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# TRAINING MANUAL

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND GENDER  
EQUALITY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN



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This manual is based on experiences gained during the project on democratic governance and gender equality entitled "Capacity-building of national machineries for governance with the gender perspective in Latin America and the Caribbean" (ROA-27), which was implemented by the Women and Development Unit of ECLAC between 2002 and 2005 with funding from the United Nations Development Account.

Sonia Montañó Virreira, Chief of the Women and Development Unit, was responsible for producing the manual, which aims to facilitate the incorporation of the gender perspective into democratic processes and institutions. The manual is divided into the following modules:

- Module 1. Good government from a gender perspective
- Module 2. Democratic governance and gender equality
- Module 3. Lessons learned

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## Introduction

This manual is based on experiences gained during the project on democratic governance and gender equality entitled “Capacity-building of national machineries for governance with the gender perspective in Latin America and the Caribbean”, which was implemented by the Women and Development Unit of ECLAC and the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations between 2002 and 2005.

The aim of the project was to strengthen the institutionality of machineries for the advancement of women, in a context of globalization characterized by major changes within the State and society. Its specific objectives were: (1) to increase the legitimacy of machineries for women’s advancement in the eyes of the rest of the State and society, in order to enhance their capacity to influence State reform processes and governance programmes; (2) to boost the participation of machineries for the advancement of women, women parliamentarians and leaders of the electoral system reform movement; (3) to create the conditions for women’s demands to be incorporated into governance programmes; (4) to develop and improve national gender machineries’ capacity for advocacy and policymaking in the framework of reform to the State and the system of government; and (5) to address the need for local gender-sensitive institutions.

Today, new demands and contentious issues are arising that the existing rules and institutions are not always able to tackle. A major debate has thus developed on the institutional reforms that are needed to participate in these processes. This manual is one of the initiatives seeking to promote the equitable and visible

engagement of machineries for the advancement of women, female leaderships and women's civil-society organizations in the reform process. Such inclusiveness should be one of the main principles governing institutional reform.

The conditions for this are in place, as all the region's countries are implementing policies driven and supported by the women's movement. Such policies are demonstrating that, in addition to being an objective in its own right, gender equality is essential if the region is to face up to its main challenges: poverty eradication and full and free democracy.

The project's main policy references are the agreements and resolutions arising from United Nations conferences and the meetings of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean that have taken place since the *Fourth World Conference on Women*.

The work strategy drew upon the research experience accumulated by the Women and Development Unit in the course of its efforts to provide policy and technical assistance to machineries for women's advancement and it took account of sociopolitical and cultural processes at the national and regional levels. Far from attempting to introduce a particular management model, the intention was to create an opportunity for dialogue within and among countries, thereby generating or strengthening networks for democratic discussion. The project thus promoted interaction between the different actors and the generation of agreements and political covenants on the inclusion of gender equity in State reform and the main programmes for building democratic governance.

Using this methodology, women's advancement machineries identified key democratic governance and gender equality issues in consultation with other actors from within the State and society. The issues chosen have been grouped into three categories. First, the political dimension of poverty, in which the project looks at

the specific traits of female poverty and analyses the scope of some pro-autonomy conditional transfer programmes. Second is women's political participation as a condition for democracy and how this ties in with the reform of the electoral process and the democratic culture. This category of issues includes concerns over institutional fragility in the region, which is especially worrisome when it comes to consolidating institutions responsible for implementing public policies on gender. Women's contributions to constitutional reform in the region are also discussed in this section. The third category of issues concerns the project's implications as regards the use of new technologies and their relevance to governance. Female Ministers and heads of gender institutions gradually came to comprehend such technologies, initially construed simply as an instrumental resource, in a much broader way, realizing the transformational power of the association between gender equity and the new technologies. In association, the two elements have the potential to unleash social behaviour and analyses capable of debunking the prejudices that perpetuate the inequality and bureaucratic obstacles responsible for excluding the contribution of women—half of the population—to successful democracies.





## **Module I. Good governance from a gender perspective**

### **A. What we will learn in this module**

Key concepts of:

- i) Women's human rights
- ii) Democracy
  - Background
  - The State
  - Democratic governance
  - Equality
  - Affirmative action
  - Gender
  - Citizenship
- iii) Public policies
  - Background
  - Key concepts
  - The gender perspective in public policies
  - Gender mainstreaming in public policies

### **B. Aims of the module**

By the end of this module, you should be familiar with a range of concepts that are necessary to discuss the links between democracy and gender equality, and specifically between democratic governance and public policies that promote equality among men and women.

## 1. Women's human rights

“All human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis. While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.” This is stated in article 5 of the Vienna Declaration, adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993.

More than 25 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and a few short years after the entry into force of its Optional Protocol, it bears recalling that the Convention was the fruit of an even longer struggle for human rights in general and the rights of women in particular. It was the outcome of almost 30 years of reflection, development of ideas, political negotiation and citizen awareness campaigns. The Convention underscores the fundamental role that the State is called upon to play in promoting true equality, the rights-based approach that must inform public policy and the importance of cultural change in consolidating equality between women and men at all levels. The States Parties are responsible for ensuring the enjoyment of rights on an equal footing and without any form of discrimination. According to articles 2 and 3, the States Parties must adopt any measures necessary, including prohibiting sex-based discrimination, to put an end to discriminatory acts that prevent the full enjoyment of rights, in both public and private sectors (United Nations Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 28 of 29 March 2000). Latin America was the first region in which all States signed and ratified the Convention. With respect to the Protocol, the process has been slower. By November 2005, it had been signed by only 18 countries and ratified by 13.

It is evident, therefore, that adoption and ratification involve broad processes of debate in which the involvement of civil society organizations and a cross-cutting alliance among women, human rights advocates and decision makers are still indispensable.

The Convention is viewed as the international charter for women's rights and gives legal expression to the quest for full equality, by reformulating the concept of discrimination in an innovative way. In effect, the Convention defines discrimination as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women...of [their] human rights" (article 1). Here, the notion of the effects of a law is complemented by the concept of genuine equality, as distinct from the formal equality which has traditionally been invoked to allege the irrelevance of special measures to combat gender discrimination.

Thus, in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is safe to assume that although most constitutions proclaim that men and women are equal and often prohibit sex-based discrimination, it is necessary to change laws whose letter is egalitarian but whose effects, in practice, are not. It is recognized that laws can be discriminatory if they contain provisions that cause social, economic and political inequalities or do not contain provisions to avoid them.

