



# What kind of State? What kind of equality?

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## **XI** REGIONAL CONFERENCE **ON WOMEN** IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Brasilia, 13-16 July 2010



UNITED NATIONS



Secretaria de Políticas  
para as Mulheres

This document was prepared under the supervision of Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), for presentation at the eleventh session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (Brasilia, 13-16 July 2010).

The report includes the progress achieved by the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean and gives an account of the work carried out during its first two years of operation, with an emphasis on women's economic autonomy.

Work on this document was coordinated by Sonia Montañó, Officer in Charge of the Division for Gender Affairs of ECLAC, with assistance from Coral Calderón. Particular thanks are owed to Diane Alméras, Natalia Gherardi, Ana Cristina González, Nathalie Lamaute-Brisson, Vivian Milosavljevic, Laura Pautassi, Patricia Provoste and Corina Rodríguez for their substantive contributions.

Jimena Arias, Virginia Guzmán, Halima-Sa'adia Kassim, Denisse Lazo, Paola Meschi, Paulina Pavez, Carolina Peyrin, María de la Luz Ramírez, Sylvan Roberts, Mariana Sanz, Sheila Stuart and Alejandra Valdés also participated in the preparation and discussion of the document.

The document incorporates valuable contributions from ministers and authorities of machineries for the advancement of women in Latin America and the Caribbean, who defined its contents at the forty-third meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (Port of Spain, 7 and 8 July 2009). They also sent materials and information for the preparation of the document and enriched its final version with comments and debates offered in two virtual forums.

The authors would also like to express their gratitude to Antonio Prado, Deputy Executive Secretary of ECLAC, for his valuable comments.

Financial contributions were gratefully received from the Spanish International Cooperation Agency for Development (AECID) and the Ibero-American Secretariat (SEGIB), and technical and financial contributions from the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

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## WHAT KIND OF STATE? WHAT KIND OF EQUALITY?

### Introduction

The document “*What kind of State? What kind of equality?*” analyses the official information available in the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, reports prepared by Governments and a range of specialized studies on equality policies in Latin America and the Caribbean 15 years after the Beijing Conference.<sup>1</sup>

It is argued that the region’s countries are in deficit from the point of view of gender equality because half of the population —women in all social strata— have not achieved the same outcomes nor the same opportunities as their male peers in exercising citizenship.

The question as to the kind of State and the kind of equality that gender equality entails is answered by proposing new ways to articulate the State, the market and the family, ways that favour democratic forms and contents within the institutions they form in order to attain real equality between male and female citizens. The spirit of the document may thus be summed up as the idea of equality in the country and at home.

This idea is akin to that proposed by ECLAC in *Time for equality: closing gaps, opening trails* (ECLAC, 2010a): put equality at the heart of development, abolishing social privileges and redistributing productive resources. This, in the

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<sup>1</sup> The Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995, and the Platform for Action adopted on that occasion is the subject of a 15-year review entitled Review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) in Latin American and Caribbean countries (ECLAC, 2009).

case of gender equality, should also be construed as the abolition of privileges and the redistribution of resources within the family by means of a reform agenda that fosters women's economic, political and physical autonomy.

The backbone of these reforms as put forward in the document is the redistribution of socially available and necessary work, that is to say, the paid and unpaid work that makes productive development possible and the provision of care for people throughout their life cycle.

It is proposed that all of the barriers to women's equal access to the labour market and to social protection be removed in favour of a social and fiscal covenant that embraces explicit policies for reconciling family and work life which:

- Guarantee all women the right to paid work.
- Guarantee the right of all to care, in a context of universalized social protection.
- Delink the right to care from obligations that are culturally imposed on women and that make them the main —and sometimes the only— providers of care for others (children, the ill or those with disabilities) without recognition and without pay.
- Promote the recognition and valuation of unpaid work and of its contribution to development by including it in statistics, and ensuring access to social protection and entitlement to all rights, especially the right to work.
- Foster parity in all spheres of decision-making (political, economic and social).
- Promote cultural changes in society and the family to help eradicate the negative consequences of the sexual division of labour, such as labour segmentation, the over-representation of women among the poor, the wage gap, the concentration of women in poor quality jobs and the inefficient use of women's educational capital in the region.

