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Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean



REPORT ON THE WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

EXPERT GROUP MEETING

Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
12 June 1987



UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
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Report on the Women in Development Planning
Expert Group Meeting

(Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago 12 June 1987)

I. BACKGROUND

1. The meeting, held at the Riverside Plaza, Port-of-Spain, on 12 June 1987, was convened as a collaborative activity by the Status of Women Division, Ministry of Health, Welfare and the Status of Women, Trinidad and Tobago and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).
2. The meeting in the main represented part of the efforts of the Ministry to restructure its national machinery on the status of women and initiate discussions on the formulation of a draft national policy on the status of women in Trinidad and Tobago.

II. OBJECTIVES

3. It was expected that the meeting would examine the findings of the ECLAC study on women in development planning presented in the report "Women as Recipients of Services from Resources Allocated in the National Budget of Trinidad and Tobago" (ECLA/CARIB 83/9) and to:
 - (a) Suggest possible operational structures or systems which would allow for a regular update of sectoral data on women; and
 - (b) Review the scope of existing services and perceived needs from the perspective of women within each sector.

III. ATTENDANCE

4. Participating in the meeting were representatives of the Ministry of Finance and the Economy; the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Health, Welfare and the Status of Women; the Ministry of Food Production, Marine Exploitation, Forestry and the Environment; the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Manpower Resources; and representatives of the legal profession and the marketing sector. A list of participants is contained in Annex I to the present document.

IV. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

5. Ms. Phyllis Augustus, Administrative Officer V with responsibility for the Status of Women in the Ministry of Health, Welfare and the Status of Women, in a welcoming address expressed pleasure that ECLAC had included Trinidad and Tobago for a national study within its regional project on Women in Development and Planning and noted that the consultant who did the study was in fact a member of the former National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) and would act as a resource person at the meeting. She emphasized the need for intersectoral discussion which would serve to enhance the work of the national machinery for the advancement of women in the country.

6. In her address, Mrs. Margaret Hector, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Health, Welfare and the Status of Women expressed pleasure to see that so many persons had taken time from their heavy schedules to participate in the work of the meeting. With regard to public comments on Government action for women, Mrs. Hector noted that it was not expected that a recommendation would emanate from her Ministry to put in place a Ministry of Women's Affairs dealing solely with women's issues. In so doing she said, the purpose of developing women in Trinidad and Tobago would be defeated. Rather, the structure to be put in place should result from a process of dialogue and discussion, careful thinking and planning, taking into account existing studies and recommendations on issues concerning women in the country. The ECLAC study, which constituted the main document for the meeting, would assist in this task. Special emphasis

was requested in the area of education, particularly the education of women in appreciating their sisterhood, and the power of unity for recognition and development of their own self-worth, value and self-appreciation. She expressed the wish to see women involved in every area of development and reconstruction in Trinidad and Tobago as they were members of a society in which they were able to develop to their fullest potential. Finally, she expressed the hope that the meeting would attempt to document the aspirations of the female population of the country and thus bridge the communication gap between policy-makers and those for whom they make policy.

7. Ms. Sonia Cuales, representative of ECLAC, outlined the activities of the ECLAC Women in Development Programme, highlighting its role as a facilitator in the process of the development and advancement of women in the Caribbean.

8. In her introduction to the ECLAC study, "Women as Recipients of Services from Resources Allocated in the National Budget of Trinidad and Tobago", she noted that the national budget was used to analyse the participation of citizens, particularly female citizens, in the development plans of the State. The sectors investigated were labour and income, education, health, social welfare and legislation. Major findings included inequality in the patterns of actual benefits in education by gender with negative implications for women as beneficiaries on the labour market, and insufficient attention to specific health needs of the female population in some areas. The study also indicated that there was room for improvement of day-care services which would enhance adequate participation of women in various areas of social and economic development.