The Convention's adoption by the States of the region implies an awareness of the fact that the traditional mechanisms and procedures for guaranteeing human rights fall short of guaranteeing genuine equality between women and men. The Convention now forms part of a human rights protection system: more frequent and efficient interaction between all the relevant treaties should endow the countries with the tools they need to enforce justice in a timely and effective manner.

Over the years, the concepts enshrined in the Convention have been shown to inspire constitutional and legislative changes and

they have served as examples for the recognition of the rights of other social sectors, such as indigenous populations or groups discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. In this sense, the implications of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women transcend the specific issue of gender equality to represent a milestone in the reformulation of the concept of discrimination, in a way that benefits many different groups. At the same time, the Convention has incorporated the experiences of other United Nations committees.

Many countries have drawn on this framework to amend their constitution and legislation. It has also been a useful reference in the introduction of new legislation and has provided arguments to defend women against direct and indirect forms of discrimination in the workplace, in politics and in the family. Furthermore, it has served to promote accountability on the part of States and, thereby, to institutionalize a practice of transparency in public management that allows civil society organizations to prepare alternative reports to the official ones.

The greatest difficulties, however, have arisen with the practical application of this standard. Unlike other international instruments, the Convention was formulated without any specific enforcement mechanism. The need for an appeal or complaints system was discussed early on, but some countries argued that discrimination against women did not warrant such a mechanism because it was not considered to be so serious a violation of human rights at the time.

Thus began a process of discussion which culminated in a new landmark, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was adopted in October 1999 and opened for signature on 10 December 2000. Most countries have opted to ratify the Optional Protocol. As far back as 1993, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action called upon States to consider accepting

all the available optional communication procedures (paragraph 90). It also proposed that other methods should be examined, such as a system of indicators to measure progress in the realization of the rights set forth in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and urged the Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to quickly examine the possibility of introducing the right of petition through the preparation of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention enables women throughout the world to submit complaints, either individually or collectively, over breaches of the Convention and authorizes the Committee to investigate allegations of serious and systematic abuses of women's human rights in countries that are party to the Protocol.

This process, which forms part of a range of positive human rights developments, makes it possible to sanction violations of women's human rights and to limit the number of violations that go unpunished as a result of women's lack of legal resources and mechanisms.

These advances are complemented by the decision of the Commission on Human Rights at its fiftieth session to designate a Special Rapporteur on violence against women within the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which currently works in coordination with the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, and to create an International Criminal Court.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The International Criminal Court was established by what is known as the Rome Statute of 17 July 1998, adopted at the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court.

The Convention provides sufficient resources to build the concepts of discrimination and genuine equality into the structural fabric of the labour, penal and civil reforms now taking shape in the region, as a contribution to the start of a fairer and more equitable millennium. What is needed now is progress towards the proper implementation of these standards, which leads into the domain of judicial reform. This is one of the greatest challenges for the region: the need to harmonize the framework of human rights that the existing institutional reforms have developed so amply over the past decade. The judicial reforms under way in many countries represent an opportunity to devise structural solutions for some of the problems that have arisen in connection with the application of the Convention, such as lack of familiarity on the part of lawyers, judges and the general public and the lack of representative cases recorded as a precedent for the Convention's serving the cause of justice. Accordingly, the Convention and the Optional Protocol thereto, as well as other international treaties in force, need to be encompassed in the revision of professional training, the instruction provided in law schools and public information schemes, in order to change not only legal standards and institutions but also the culture and day-to-day practices as well. National mechanisms for application of the rules must therefore be improved and authorities' awareness increased in order to build the Convention and the Optional Protocol into the overall effort to strengthen human rights legislation.

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## 2. Democracy or “the personal is political”

### A. Background

A consensus has existed around democracy for some 20 years in Latin America. Governments are elected by universal, free and secret ballot and the long history of coups d'état and dictatorships has evidently been relegated to the past. Elections are the main mechanism by which a country's rulers are selected. The political, economic, social and cultural arenas have been transformed over the past two decades in step with processes of democratic transition, economic restructuring and State reform. Organized women's groups in civil society have been among the leading actors in this democratic recovery and their mobilization has been at the heart of the changes.<sup>2</sup> Women have been active in two areas: the struggle for human rights and the strengthening and creation of subsistence and community development networks. Despite this, women have still not achieved a significant presence in decision-making.

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<sup>2</sup> The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and the women miners in Bolivia, whose hunger strike triggered the fall of the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer in 1978, are noteworthy, but far from unique, examples of such movements.

Notwithstanding the positive aspects of the generalized consolidation of democracy, institutions have attracted growing distrust: parliaments and political parties are losing strength as new political actors and mass-media personalities emerge as intermediaries between society and the State and, in some cases, as young men and women sharply criticize serious gender inequalities exacerbated by the unequal distribution of income, power and time use.<sup>3</sup> This tension has translated into situations of institutional uncertainty, insecurity and political instability.<sup>4</sup> Renewal of political systems and major institutions, such as political parties and the State, poses challenges which, in some cases, lead to constitutional changes, political covenants and other reforms of democratic institutionality.

Existing institutions have been overwhelmed by the dynamics that have emerged in society, both in the private and the public sphere, and must be adapted in order to cope with the new circumstances. In this context, concerns arise over governance and, subsequently, democratic governance.

Even when the term “democracy” does not serve for descriptive purposes, it is still necessary normatively speaking (Sartori, 2003). Democracy is, and cannot be delinked from, what democracy should be. Here, concepts of descriptive democracy refer to such democracy as actually exists, while concepts of prescriptive democracy concern the ideal pursued by a society. Throughout history, democracy has always indicated a political entity — a form of State and government— albeit with different, more or less liberal or radical currents. A review of the literature shows the

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<sup>3</sup> The ninth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Mexico City in June 2004, undertook a thoroughgoing analysis of the way in which these three dimensions are articulated in the ECLAC document entitled *Roads towards gender equity in Latin America and the Caribbean* (LC/L.2114(CRM.9/3)), Santiago, Chile, June 2004.