In brief, the document argues that gender equality is part of the quest for equality in all spheres: entitlement to and effective enjoyment of rights, productive development and equitable families which lay the groundwork for women's economic autonomy, access to the decision-making at all levels, physical autonomy such as the right to live a life free from violence, and the full exercise of reproductive rights. Articulating the three spheres of autonomy will, the study finds, give rise to a virtuous cycle of equality in which the State, the market and the family are responsible agents in building more equitable societies.

## I. EQUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT

### A. States and gender equality

The question on the role of the State is being asked at a historic moment in which great shifts are occurring towards gender equality, although there are also obstacles to further progress and, as a result of recent crises, a debate is under way on whether States in the region are capable of overcoming all the dimensions of inequality.

After years of social and political struggle on the part of the women's movement, the adoption of legislation and the implementation of policies inspired by the Beijing Platform for Action and by the effects of globalization and the transformation of productive structures, women have made inroads into new spheres of action and greater autonomy and recognition of their rights, even if discrimination and inequality persist. In recent years, democratic processes in the region have achieved much in terms of the constitutional recognition of the economic, social and cultural rights of different sectors of the population. In this framework, public policies today must deal not only with remaining challenges, but also with new ones that call for new types of response from the State, such as climate change, technological innovation and migration.

One of the challenges examined in this study is the need to recognize that the reproductive work performed in households is part of wealth creation and that it is a responsibility not only of women and men but also of the community, businesses and institutions, as well as being a lynchpin of economic development. It is redefining traditional understanding of

the boundaries between public and private spheres, and is driving a rethink of how the State, market and the family interact. These changes address the need for a society in which, in the words of Nancy Fraser (1997), women and men are both caregivers and providers. A step in this direction is the notion of parity, not as a larger share for women but as a broader expression of universality (Montaño, 2007), on the understanding that equal participation ultimately applies not only to decisions in democratic institutions but also to family, productive and social life.<sup>2</sup>

Second, public policies on gender, which by definition require democratic States with the capacity to steer action, have run against the grain of macroeconomic policies which in the past two decades have tended to reduce the role of the State and deregulate financial and labour markets and have treated social policies as a means of offsetting the exclusionary dynamics arising from the practical application of that paradigm. As a result, although women's rights are recognized in law, the institutional structure the State needs to enforce them are weakened and the objectives of equality are often subordinated to the objectives of growth.

Gender equality has faced a double prejudice as a result of what is known as the strategic silence (Bakker, 1994), which helps to explain why macroeconomic and development policies have not taken account of gender bias and the historical continuity of the male provider as the template for the sexual division of labour.

Lastly, while globalization, public policies and pressure from women have broadened the horizon of women's human rights, this recognition has run aground in countries whose national legal frameworks do not always incorporate international legal standards. One example is women's autonomy in the areas of sexual and reproductive health, which continues to be questioned in several countries, where basic measures such as access to emergency contraception have been rejected, thus imposing the violence of unwanted pregnancy. This generates debates that are becoming increasingly common in the region, and show the diversity of visions about the type of State and equality held by various actors and collectives with unequal levels of power.

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<sup>2</sup> The Quito Consensus adopted by the tenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (2007) recognizes parity as "one of the key driving forces of democracy, that its aim is to achieve equality in the exercise of power, in decision-making, in mechanisms of social and political participation and representation, in diverse types of family relations, and in social, economic, political and cultural relations, and that it constitutes a goal for the eradication of women's structural exclusion" (ECLAC, 2007a, p. 3).

## B. The care economy

The idea of the redistribution of care work and the levelling of total work time challenges traditional economic and social thought by including unpaid work as an essential part of the analysis. It has, moreover, raised questions about the politics, public policies and cultural assumptions on which such thinking is based, offering innovative visions that have yet to be translated into daily practices and common sense.

