the end of the youthful stage. According to some studies, the sharp increase in teenage pregnancies places them on an even greater level of vulnerability.

II

Balance

From the first years of the post-war period up to the 1980s the transformations of Latin American and Caribbean societies had a great influence on the situation, living conditions and social role of women in the region. These changes were difficult to measure in the majority of cases, and had visible effects on women's

social or public role. With major contradictions and differences between socioeconomic strata, degrees of modernization of the countries and depending on whether their origin was rural or urban, women's presence in economic activity increased, and they participated in the generalized feeling of growing social

mobilization. Many had fewer children, and their life expectancy was extended. Although a pattern prevailed in employment which was compatible with their traditional role, autonomy and economic independence increased, and they began to see themselves in a positive light as having value in and of themselves.

With the spread of the cinema, television and mass education, another way of socialization was propagated. In addition new socializing agents emerged, sometimes instead of the family, opening up new opportunities in terms of women's tasks. The gap between educated and uneducated women widened—thus creating two superimposed worlds—as did that between younger and older women.

Little is known about the private world and its changes. Some qualitative changes point to a transformation of family roles and a greater openness of the private towards the public, particularly in terms of the socialization of family members. Likewise, some topics went from the private domain to social debate, such as domestic work and violence within the family, for example. The increase in violence against women in Caribbean society constituted a visible concern of governments as well as non-governmental organizations. Featured among actions undertaken are studies, forums, radio and television programmes, the setting up of shelters to take in victims of battering, legal measures, etc. Apparently, awareness on these issues is unequal, depending on the country and social level. On the other hand, private space is reassessed as being an affective area also necessary for men, especially of the younger sector.

Although many aspects are not sufficiently clear to be considered as achievements of objectives proposed for the role of women, there are some which are worth mentioning. Without a doubt, there is growing public awareness opposed to any kind of social discrimination based on sex. Likewise, there is virtual consensus as to the right of women to fuller participation. In the majority of countries in the region the role of the State has been essential in the massive broadening of educational coverage and in the area of legislative reforms which opened up new ground for women. Likewise, significant working opportunities were created for women of the region within State bureaucracies and in

public teaching. In recent years, the majority of countries have established specialized offices at State level for the advancement of women.

The role of non-governmental organizations has been extremely important for the accumulation of new knowledge on the status of women and their needs. They have supported specific projects directed at income generation, training and mobilization. In some countries they have liaised and co-ordinated with State agencies and in others, they have instead provided alternative opportunities.

The main obstacles to women's participation stem from the persistence of cultural stereotypes regarding women's role, unfavourable economic conditions that affect large sectors of women, persistence of legal limitations in their family relationships, their as yet insufficient education and training, and lack of sufficient and adequate employment. This situation reflects the ambivalence of the region's social development, with major formal advances and with fundamental problems heightened by the crisis.

Doubtless, the crisis generates new contradictions in the female sector. Recent decades raised expectations for education, employment, new opportunities for participation, which are unlikely to end. It might even turn out that the crisis will renew more conservative and traditional models, in a tentative return of women to the home, to ease employment demands. The promotion of women's incorporation into society is a recent and precarious process. The crisis is an important factor which should be considered in the taking of necessary precautions for preventing this process of integration from being halted. The linking of women's problems to those of society as a whole, and their structural character was the tonic adopted by the region upon committing itself to the advancement of women's rights. Only decided political will to reinforce this approach will prevent reversals in the status of women in Latin America and the Caribbean. The crisis in itself does not have the power to delay or reverse advances achieved in women's social role. On the contrary, it may be used as a tool to generate new development models with more active participation by women. The option that is adopted to deal with the crisis will be more decisive in achieving that end than the economic situation in itself.

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