<sup>4</sup> In 2005, social conflicts resulted in a change in presidents in Bolivia and Ecuador, although, in general, solutions have been reached through constitutional means.



breadth of the feminist discussion of the concepts of individual, citizenship, politics and State and alignment with different stances on democracy, whether liberal or more radical. "Liberal" feminism largely makes a priority of judicial changes, while more "radical" feminism maintains a debate on the deconstruction of assumptions underlying the notion of democracy. There is no definition of feminist democracy, but there is a feminist debate on democracy.<sup>5</sup>

Feminists have criticized the limitations of the concepts of democracy. As early as 1791, the French activist *Olympia de Gouges* wrote the "Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen" and presented it before the French National Assembly; she went to the guillotine for it. In 1792, the British writer *Mary Wollstonecraft* published "A Vindication of the Rights of Women", one of the most radical feminist manifestos ever written. Its inspiration was the idea that women do not exist solely for the pleasure of men and it proposed that women should receive the same treatment as men in terms of education, political rights and labour and should be judged by the same moral standards.

Contemporary feminism has resumed the discussion and has criticized democracy for a lack of attention to laws and institutions (*Betty Friedan*). More radically, it has called into question democracy's omission of the private dimension. The slogan "the personal is political" spread under the influence of Latin American social movements campaigning to change legislation and the State framework on the status of women. *Carole Pateman* went even further by asserting that, in reality, there is no such thing as democratic theory, because of the traditional patriarchal biases of traditional doctrines; consequently, democratic practice

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<sup>5</sup> An excellent paper in this respect is María Emma Wills Obregón, "Feminismo y democracia: Más allá de las viejas fronteras", *Análisis político*, No. 37, Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1999.

does not exist, insofar as women have never achieved anything resembling egalitarian power in the family, civil society or the State. From this perspective, even countries recognized as democratic could be considered to be in a transitional phase. They have naturalized sex and removed the problem of inequality from the sphere of politics (Valcárcel, 1997).

### Box I.1

#### TYPES OF DEMOCRACY

**Representative or formal democracy:** a system in which representatives are chosen to make decisions on behalf of the entire population. According to Nohlen, elections are the broadest mechanism for citizen participation, as they enable society to resolve disputes peacefully, consult the opinion of all citizens (male and female) and make decisions according to the majority principle. However, the holding of periodic elections without consideration of the living conditions, identities and interests of the population represents a problem and weakens the substance of democracy.

**Representative and participatory democracy:** citizens elect representatives in this system too, but it also includes elements of direct democracy such as referendums, plebiscites, popular initiatives and revocation of mandate. There is also debate on the need for mechanisms of citizen participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies.

**Representative, participatory and inclusive democracy:** in this system, in addition to the elements of the previous model, another democratic objective is to effectively include in the political and social system all citizens who are prevented by various institutional, cultural and social restrictions from fully exercising their rights.

Moreover, although an increasing number of studies have scrutinized the political role of women in Latin America, their contribution to the construction of democracy, especially during wartime and in the effort to combat authoritarianism, has not been sufficiently documented. Indeed, this contribution has been

rendered invisible by the restoration of democratic political systems, *leaving women outside the boundaries of effective power.*

The debate on democracy, democratic governance and gender raises the challenge of identifying tensions and bridges between the usual definitions of democracy—as a political system made up of representative institutions—and the contributions that feminism makes by questioning dichotomies, challenging the boundaries between the private and the public and extending the notion of democracy into the family. It also seeks to identify forums for dialogue with public policymakers to facilitate the mainstreaming of gender analysis.

From the gender perspective, one of the questions raised is whether democracy that is limited to the electoral process signifies an advance in the status of women; similarly, it is important to consider the effects of poverty on equality and freedom of citizenship, the impact of poverty-alleviation programmes on women, women's use of time and their capabilities and freedom to enter the world of democracy and governance.

## **B. The State**

Norberto Bobbio and Michelangelo Bovero (1985) refer to dichotomy as the distinction whereby a universe may be divided into two jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive spheres, which together make up the whole. The first great dichotomy underlying the theories of the State distinguishes between the public and the private, which, according to Bobbio, spins off into another great dichotomy: that of equals and unequals.

The widely held view of the State as a politically organized society is not the object of this work, which looks instead at the most salient aspects of the feminist debate on the modern State.

Contemporary debate addresses the subject of State or the political system indistinctly. What makes the two concepts

interchangeable, according to Bobbio (1985), is the interest in power in its various expressions. This has been one of the main concerns for feminists too, but it has been extended into the sphere of the family, which—from other theoretical perspectives—has been considered a non-political area, with the public sphere thus exerting dominance over the private.

### Box 1.2

#### ELEMENTS OF STATE THEORY

- 1) *Politically organized society*
- 2) *Human settlement in a territory*
- 3) *Unity of law and international relations*
- 4) *A quintessentially public institution*
- 5) *An institution with a legitimate monopoly over violent means*

From a feminist perspective, power is not situated solely in the public sphere, in the political system; it also exists in the private arena and the family. The concepts of gender and gender relations serve to disarticulate power relationships (Amorós, 2005) and to expose their lack of legitimacy from the point of view of gender equality.

Feminism has defined social relations between men and women as political or power relationships and has suggested that it is precisely the dichotomous exclusion of the private sphere from the analysis of power that explains the subordination of women in the public sphere (Scott, 1996). Specifically, feminism criticizes gender systems as binary arrangements that place men and women, the male and the female, in opposition, without necessarily placing them on a level in terms of equality. For feminism, the political is about power, and power—following this school of thought—is present in all relationships.

The State has been one of the institutions most heavily criticized by feminists for producing and reproducing gender discrimination. In formulating this criticism, radical feminism has drawn on sexuality and the cultural construction of sexual difference.

Increasingly since the 1980s, however, concomitantly with the redemocratization processes in the region, a notion that has been regaining credence is that the State can also help to change sociocultural patterns and create the conditions for true and effective equality and equality of opportunities for women. There is a tension between criticism of androcentrism and demands for redistribution based on considerations of equality (Puleo, 2005). This is the tension Valcárcel describes between Weberian politics (Valcárcel, 1997, p.101), as a managerial activity for solving macroproblems, and the influence of the rather diffuse tradition of a temporally and spatially broad feminist movement. The effort to influence State political reforms managed in a rather Weberian way, in which the political is a narrower concept, while reconciling this with a vision of politics and power that must be dismantled, is a constant in the relationship between democratic governance and feminism.

Similarly, the notion of sovereignty refers to the ultimate power of command in a political society (Matteucci, 1991). It is linked to the concept of State, since the State is sovereign insofar as it makes decisions within the territory in which it is established and decisions must be taken in accordance with its norms and institutions. Currently, with the acceleration of globalization, societies are becoming more deeply interpenetrated in terms of economics, politics and culture and new public and institutional problems are emerging that transcend national boundaries. In this context, the notion of sovereignty is also being transformed. The new forms of regulation of different spheres of social life —laws, standards and institutional practices— are debated, negotiated and decided, not only nationally but also at the level of the international community.