There are significant precedents for recognizing the importance of care work performed in the household. For example, the Beveridge report (1942), which guided British labour policy on social security on the principle of universal coverage for all from cradle to grave explicitly stated that “[...] The great majority of married women must be regarded as occupied on work which is vital though unpaid, without which their husbands could not do their paid work and without which the nation could not continue” (report cited in Aguirre and Scuro Somma, 2010, p. 12).<sup>3</sup> Such recognition has not been included in contemporary economic thinking or the public policies based upon it, however.<sup>4</sup> Rather it is the multifaceted impact (on family, labour, political and scientific life) of women’s increasing autonomy that is driving a rethink of explanatory models of the economy.

Here, feminist economists have made important conceptual and theoretical contributions which have shed light upon how the sexual division of labour has shaped the functioning of the economic system, and have led to the inclusion of previously absent dimensions, such as unpaid work, in economics (Picchio, 2001 and 2005). This analytical development leads to the care economy, in which particular attention is afforded to the social reproduction work performed mainly by women.

Picchio (2001) and other feminist writers suggest incorporating the linkages between paid and unpaid work in the traditional representation

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<sup>3</sup> The then Minister of Labour in the United Kingdom asked William Beveridge (Master of University College, Oxford) to produce a report on social protection. The report on Social Insurance and Allied Services presented to Parliament (known as the Beveridge report) was made public in 1942. Beveridge sought to ensure a minimum standard of living below which no one should fall. To convince sceptic conservatives, Beveridge explained that if the State covered sickness and retirement pension costs, then national industry would benefit from increased productivity and the resulting rise in competitiveness

<sup>4</sup> According to Picchio (2001, p. 3), the labour-market analysis of classic economists (Quesnay, Smith, Ricardo and, in some way, Marx) incorporated productive and reproductive aspects, as these were seen not in a reductionist and merely biological way, but also as having social meaning.

of the economic circuit, and particularly the circular flow of income that describes relations between households and businesses. Within this scheme, Picchio suggests the inclusion of an economic space that is termed here social reproduction,<sup>5</sup> which encompasses economic functions performed in the private household sphere without which the economic circuit could not operate. These have to do with the transformation of goods purchased in the market into effective consumption, or the provision of the effective conditions for well-being;<sup>6</sup> enabling the population to join the paid labour market or to become self-employed workers; and, lastly, regulating the labour force for economic activity, since the arbitrage that takes place within households (along with labour demand and market conditions) determines the volume of labour available for economic activities.

This analysis reveals the critical economic role of unpaid reproductive work and affords a clearer understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between production and the redistribution of wealth. The approach also allows for reviewing and proposing innovations in public policies on productive development, labour and social protection, and for a more thorough look, among other things, at migratory movements that substantially affect the distribution of income.

Articulating paid and unpaid work also enables a deeper examination of the employment systems that generate the monetary resources that are the primary source of economic autonomy for most people. It also explains how this linkage operates in the wage labour market or in independent work and small mercantile production. It also affords an understanding of the interaction among businesses, the State and families in configuring employment systems and greater insight as to why State protection of women's labour rights has focused more on protecting maternity than on the continual process of production and reproduction—which includes men and women (Pautassi, Faur and Gherardi, 2004).

The political demand for the visibility of unpaid domestic work aims to make explicit the contribution of reproductive work to wealth

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<sup>5</sup> Picchio (2001) calls this the human development space, but this could be confused with the work of the Human Development Index (HDI) calculated every year by the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP) or with the concept of human capital, which refers to an instrumental use of individuals as elements of production that must be updated and valued to increase their productivity.

<sup>6</sup> Picchio (2005) understands well-being, according to the approach of Sen (1985) and Nussbaum (2000), as a set of human capacities and effective functioning in the social sphere.

creation. The reconciliation of work with family life, as it is reflected in the redistribution of caregiving tasks among the State, the market and families, remains the blind spot of public policy in Latin America and the Caribbean. A State that steers in this direction and reinforces existing initiatives in the region would create the conditions and capacities needed for productive development to rely unreservedly on the contribution of women who are still unable to overcome the obstacles that would give them increased labour mobility and a working life free from discrimination, with full exercise of citizenship.