9. In emphasizing the importance of having accurate data on women, she explained how the study could assist the Government in its efforts to comply with its commitment to the advancement of women in the country through:

(a) The formulation of a national policy on the status of women;
(b) The preparation of a plan of action;
(c) The establishment of linkages between a national policy and plan for women and the mainstream development issues considered in the country's national development plan; and

(d) To assist in fashioning the structure of the national machinery as an instrument through which the women in Trinidad and Tobago could be integrated into the planning process. Such a body could study, advise, channel and co-ordinate action to be taken by appropriate bodies, institutions, etc.

10. Mrs. Joaquim St. Cyr, a member of the former NCSW and technical resource person for the meeting explained the methodological aspects of the data recorded in the study. She pointed to the contradiction between the accuracy of data and the timeliness of data. In trying to be up to date there might not be time to check on data which was still forthcoming from sources such as the census for instance. In terms of preparing studies of this kind it meant that one had to be very experimental and creative. She described the study as very innovative and useful and suggested that it was a valuable instrument which could benefit policy-making on women's issues. In this regard she recommended that it be an ongoing exercise both in terms of refining the approach and in terms of updating the data. In this respect also, attention was drawn to the list of parameters proposed at the end of the study which should guide the work of the meeting and provide a tool for useful follow-up. If the different ministries could provide the data required in the parameters related to their specific fields, the Government would be able to have ready information on the progress being made by women in the society.

11. Attention was drawn to the fact that data are not always available disaggregated by gender. A simple example given was that of the examinations of the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) (which replaced the General Certificate of Education exams (GCE) for which the data on performance of the students is not given by gender.

12. An interesting relation was drawn between education, labour and income. It was recognized that women were educated, as they enjoyed equal access to educational services as men. Yet, not all educated women were on the labour market. This raised a number of questions: Does money mean less to women? Is social status on account of money less important for women? Are the salaries that women obtain worth going out to work for considering the high costs of clothing, transport, day-care, etc.? How are their career opportunities affected by the fact that they often leave the labour force during reproductive ages?

13. In the area of legislation it was noted that lingering discriminatory provisions prevailed in the country's legislation. Bills relating to issues such as occupational health and safety provisions for day-care centres by employers, sexual offences, consumer guidance are all yet to be enacted. The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women had been signed but not yet ratified by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. It was emphasized that law and legislation were fundamental to any discussion on the status of women.

14. Finally Mrs. St. Cyr recommended that as a follow-up to the study the following areas should be considered for action:

- (a) Women in non-traditional activities;
- (b) Social support services for women in the labour force;
- (c) Meaningful, quality jobs for women;
- (d) Science and technology for women; and
- (e) Improvement of maternal and child care.

15. Mr. Franklyn Murrel, Statistical Officer and representative of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Manpower Resources expressed appreciation for the excellent study. He noted that in preparing statistical information difficulties arose as regards the definition of users. Statistical data were collected on the assumption of what users might

need. Discussions such as that carried on at the present meeting were very important. Statisticians were enlightened on the need for disaggregation of data so as to provide the required information on policies and projects for women. He observed that people with statistical expertise would be able to appreciate the amount and quality of work that went into the preparation of the study under review. He was impressed by the amount of Central Statistical Office data and information potential that were not even tabulated which had been used effectively by the researcher.

16. Ms. Augustus proposed a draft organigram for the restructuring of the national machinery on the status of women. The main features of the organigram would be the establishment of one administrative body, a Women's Bureau, as the national machinery on the status of women, supported by an inter-ministerial committee and a National Council for Women. The inter-ministerial committee would be comprised of officials from Government ministries while the National Council would be composed of representatives from non-governmental organizations and individuals from the general community. The proposed draft was discussed and accepted unanimously by the meeting.

17. With regard to the terms of reference for the Women's Bureau, the meeting agreed that the first tasks of the Bureau should include the drafting of a national policy on the status of women and the preparation of an action plan which would state priorities and define the implementing bodies.