The inclusion of gender equality, as well as the general issue of human rights, in public and institutional agendas has challenged the notions of sovereignty that are most closely linked to the national State framework. Lobbyists for the inclusion of the gender equality issue on such agendas form networks of actors drawn from civil society, the political system and the State, who transcend national boundaries to articulate their efforts in international forums, particularly those of the United Nations, and also in local politics.

States and other transnational actors have different degrees of power and resources to define new international rules and standards, and this determines both their decision-making autonomy and their capacity to safeguard rights at the national level.

### C. Democratic governance

The concept of governance does not have a single or definitive meaning. It is historical and dynamic in nature, since its meanings and uses tend to shift according to the social and political context and the theoretical framework employed.

The concept of governance appeared as early as 1975 in a report prepared by the *Trilateral Commission on the crisis of democracy*.<sup>6</sup> In this report, the idea of governance refers simply to the imbalance between the citizens' demands and the State's capacity to respond. Here, the means proposed to deal with the instability caused by such imbalances is to diminish demands and contain social mobilization, rather than expand the State's

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<sup>6</sup> The Trilateral Commission was established in July 1973 following a year and a half of meetings at the initiative of the Chase Manhattan Bank. It is a private entity, whose most distinguished ideologue is Zbigniew Brzezinski, who characterized it as the greatest assembly of financial and intellectual powers the world had ever known.

response capacity. Thus, it constitutes a conservative reaction to mounting demands by citizens.

In contrast, democratic governance has been conceptualized from various theoretical and political perspectives. There are a variety of slants in the descriptions given, but they coincide on the need to strengthen citizens' capacity for representation and negotiation vis-à-vis the recognized and legitimate authority of the political powers. The following are some of the interpretations of the concept of governance:

- A state of dynamic equilibrium between the level of social demands and the political system's capacity to respond to them in a legitimate and effective manner (Camou, 2000).
- Society's capacity to set and achieve objectives that respond compatibly to the different interests of citizens, transparently and with clear responsibilities (Institute for Nicaraguan Studies (IEN), 1999).
- A quality of political systems, rather than of governments, since democratic governance is understood to mean a democratic social system's capacity for self-government, by dealing with challenges and opportunities in a positive manner (Prats, 2002).
- Government's capacity to be obeyed without violating the rules of play of democracy and without any threat that these rules might be breached by another social or political actor being perceived as feasible by the society as a whole (Ansaldi, 1995).
- A system in which norms and standards are the outcome of the participation, deliberation and contention of interests and mental models among actors who are concerned not only with their own rights and interests but also with stability and progress in the global order. The core of governance is the quality of relationships between government and society (Guzmán, 2003).

- The exercise of representative power consistently with rules decided according to procedures of popular sovereignty and pluralism, with mechanisms for inclusion, citizens' participation and accountability that enable the forging of compacts with the institutions and organizations that hold power in society (Bareiro, 2004).
- "Governance" in contemporary societies is manifested in:
  - The stability of democratic institutions despite the uncertainty of the results of the political game;
  - The capacity of political and social institutions to add and articulate interests, as well as to regulate and settle conflicts thereof.

### Box I.3

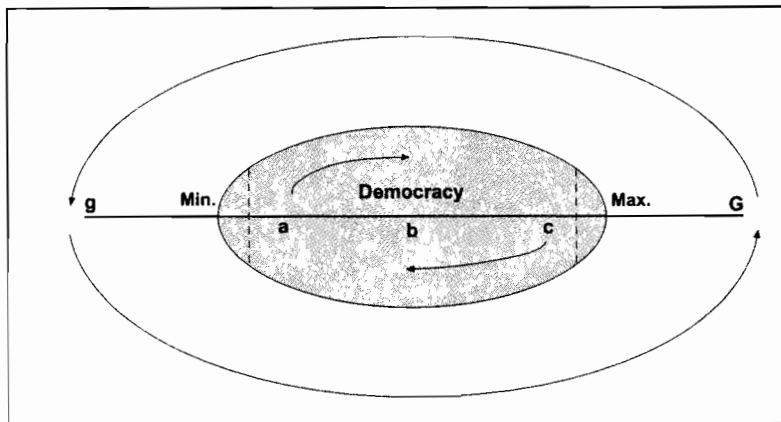
*Governance requires actors to be represented proportionately with their power, whereas the ideal democracy requires them to be represented proportionately with their number.*

There are various degrees of governance. Figure I.1 shows, at one extreme, a purely authoritarian or totalitarian situation (G) and, at the other extreme, a fragmented society that lacks the effective



capacity to process and implement political decisions (g).<sup>7</sup>

Figure I.1



Source: David Altman and Rossana Castiglioni, “¿De qué hablamos cuando hablamos de gobernabilidad democrática?”, *Desarrollo humano e institucional en América Latina (DHIAL)*, No. 9, Barcelona, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> In figure I.1, the horizontal line represents the governance continuum, where ‘G’ is maximum possible governance and ‘g’ the minimum. The closer to ‘G’, the nearer we are to a purely authoritarian or totalitarian situation. In contrast, the nearer to ‘g’, the closer to a perfectly fragmented society, or Hobbes’ “War of All against All” with no effective capacity to process and implement political decisions. Transit from ‘G’ to ‘g’ does not necessarily follow the horizontal line; it may perfectly well follow the curved lines. The grey area in the centre represents the field of democracy. But as democratic as any system may be, it can never be anchored at a specific point of the grey area. Situations are constantly changing. The degree of (non-)governance in presidential regimes like Latin America’s is probably associated with the electoral cycle. In the run-up to elections, political parties attempt to maximize the flow of votes. They compete for electoral support in a context of extremely limited inter-party cooperation. In this situation, non-governance increases, that is we move closer to point ‘a’ in the figure. In stark contrast, once a political party wins the presidential election in a multi-party system, the executive usually has to seek support to gain the parliamentary majority it needs to fulfill pre-election promises. It is at this point (if such support materializes) that governance becomes viable; in other words, we move closer to ‘c’ (Altman and Castiglioni, 2000).