## II. THE STATUS OF WOMEN

The 15 years that have gone by since the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) have brought changes in gender relations in the region, which have led to the conquest of greater rights, equality, and political and economic leadership by women.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, however, the weight of the practices, ideas and structures that keep women in a subordinate position, together with the emergence of new inequalities, prevent the progress made—such as that in education—from producing gains in well-being (ECLAC, 2010b). The combination of rapid change and resistance to change means that the path taken since the Beijing Conference has been characterized not by linear progress, but by ups and downs, detours and hurdles.

Returning to the proposal made by ECLAC regarding equality as entitlement to rights, many of the gender inequalities that require more devoted action on the part of the State to ensure respect for women's rights have to do with the distance that separates women from basic well-being thresholds in such areas as access to productive resources, employment in adequate conditions, ability to make decisions about sexual and reproductive life and motherhood, professional care during pregnancy and childbirth and a life free of violence. There follows a brief summary of the main changes and outstanding problems in the region.

One of the changes that best conveys the depth of the recent transformation is women's growing participation in decision-making

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed report on the progress made in relation to the commitments undertaken at the Fourth World Conference on Women, see ECLAC (2009).

at the highest level of the State in various countries. The most recent examples of Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago<sup>8</sup> bear witness to a significant trend towards greater political participation. The tracking of women's presence in positions of power by the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean shows progress in the judicial and legislative branches, especially in the parliaments of countries that have adopted quota laws. The region is among the most advanced as regards proportion of legislators, although the regional average has advanced very slowly, and stands at just 22%, with very little participation at the local level.

At the root of this and other transformations is the longer-term process that has led to women's progressive access to education. By 2005 the region had attained equal schooling for both sexes, although differences remain in certain sectors and areas —chiefly in rural areas and among the indigenous and Afro-descendent populations. There is also much ground left to cover concerning educational contents for egalitarian socialization.

Noteworthy for its large scale and structural impact is the steady increase in female participation in economic activity, which in 2008 averaged 52% in urban areas. The road has been long and complicated, however, with discrimination and other obstacles along the way, including the excessive workload shouldered by women. Figure 1 shows two basic trends that are apparent in all of the region's countries that are conducting measurement of men's and women's total workload (paid and unpaid).<sup>9</sup> While the number of hours that both sexes spend on unpaid domestic work and on paid work can vary widely from one country to another, the following is true in all cases: (i) women's total work time is greater than that of men, and (ii) women spend a larger share of their time on unpaid work than men.

A major challenge for development policies is how to bring down the high proportion of urban and rural women who are not engaged in paid work. For most of them, this is due to various types of market

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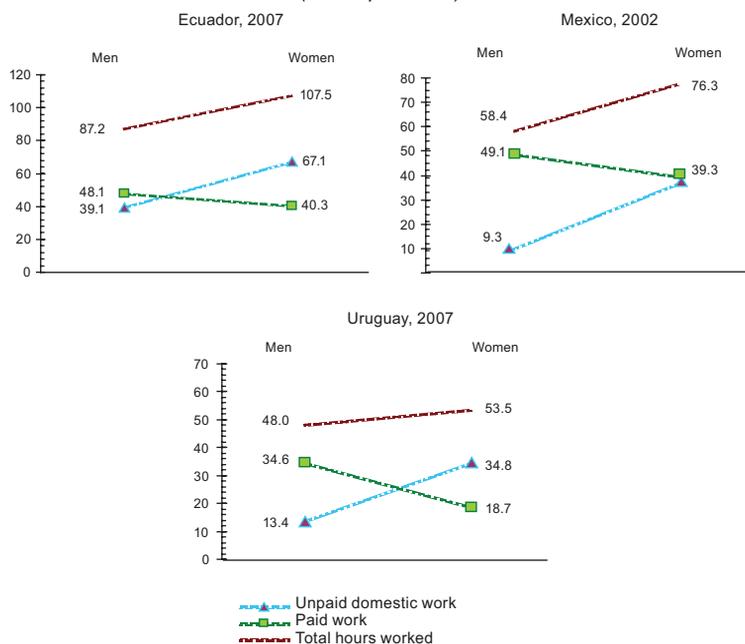
<sup>8</sup> Michelle Bachelet, Cristina Fernández and Laura Chinchilla were elected to presidential office, respectively, in Chile (2006), Argentina (2007) and Costa Rica (2010). Portia Simpson-Miller was elected Prime Minister in Jamaica (2006), as was Kamla Persad-Bissessar in Trinidad and Tobago (2010).