18. Guided by the document "Women as Recipients of Services from Resources Allocated in the National Budget of Trinidad and Tobago" (ECLA/CARIB 83/9), the meeting proceeded to discuss various issues within each sector, thus providing the preliminary inputs for a national policy.

19. The representative of the Ministry of Food Production, Marine Exploitation, Forestry and the Environment suggested that the Statistical Officer from that Ministry be requested to collate the data emanating from the Ministry on a regular basis.

20. The representative of the Ministry of Education observed that at the formal level the issue of drop-outs and those who never went to school should be addressed. The need for compiling accurate data through special research projects should be reflected in the general policy. At the informal level attention should be given to the popularization of programmes of science and technology, promotion of science literacy, health and nutrition education, family life education and education in the area of legal rights. The Government should encourage girls to benefit more from courses in science and technology which are offered by the schools. Family life education programmes should not be limited to family planning education only and should cover issues such as norms, values and responsibilities that people have towards each other. Physical education should be encouraged, while there is also room for increased encouragement of additional training of female teachers, particularly in the area of science and technology.

21. The representative of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and the Status of Women advocated the fostering of healthy life styles for women, specialized care for women and children, optional spacing of families where women's physical and psychological health is concerned, information as regards choices that women have, and the provision of adequate public health facilities for women.

22. With respect to the question of the law and women, cognizance was taken of the need to strengthen laws where women were disadvantaged, to ensure equal access to legal services and the establishment of mechanisms which would keep this question under constant review, and finally the establishment of machinery to offer redress to women who have been discriminated against on the basis of gender.

23. As regards the agriculture sector the need was expressed to ensure equal opportunities for women in agricultural and related pursuits, for example security of tenure, credit facilities, hours of work and agricultural wages.

24. With respect to employment efforts should be made to ensure that women were not economically disadvantaged on account of their social and reproductive roles as bearers and rearers of the family and the household. The effects of penalization through retrenchment should be considered, particularly with regard to the recognition of single parenthood as an accepted family pattern. A policy on women should emphasize the need to promote appointment of women at decision-making levels. Finally, the need for accurate data was again emphasized and this subject should be included in a policy document on women.

25. The social services sector should put adequate mechanisms in place to provide support services and relief for women in crisis, for example, through exemption from certain public obligations.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

26. The meeting concluded with the following recommendations:

(a) Draft policy guidelines and recommendations for an action plan should be prepared on the basis of the current discussions;

(b) The documents prepared as at (a) above should be circulated for the comments of participants;

(c) The organizational chart for the structure of the national machinery on the status of women, presented as a draft, should be adopted by the appropriate body;

(d) Representatives of each sector to inform the relative statistical officers of the specific needs for disaggregation of sectoral data by gender;

(e) Effective use of available resources should be improved; and

(f) The List of Parameters to be used for assessment of women as beneficiaries of public services should be discussed within each sector and their comments elicited.

Annex I

List of participants

Mrs. Margaret Hector
Parliamentary Secretary
Ministry of Health, Welfare and the Status of Women

Ms. Phyllis Augustus
Administrative Officer V
Division on the Status of Women
Ministry of Health, Welfare and the Status of Women

Dr. Lucy Durgadeen
Ministry of Education

Mrs. Anne De Govia
Ministry of Education

Dr. Rosemary Paul
Ministry of Health, Welfare and the Status of Women

Ms. Judy George-Harris
Ministry of Food Production, Marine Exploitation, Forestry
and the Environment

Mrs. Annela Hutchinson
Ministry of Labour, Employment and Manpower Resources

Mr. Franklyn Murrell
Ministry of Labour, Employment and Manpower Resources

Resource persons

Ms. Lynette Seebaran
Attorney-at-Law

Mrs. Stephanie Daly
Attorney-at-Law

Ms. Karene Ramkisson
Marketing Consultant

Mrs. Joaquim St. Cyr
Senior Project Analyst
Ministry of Finance and Planning

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Ms. Sonia M. Cuales
Social Affairs Officer
Unit for the Integration of Women in Development