Table I.1

**DIMENSIONS OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE**

<b>Deepening</b>	<b>Institutionalization</b>	<b>Social returns</b>
Extension of observance of the law and accountability among authorities and towards citizens	Consistency of political practices	Economic and social results of the political exchange and their effects on the stability of the institutional regime
Reduction of institutional barriers that limit political participation and the mobilization of marginalized sectors of society	Predictability of rules	
Decentralization of power	Acceptance of the uncertainty of the results of the democratic exercise	Macroeconomic stability and poverty eradication
Establishment of means to guarantee more space, energy and autonomy for civil society	Political structures that enable the proper mediation of interests and settlement of disputes	
Effective safeguarding of the political and civil rights of citizens	Degree of development of the political parties	

Source: Carlos Sojo, "Gobernabilidad democrática en Centroamérica: riesgos y oportunidades", Colección de documentos, No. 48, International Institute for Governance (IIG), 2002.

**D. Equality**

The notion of equality is a relatively recent one, dating from the eighteenth century. In a nutshell, it can be defined as a convention whereby the same value is assigned to the different components of a society, whether on the basis of sex, social class, ethnic origin, culture, race, age, or others. Moreover, it is an end, a principle and an objective of the democratic and social State where the rule of law prevails.

According to Sartori, two meanings of the term "equality" are, often intentionally, confused: the idea of similitude—the fact that two or more things or persons are identical—and the notion of justice. The term "equality" in the singular is useful as a declaration of principles, as a reference for protest, but when it becomes a signifier of proposal, the term should only be used in the plural: "equalities".

Sartori points out that the notion of equality of opportunities masks two heterogeneous concepts. Citing Flew, Sartori states that equal access for all to everything, based on merit, is one thing; equal starting conditions that give all equal initial capabilities is a completely different matter.

This difference is especially relevant when it comes to policies of equal opportunities for women, since equality of access refers to the fact that all individuals should have equal legal standing and receive equal treatment. A policy of equal opportunities must, however, also consider men's and women's starting conditions, which are differentiated as a result of socialization and the history of male accumulation of power, as well as the maintenance of sex-based division of labour and discriminatory sociocultural patterns. As the philosopher Amelia Valcárcel points out (1997), democracy is not just equality, it is also freedom; however, the main debates have concerned the former, which is precisely the idea of equality on which the feminist tradition is founded.

#### Box 1.4

*"Feminism is a political philosophy of equality which, all principles being clear and distinct, simply argues as follows: if it is accepted that all human beings are equal in the quest for what are considered to be goods, why should half of the human race, the full collective of women, not have the same recognized rights to such goods as the entire human collective body?"*

Source: Amelia Valcárcel, *La Política de las mujeres*, Women's Institute of Spain, Madrid, 1998.

#### E. Affirmative action

In principle, affirmative action may be construed as measures designed to achieve true equality, using forms of statutory inequality in order to attempt to eliminate the negative consequences of de facto differences.

## Box 1.5

## AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

*The constitutional reference to sex implies putting an end to the historical inferiority attributed to women in the area of employment and working conditions. Thus, measures are constitutionally legitimate only if they aim to offset a real initial inequality. Very specific action is required to systematically interpret the constitutional precept that forbids discrimination based on sex in conjunction with other constitutional precepts, in particular article 9.2 of the Spanish Constitution, which obliges public authorities to ensure that conditions of equality between women and men are "real and effective" (Ruling 28/92 of the Constitutional Court (STC) of 9 March). Hence the idea of compensatory measures: rather than being interpreted as facilitating women's access to the labour market with equal opportunities (given their traditional exclusion), such measures defend the quest for compensation to offset the imbalance arising from the previously prevailing notion that the man was the "head of the household" and that a married women had to be freed from factory work (STC 19/89 of 31 January, f.5).*

Source: Susana Torrente G., *La mujer y la protección social*, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Office of the Deputy Director of Publications, Madrid, 1999.

**F. Gender**

The concept of gender refers to the social construct of relations between men and women, learned through the process of socialization, which change over time and vary significantly from one culture to another and even within the same culture. There is a general consensus on the distinction to be made between the concepts of sex and gender. Sex is a biological characteristic determined by birth and it is universal. The concept of gender refers to constructed social differences which are, therefore, learned and, above all, changeable. Gender relations vary according to the cultural and historical context and give rise to

different roles, responsibilities, opportunities, needs and limitations for men, women, girls and boys.<sup>8</sup> The term “gender” is used to refer to the set of social relations based on perceived differences between the sexes, which are translated into cultural symbols, normative concepts, social institutions and organizations and subjective identity (Scott, 1996).

Gender is an indispensable category of analysis for understanding inequality in fields that have been considered neutral, particularly in the sphere of philosophy, political science and the ideas that inspire democratic principles and governance. Many of the concepts outlined here have been the subject of critical analysis and thought, especially in the light of experience. One of the most interesting reflections is that, beyond the triumph of the *gender perspective* as a compulsory feature of public policies, its true success lies in the fact that understanding it implies a conceptual leap: recognizing that male and female behaviours depend essentially not on biological facts but, to a great extent, on social constructs. Thus, the notion of the gender perspective leads back to the core of the feminist discourse (Lamas, 2006).

According to Baratta (2000), the lowest common denominator that followed feminist epistemology was the dismantling of the androcentric model of science, which took the male as the standard. Feminism has criticized the prejudices underlying these concepts and has introduced a new model that includes the necessary consideration of the public and the private, of productive and reproductive life, as well as their interrelationships.

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations Gender resource package for peacekeeping operations 2004 [online] <http://www.unficyp.org/Gender%20Affairs/start-grp.html>

**Box 1.6**  
**SEX/GENDER**

*The sex/gender system is the set of arrangements through which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed human needs are satisfied.*

Source: Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy of Sex'", *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, Raynu Reite (ed.), New York, Monthly Review Press, 1975.

### **G. Citizenship**

The debate on women's citizenship has come to the fore again since the Fourth World Conference on Women, which was held in Beijing in 1995. The resulting Beijing Platform for Action incorporates various initiatives of the women's movement (Vargas, 1996).

Like the ideas of democracy and State, the idea of women's citizenship connects with discussions in the liberal tradition (Jelin, 1996), with the most radical perspectives that different social groups have taken on rights (Bareiro, 1996a) and the extension of rights to encompass women's human rights, including reproductive rights. At present, the discussion on citizenship is part of the debate on "the right to have rights" (Bobbio, 1991), as explained by Jelin. This transcends the concepts delimited in legal practice and public policies, whose application is usually confined to people of a particular age group, with residence in a particular territory and the ability to vote. Some authors have expanded the concept of citizenship to the point of eliminating borders between human, reproductive, sexual and citizenship rights (Bermúdez, 1996). This not only raises methodological and conceptual issues, but also has political consequences for the strategies that women can use to achieve greater power in society.