<sup>9</sup> See Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <http://www.cepal.org/oig/>.

discrimination or lack of public childcare services, or both. The percentage of women with absolutely no income of their own was 32% in 2008, while only 10% of men are in this situation.<sup>10</sup>

These figures go hand in hand with the increasing feminization of poverty: in 2008, there were 130 women in indigence for every 100 men. This proportion is higher than in 1990, when it was 118 women for every 100 men. Paradoxically, this gap widened during the region's boom times (2004 to 2008, ECLAC 2010b) when the absolute numbers of poor and indigent fell.

**Figure 1**  
**LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (SELECTED COUNTRIES):**  
**HOURS WORKED, TIME SPENT ON DOMESTIC WORK**  
**AND ON PAID WORK, BY SEX**  
*(Hours per week)*



**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of the results of time use surveys and questions on domestic tasks and paid work included in the household surveys of the respective countries.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

In the area of human rights, progress has been made in adopting egalitarian constitutional and legal frameworks. Some countries have moved forward with a new generation of laws on gender violence and other legislation geared to guarantee the human rights of women. However, with some exceptions, legislation on sexual and reproductive rights is still controversial and encounters resistance from sectors that have significant influence in public decision-making.

But legislative progress does not always translate into the effective enjoyment of rights. This is unmistakably clear in the sphere of physical autonomy: violence against women persists, maternal mortality still falls far short of the respective target of the Millennium Development Goals<sup>11</sup> in several countries and adolescent girls still face pregnancies that are, as a rule, unwanted. As a result, while fertility rates continue to fall in the region, and adolescent girls still face pregnancies that are, as a rule, unwanted. As a result, while fertility rates continue to fall in the region, adolescent motherhood is steady or increasing in several countries. In many cases these problems could be avoided by using existing technology and know-how and by providing low-cost preventive services. These limitations have an unquestionable impact on women's physical autonomy and political and economic participation, and they are amplified by the lack of income.

One major achievement has been the process of building and strengthening machineries for the advancement of women in all of the region's countries. These machineries have, along with the women's movement and other national and international actors, played a key role in the progress discussed herein, and they will continue to do so as they address the challenges that remain. They have been active in designing gender equality plans and programmes that emphasize the social sector, and they have pressed for constitutional and legal reforms to establish equality. Recently, some countries have incorporated the principle of parity and others have approved national laws that seek equality in all spheres, paired with new initiatives for mainstreaming the gender perspective as a political priority. These machineries have also driven the production of data and measurements that raise the profile of gender issues and provide a basis for resolving them. Over

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<sup>11</sup> Target 5A of Millennium Development Goal 5 is to reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio. By 2005 only around 25% of the distance this target had been covered.

the past few years, alongside the principal machinery, others have emerged in other branches of government and in sector-specific and local branches of public administration (Fernós 2010), reinforcing the commitment of States to gender equality. In all cases, the partnership with civil society has been essential for the initiation and sustainability of institutional progress.

The persistence of discrimination and inequality is made manifest in the fact that, despite substantial achievements, the majority of women are still far from attaining economic, political and physical autonomy. The barriers that remain in these three spheres of autonomy reinforce each other and keep women from participating in society, in the political process and in economic development. The ability of women to autonomously generate their own income could be the factor that breaks the cycle, and this will be explored in the following section.



### III. WOMEN AND PAID WORK

With respect to women's contribution to development in the countries of the region, as ECLAC has noted for the year 2008, it is clear that without the wife's monetary contribution, poverty levels in two-parent households in urban and rural areas would have increased by 10 and 6 percentage points respectively.<sup>12</sup> These figures underscore the fact that more women need to find paid employment opportunities so as to earn income of their own.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, women's progress towards economic autonomy remains limited as demonstrated by their still-low rate of economic participation and the disadvantages they suffer when seeking to enter the labour market. This situation is due to rigidities in the distribution of reproductive work and is exacerbated by the structural heterogeneity of the economy and the extremely wide social inequalities that prevail in the region.