There are a number of tensions and challenges revolving around the citizenship debate. The most significant are: the redefinition of the national State and the concept of sovereignty, the tension between the particular and the universal, the tension between the individual and the collective, and the debate on the public and the private, as well as issues relating to representation, delegation of power and forms of leadership.

Women's citizenship has been associated mainly with suffrage. Nevertheless, analysis of the exercise of civic, political and cultural rights and their intersection with the perspective of women's human rights throws up a number of aspects, including: the right to vote, participation in the civic struggle for democracy, the recovery of human rights, demands for education, criticism of State excesses and other forms of women's individual and collective expression in communal management, preservation of language, the applicability of traditional systems of authority and relations with the State, as well as, more recently, reproductive rights. These aspects are summarized in the concept of the right to have rights.

Nevertheless, Elizabeth Jelin (1997) reminds us that behind the notion of citizenship there is a process of negotiation in which citizenship refers to a conflictive practice linked to power, which reflects the struggles about "who is entitled to say what in the process of defining common problems and [deciding] how they are to be faced".

The constitution of the modern imaginary of public and private and the modern idea of the radical difference between men and women were crucial to the criteria of inclusion, exclusion and classification that have underpinned the forms of citizenship of our times. In fact, the modern State has been based on a clear separation between public and private and on a hierarchical order of gender.

For Zincone (1992), the dichotomy between the public and the private institutes two different types of power. The first is political, which is exercised among “equals” and involves a negotiation of interests and conflicts and the mutual recognition of the participants’ political capacities. The second is family power, wielded over “non-equals” and built on the belief in a natural and hierarchical order of decision-making power, based on the principle of authority and the assumption of the natural inequality of the political capacities and social vocations of the participants. Historically, power has been a masculine prerogative: men, the members of the community of “equals”, exercised their political powers in the public sphere, and in private they exercised their authority over the “non-equals”, including women, children and servants.

The persistent symbology of gender and power differences between men and women have determined not only a discriminatory distribution of rights, but also a serious limitation on the real and autonomous enjoyment of rights.

The emergence of the theoretical and political expressions of the feminist movement has brought significant pressure to include women in the public sphere and to shift the boundaries between the public and the private. Women’s organizations and different aspects of gender institutionality have done much to bring issues previously considered to be private, such as domestic violence and the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights, into the public arena.

Gender equality is an indicator of how democratic a political system is. Feminists have criticized democracy for not including women on equal terms, especially in the exercise of power, and for not dealing with their specific interests. Gender has become a specific variable in the political arena. Increasingly, mechanisms have been developed to include women in elected and mandated posts. The most important instruments are minimum quotas for representation, which are compensatory mechanisms. In the last



few years, there has been some debate and acceptance of parity democracy, which represents a rethinking of the concept of representation: if the citizenry is made up of men and women, then both should be represented in equal percentages in the political system, instead of considering only ideological and territorial plurality. In this sense, *parity is not a higher quota for women*, but the broadest possible expression of universality. This is how it was understood by the Venezuelan women who argued for its inclusion in the legislation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Lastly, in order to admit twenty-first century demands for parity, progress must be made in the theoretical sphere in order to overcome the naturalist cultural heritage once and for all and strengthen democracy (Valcárcel, 2001). Achieving parity is thus a process that includes recourse to quotas and other tools but that, above all, requires the recognition of women as citizens with full rights.

#### Box 1.7

#### QUOTAS OR PARITY: AN OPEN DEBATE

*It is important not to confuse parity with affirmative action, although they are similar. Women are not a group in need of a "plus" to make up for falling short of required conditions. Although men and women have very similar skills and meritocratic qualifications—as is currently the case—we continue to observe that men tend to occupy most of the available space. So this pattern has to be changed and progress made towards democracy, ensuring that neither sex is displaced from public life or from legitimate power. The purpose of parity is to ensure that the system does not continuously lean towards men in the gender variables.*

Source: Private communication by Amelia Valcárcel.

## H. Conclusions

Taking into account the importance of a democratic international environment, progress is needed in the following areas in order to achieve democratic governance from a gender perspective:

1. Deepening of the democratic system by extending governance from the city into the heart of the family and into gender relations.
2. Institutionalization of democracy with parity representation for women and an agenda of political, social and economic equality that allows an effective, efficient and responsible exercise of State powers. This requires:
  - Legislation and administration of justice that can safeguard fundamental human rights in the constitutional and legal fabric of a State governed by the rule of law;
  - Citizens' participation in political decisions and in the political management of the State;
  - Professional, effective, efficient and transparent public administration.
3. Increased capacities for social returns that result not only in growth, but also in the elimination of poverty and all forms of discrimination.
4. Eradication of concepts that naturalize female and male roles and result in social tolerance of discrimination.

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### **3. Public policies**

#### **A. Background**

Latin America has a long history of social policies, although not necessarily of a welfare state. The welfare state entered a crisis in the 1980s as a result of the inefficiencies of a power structure that excluded citizens. These inefficiencies were aggravated by the rise of military dictatorships and authoritarian governments which led

to the first reforms that removed the social function of the State while strengthening its role as guardian of national security, understood as the struggle against the enemy within. Opponents, trade unionists and political parties had little input during the early structural changes in the age of Reagan, Thatcher and Pinochet, their main exponents (Serrano, 2005).

Many authors have referred to the 1980s as the lost decade, from the point of view of economic and social lag and the worsening of inequalities. The 1990s brought two significant developments: a return to democracy in most of the countries and the structural reforms inspired by the *Washington Consensus*.

As far as gender policies are concerned, however, the 1980s brought an accumulation of developments and gains, as the main models were developed for policy impact, management and participation of the social movement in the definition of agendas during this time. This period saw the development of a vast institutional network consisting of non-governmental and grassroots organizations, which began a long process of building impact on governments and legislative institutions. This was the stage at which women's organizations throughout the region were able to raise the social threshold of their demands in terms of their legitimacy.

During the 1990s and owing, in large part, to the impetus of the international conferences convened by the United Nations, the conditions were ripe throughout the region for the emergence of new institutions to formulate policies on gender equality.

## B. Key concepts<sup>9</sup>

Social policies are concerned with the well-being of individuals and their relationship to politics and society. Their main concern is the design of measures, rules, mechanisms and procedures by which citizens may access services, especially health, education and social protection.

How public policies are construed depends on the theoretical and political standpoint taken.

For some authors, such as Molina (2005), public policies are a set of decisions that translate into strategically selected actions generated, initially, by the State. They are public in scope, given the size of the social aggregate on which they impact and, above all, the imperative nature conferred by the legitimate and sovereign authority of the public power.

Other authors, such as Muller and Surel (1998), afford emphasis to the relations established by the State and society in the process of public-policy preparation, decision-making, planning, implementation and evaluation. These authors see research into public policies as going beyond understanding the mechanisms of decision-making by authorities within the State, insofar as policies are the result of social processes that are initiated in the different areas of society where the problems these interventions target are constructed and defined. Analysis of public policy therefore enquires into the relations between State and society, the functioning of democracy and the participation of the subjects of policy in the definition of public problems and in the design of policy intervention strategies.

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<sup>9</sup> For an introductory definition of social policies see: <http://www2.rgu.ac.uk/publicpolicy/introduction/socpolf.htm>

Enhancing democratic governance from the State implies formulating public policies that meet the demands of different groups in society and can offer the population security and well-being. It also requires the creation of channels for participation to ensure that different members of society can express their problems and see them dealt with by the political system. Simultaneous consideration must be given to political, communicational and management issues in the analytical stages of the generation, design, management and evaluation of each policy if political economy is to be harmonized with government technique (Lahera, 2006).

### **C. The gender perspective in public policies**

Policies which take gender aspects into account acknowledge that organizational practices and routines require new procedures in order to overcome inequality. Some of these procedures are: the inclusion of stakeholders in public policymaking within decision-making institutions; the disaggregation of indicators by sex; evaluation of differential impacts on men and women and, consequently, on other sociocultural groups, especially the most vulnerable.

The design of such policies requires a highly developed body of theory in order to analyse the meanings, practices, symbols, representations, institutions and norms that societies develop on the basis of the biological difference between men and women. It specifically includes the dimension of social relationships and power structures and emphasizes the need to understand how all of this is realized in each case (Bandeira, 2005).

The processes through which gender inequalities are socially constructed depend on a large number of institutions. Gender inequalities are reproduced in the processes of distributing resources, responsibilities, power and time. Institutional rules and practices determine which categories of individuals to include (or exclude) and how they will be positioned within the institution.



The institutional patterns of inclusion, exclusion, positioning and progress thus express gender, class, race, and other inequalities.

#### Recuadro 1.8

*The incorporation of the gender perspective in the main current of development refers to the "process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality." (United Nations, 1997).*

#### D. Gender mainstreaming in public policies

The commitment to gender mainstreaming means that governments must support ministries or specialized secretariats for women's affairs and incorporate the gender perspective into all public policies proposed by the State and implemented in the government sphere. Accordingly, the following questions should be considered in relation to each policy: Does it change women's living conditions? Does it contribute to their autonomy and empower them? (Bandeira 2005).

From the point of view of democratic governance, moving forward with gender mainstreaming means taking the set of demands for gender equality mobilized by different social actors at the national and global levels and articulating, negotiating or contrasting them with proposals of governance and State reform. In this sense, mainstreaming has much to do with the generation of new mechanisms for communication between the State and society, in which women participate as social subjects (Guzmán, 2004).

Institutional development in the region has been very extensive and has given rise to a structure for the formulation and design of public policies.

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#### **4. What we learned in this module**

- How the rights framework, democracy and public policy from a gender perspective are related.
- How to identify gender bias in the main concepts used in the analysis of democratic governance.
- Characteristics of public policies and gender mainstreaming.



## **Module II. Democratic governance and gender equality**

### **A. What we will learn in this module**

Based on the experiences of selected countries over three years (2002-2005), we will see how the various policies, proposals and actions have been implemented and how they are linked.

The following points will be covered in the module:

- The impact of poverty —especially among women— on the legitimacy of democracy (Brazil and Ecuador).
- The effects of women's participation on the quality of democracy (Bolivia, Honduras, Mexico and Paraguay).
- The value of new technologies in formulating a strategy to strengthen democracy at the national and regional levels.

The module will cover national and regional experiences and the articulation of these two dimensions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Refers to countries where the project was fully implemented and where verifiable results were recorded.

## **B. Aims of the module**

By the end of the module, users will be familiar with national experiences and emerging challenges in the implementation of the governance project.

### **1. The project**

#### **A. Background**

The project was implemented simultaneously at the national and regional levels. By participating in regional meetings and virtual forums, female ministers and heads of mechanisms for the advancement of women have gained a regional overview of strategies for incorporating gender equity into policies, ensuring women's participation in public life and decision-making and transforming the cultural representations that are used to justify gender inequality.

The backing provided by women's networks and other institutions, and especially by the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, has helped to develop mechanisms for debate, consensus-building, learning and support for the respective national efforts. These networking mechanisms disseminated best practices not only among countries directly involved in the project, but also to other countries.

Project activities have been implemented in different contexts, including during times of governmental transition and at critical points when the institutional continuity of gender mechanisms has hung in the balance.

Regional studies on issues relevant to democratic governance (such as electoral systems, the political representation of women and the link between poverty and gender) have uncovered the

main trends at the regional level and the specific characteristics of each country.

The project's various intervention strategies have forged links between female ministers and heads of gender mechanisms on governance issues, and have led to the creation of national and regional networks of experts on the issues most critical to governance: poverty, political culture and electoral systems.

Within countries, networks and links have been formed around specific issues:

- Political culture and electoral reform in Mexico and Honduras.
- Poverty, gender and race in Brazil.
- Social policies, gender and poverty in Ecuador.

The *project* which lasted for 36 months, is fully described on the *website of the ECLAC Women and Development Unit*. The information there highlights the active participation of the governments represented in the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, whose Presiding Officers were responsible for follow-up and monitoring, as regards both country selection and the discussion of regularly reported results and achievements. The selected countries are shown on the following map:



Note: The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

The project was carried out in a context of volatile economic growth, as well as persistent poverty and social, regional, ethnic and gender inequalities. Although some significant progress was made, the pace and scope of these changes were admittedly insufficient to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, let alone the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action or the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

The 1990s saw a consolidation of certain economic and financial aspects that are rooted in lengthy historical processes. These processes created the conditions for the world economy to change gradually from an aggregate of national economies linked by trade, investment and financial flows into a set of global networks



of markets and production that transcend national borders. Yet these undoubtedly powerful processes have not been matched by equivalent development in global institutionalization, whose agenda is incomplete and asymmetrical (Ocampo, Bajraj and Martin, 2001).