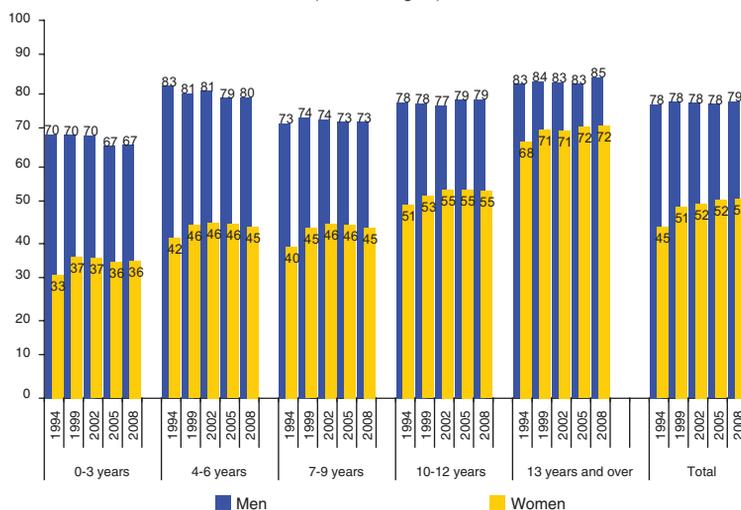
Unlike the situation for men, the economic participation of women is linked more directly to the number of years of schooling. The female component of economically active population (EAP) with 13 or more years of schooling have higher rates of labour force participation and thus account for a larger proportion of the economically active female population than those with fewer years of schooling (see figure 2). This points to the additional barriers that women, especially poor women, must overcome when looking for a job.

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<sup>12</sup> Figures based on special tabulations conducted by ECLAC of household survey data.

Women's entry into the labour market has occurred against the backdrop of demographic changes (lower birth rates, population ageing), insufficient State-provided care services, the high cost of market-based care services and more limited availability of social and family care networks. This means that women often settle for more flexible and informal occupations, such as part-time jobs (28% of employed women, compared with 16% of employed men) or jobs that enable them to work from home, in which they are usually subjected to subcontracting chains. Because of the lack of job opportunities, hence of income, they cannot afford the care services that might enable them to reconcile work and family life, which makes their situation very complex.

**Figure 2**  
**LATIN AMERICA (SIMPLE AVERAGE): MALE AND FEMALE RATES OF PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY BY YEARS OF SCHOOLING, URBAN AREAS, 1994-2008**  
*(Percentages)*



**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of special tabulations of data from household surveys conducted in the respective countries.

The gap between men and women with respect to job opportunities is evident from the unemployment rates, which have remained systematically higher for women: in 2008, regional average unemployment was 5.7% for men and 8.3% for women.

The structural heterogeneity of the regional economies leads to equally heterogeneous systems of employment. For women, working conditions and job opportunities, and reconciling paid and unpaid work vary depending on whether they are wage earners or engaged as independent or self-employed workers in the formal or informal sector.

Nevertheless, irrespective of the form of labour participation, the majority of women find themselves in low-productivity sectors, earn lower wages, have less advantageous working conditions, enjoy less social protection and suffer the effect of sex-based segmentation that is both horizontal (differentiated occupations for women and men) and vertical (concentration of men in higher positions). This reproduces conditions of inequality compared with men. In either case, the lack of childcare alternatives has had a significant impact on women's employment opportunities and strategies. This trend has not changed in recent decades.

Labour flexibilization has adversely affected wage employment, with a negative impact on the quality of employment for women, linked directly to their domestic responsibilities. Regulation of labour rights has focused mainly on maternity protection with little attention paid to discrimination and the gender-related causes of labour inequality.

The globalization of the economy and trade openness as a strategy for international integration of countries have shaped labour-force and capital flows, and this has had a strong impact on the way in which women enter the labour force. The trend in the region in terms of employment opportunities for women is the opposite of the trend observed abroad. Most of the opportunities created for women in the region have been for precarious jobs, with female workers in sectors such as the maquila, agro-exports and tourism being dubbed the "weak winners" of globalization (Kabeer, 2000).

Paid domestic work deserves special mention since, despite recent legal gains in various countries, this type of work remains the most precarious, and accounts for 12% of paid female workers in the region. Among women migrants, this continues to be the preferred niche for entry into the labour market and generates both monetary contributions to development through remittances and care costs in the household of origin, which are generally shouldered by other women.

Independent work accounts for approximately a quarter of the employed population, which includes a high proportion of women. One important fact is that many female own-account workers work out of their homes, whereas few male self-employed workers do. For women, performing productive work from the home is a strategy for coping simultaneously with productive and reproductive work, and usually involves low-productivity activities. This means that their income remains lower than men's and their progress towards profitable enterprises is limited.

The fact that women have less access to economic assets and resources—whether natural (land, water), financial, physical (equipment, machinery), personal (skills training) or social (networks, community)—severely constrains their capacity to generate income in any form of labour participation, and proves to be especially crucial for independent work. Gender equality with respect to access to assets must be a central component of policies for women's economic autonomy.

The incidence of monetary poverty continues to be high for women, both for individuals and for female-headed households. The most glaring aspect of the lack of economic autonomy for women is poverty, which goes hand in hand with lack of freedom and time, while excluding them from access to social protection. This turns them into welfare subjects with limited resources for exercising their rights within the family and the community.

Social protection relates to the basic rights which citizens (both men and women) of a given community undertake to guarantee with respect to important events in the life cycle (birth, development, illness, old age, death), employment events (opportunities, working conditions, loss of employment) or any other kind of event (natural disasters, accidents). The challenge now is to extend these rights universally to all, breaking their dependence on the labour market and on targeted welfare policies, which grant minimum levels of protection in cases of extreme need but are not a guaranteed universal right.

Both labour and social policies in the region have been developed with marked gender biases, based on the assumption that women bear sole responsibility for the household while men fulfil the role of provider. Only recently have these assumptions been dispelled with the formulation of initiatives designed to counter discrimination in privately funded social

security systems and only recently have rights, such as social security and preschool education been expanded to achieve universal coverage. Indeed, preschool education is gradually being understood as a right of boys and girls rather than a solution allowing women to delegate duties while retaining responsibility for care of the family. On the other hand, public services for sick persons or persons with various degrees of disability are very underdeveloped. Other initiatives, such as conditional transfer programmes, have elicited a mixed response: their impact in terms of poverty reduction is recognized, but their impact on women's autonomy is questioned.

The shift towards universal social protection systems is incompatible with the weak fiscal position of the States of the region and with gender biases within these systems. These systems have not been modified as necessary to guarantee care services that do not depend on women and in order to overcome the discrimination that is apparent in their design and implementation.

To sum up, labour policies and lack of institutions relating to the paid labour market have led to flexibilization of the female work force. While a few advances have been recorded, the causes and structures of paid and unpaid work have not yet been addressed. In any labour integration arrangement or sector and in all socio-economic groups, in both urban and rural areas, women bear a greater overall work burden than men. Care demands within the home are an obstacle to women's entry into the paid labour market, and this is exacerbated by the limited availability of public care services and by the fact that care duties are not distributed between households, the State and the market, nor between women and men within the household.



## **IV. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY GUIDELINES: TIME FOR WORK**

The foremost proposal to emerge from this analysis is the forging of a new social and fiscal covenant for the redistribution of total work between men and women, including the adoption of all the necessary measures by the State, whether legislative, institutional, educational, health-related, fiscal or relating to women's participation in decision-making, in order to remove gender biases from the labour market and eliminate the wage gap, segmentation and discrimination. This requires the allocation of sufficient resources to guarantee the rights of women in the labour market and in the family, so that they have all the necessary conditions to exercise economic, physical and political autonomy. This cannot be achieved without sound, cross-cutting institutions at the national and territorial levels that operate in consonance with international legal frameworks.

### **A. A new equation for a new arrangement**

In order to fulfil this role, the State does not need to become a philanthropic organization or to relinquish all its power to the market. The new equation being posited seeks to reorient policies towards the creation of stable, productive jobs and to provide resources and social infrastructure so that the right of each citizen to receive care becomes a reality. From this point of view, the issue of care would cease to be relegated to women as a problem to be solved so that they can work and would be attached to the rights holder: boy, girl, sick or disabled person.

Thus, the questions “What kind of State? What kind of equality?” can be answered with the proposal that the State should be the guarantor of equal opportunities in the market and the democratization of the family, as well as the development of universal social protection systems.

## **B. Labour and social protection policies**

The foregoing shows how crucial it is to promote public policies that assign an active role to the State so that more women can access well-paid, productive jobs and can be free to choose the time and place of work. Welfare programmes that target women must be temporary lest they become mechanisms for catering for the poor and deter them from seeking to pursue independent working careers. Policies for equality must be at the heart of these concerns. This means overcoming the tendency to link them exclusively with the social sphere.

Care policies, understood as the interaction between social protection systems, the education and health system, among others, must be formulated as part of the investment in social infrastructure that is indispensable for economic and productive development. From this point of view, not only must women’s non-monetary contribution to work and social protection be valued but also the cultural stereotypes used to justify women’s engagement in care work must be dispelled.

The design of a new agenda for redistributing care work and mainstreaming the gender perspective calls for conditions through which the disruptive nature of such proposals, which usually appeal to common sense, and institutional cultures can be channelled. The mere fact of proposing interconnections between the public and private spheres marks a break with the traditional policy sphere. Systemic gender mainstreaming processes alter the practice of sectoral policies, since norms, practices and a host of cultural values must be changed in order to obtain results.

## **C. Empowering women to exercise their right to equality**

The various forms of discrimination against women are obstacles to their participation on an egalitarian basis. These include the physical violence inflicted on them, the denial of their reproductive rights and their limited presence in all spheres of decision-making. In order to

achieve equality, a holistic approach to economics is needed based on the recognition that work is not just a mere factor of production but, indeed, a historical and cultural product —a construct in which people invest both their physical and subjective being. The factors of production, that is, the individuals, are born, nourished and cared for largely thanks to the unpaid work of women.

Equal opportunity policies are essential for eliminating obstacles to entry into the labour market; furthermore, women must make their voice heard publicly and all women must be represented at all levels, not only in legislative bodies and in the judiciary but also in the corporate world, trades unions and local authorities. Of special concern is the situation of poor, indigenous and Afro-descendent women, who suffer disadvantages and discrimination arising from the multiple forms of inequality that are characteristic of the region.

#### **D. Institutional framework**

The change proposed requires the virtuous and strategic alignment of social and political forces capable of taking advantage of windows of opportunity, such as the demographic dividend, market liberalization, an educated female work force and the productive capacities of the entire population.

As demonstrated by the 15-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, countries have made significant strides in policy formulation and application. This has been possible thanks to the impact of a host of favourable factors: the feminist social movement, in partnership with machineries for the advancement of women, has contributed political strength, knowledge and initiative, taking advantage of opportunities created by the political will of Governments. In this regard, the machineries for the advancement of women play an important role, in some cases as coordinators, in others as policymaking bodies and in others, yet again, as mechanisms for political impact.

The studies, gender analyses, statistics, bills, training programmes, accountability systems, cross-party congressional groups, associations of female judges, female mayors and a broad range of secondary mechanisms have created an institutional network which has facilitated the dissemination of the gender analysis and many of the achievements

including improvements in social and political conditions that had run counter to the gender agenda (Fernós, 2010).

With regard to knowledge, the work done in past decades on social issues, poverty, vulnerability and human rights has built up a solid body of evidence and theory that have helped to open new avenues in feminist economics and new economic approaches which challenge the epistemological bases of conventional studies, especially in the field of the care economy. These studies provide new arguments that must be invoked in order to support the design and implementation of policies for redistribution of total work—especially the work of caregiving. The success has been commensurate with the degree of coordination and efficacy of the host of political stakeholders involved.

In short, the time for equality has come and the region must seize this opportunity to ensure that gender equality keeps pace with development.

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