No developing region has embraced economic liberalization programmes more firmly than Latin America and the Caribbean. The period 1991-2003 showed clear progress but also some standstills and setbacks. The greatest frustration has been the region's persistent divergence from the developed world in terms of per capita GDP since 1973. According to data from Maddison (2001), the region's per capita GDP was around 28% of the figure for the United States between 1870 and 1973, then dipped to 22% in 1998. Since then, per capita GDP has fallen in half of the region's countries, and the fastest-growing economies of the 1990s have lost some of their spark (ECLAC, 2004). In this sense, 1998-2002 was something of a "lost half-decade", on top of the region's poor economic performance during the preceding 25 years, and the per capita GDP gap with respect to the developed world continued to widen.

Although the upturn in growth in 2003 (1.5%) and the estimates of around 3.8% for 2004 are positive developments, they are not enough to reverse this situation. The divergence has also been accompanied by sharpening disparities in income distribution and rising poverty and indigence in almost all the region's countries (ECLAC, 2004). According to ECLAC estimates, income distribution continued to worsen in 1991-2003, with very few exceptions. Such deterioration is linked to patterns of asymmetrical distribution in the phases of the business cycle, which has shown large, high-frequency movements over the last 30 years. During recession, the share of low-income groups dropped more dramatically, while the share of high-income groups increased at above-average rates during boom times. A similar pattern occurred with poverty: the percentage of poor dropped during the 1991-1997 economic recovery, but remained higher than levels recorded prior to 1980. Following 1997,

progress stalled and some countries even suffered setbacks. The optimism that prevailed at the beginning of the 1990s gradually gave way to disappointment over the results of the reform period.

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## 2. National experiences<sup>11</sup>

Country experiences were related to three areas: policies to reduce poverty, political participation and institutional development, and the importance of new technologies for democratic governance and gender equity.

Throughout the project, participating institutions identified common ground between democracy and gender equality. Eradicating poverty emerged as one of the main challenges, both because it highlights an alarming concentration of wealth, and because of the political dimension (favouritism) associated with

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<sup>11</sup> Refers to countries where the project was fully implemented and where verifiable results were recorded.

the management of certain broad-coverage poverty-reduction programmes with a high level of women's involvement.<sup>12</sup>

The second point of overlap was the imbalance of power between men and women. The rate at which women are being incorporated into decision-making processes in the public sphere and the business and union world contrasts with their growing contribution to income generation and to community- and family-based social protection. Similarly, women's capacity to influence constitutional or electoral reform shows the gulf between the widely accepted principle of equality and the actual exercise of that equality.

The third point of intersection is the institutional instability of gender machineries, which are often endangered by changes of administration, despite the fact that some constitute high-level government bodies.

To correct these distortions caused by the political treatment of women as a vulnerable minority, the strategies employed focused on capacity-building within the respective women's organizations.

### **3. Poverty and gender mainstreaming**

Feminist literature on the poverty-gender link has found a number of limitations in poverty definitions, especially in terms of capturing the gender bias that conditions poverty and the various factors (sexual division of labour plus economic, social and political aspects) that make women more vulnerable to poverty, as well as ways in which it can be overcome. The absence of a gender perspective from many poverty-reduction strategies means an increase in women's workloads, which prevents them from accessing and making use of opportunities.

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<sup>12</sup> For a broader discussion of this issue, see Chant (2003), Daeren (2001) and Serrano (2005).

*Machineries for the advancement of women* have analysed poverty within development strategies and have managed to include the gender dimension, at least formally, in poverty reduction strategies (in countries such as Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Honduras and Paraguay). In most cases, they articulate their proposals with current decentralization policies (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Paraguay). These strategies approach poverty from the point of view of women's citizenship and the protection of rights. From the perspective of right, machineries for the advancement of women have sought to include domestic violence and sexual and reproductive rights in poverty-reduction strategies.

#### **A. Definition**

Generally speaking, poverty is acknowledged as being a multi-dimensional phenomenon. However, poverty measurements have tended to focus on the monetary assessment of household income since, to a certain extent, this summarizes the possibility of accessing resources and satisfying needs.

Such methods also assume that resources are equitably distributed among all members of the household, that those members have equivalent needs and that all decisions are democratic and consensual, as if such decisions were free from negotiation and conflict, or even violence.

Box II.1

POVERTY FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE<sup>13</sup>

*Promoting gender equity – the third Millennium Development Goal– is not only an end in itself, but also an essential means of achieving the target of reducing poverty.*

*In Latin America and the Caribbean, women suffer a series of disadvantages compared with men. These range from unpaid housework and a lack of social recognition to higher unemployment and wage discrimination, as well as unequal access to and use and control of productive resources and slow progress in gaining political participation. Hence, men and women experience poverty differently.*

*From a gender perspective, however, measuring poverty on the basis of income does not reflect the situation of men and women and does not identify the factors in the respective difficulties they face in overcoming poverty. Most poverty indicators in use today are not gender sensitive, because they are aggregate measurements that use the household, not the individual, as the unit of analysis and do not impute income for unpaid domestic work. Furthermore, this methodological approach assumes that resources are equitably distributed among all members of the household, and that their needs are the same. Despite their limitations for poverty measurement, two derived indicators – the female poverty index and the proportion of households headed by indigent women– nonetheless show that women are more seriously affected by poverty in the region.*

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<sup>13</sup> A Spanish-language document on the relevant international instruments can be found at: <http://www.cepal.org/cgi-bin/getProd.asp?xml=/mujer/noticias/noticias/4/7214/P7214.xml&xsl=/mujer/tpl/plf.xsl&base=/mujer/tpl/top-bottom.xsl>.

**Box II.1 (concluded)**

*The female poverty index –which is calculated by dividing the ratio between the number of men and women in poor households by the number of men and women in all households– shows many Latin American countries with indices of over 100 in 2002, both in urban and rural areas. This shows that women are more strongly represented in poor households, especially working-age women of 20 to 59 years.*

*In the region's urban areas, the proportion of female-headed indigent households is higher than male-headed ones, with a gap in excess of five percentage points in Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala and Panama. In addition, between 1990 and 2002, the proportion of extremely poor households headed by women increased in many countries.*

*A useful complement to these two indicators would be an analysis of individuals with no income of their own. This is more often the case for women than men, and affects spouses in particular.*

*Lastly, available information suggests that women in the region are making a significant contribution to reducing poverty, even though they are more seriously affected by it. This is another motivation for their seeking access to the labour market. During the 1990s, the female labour participation rate grew faster than that of men, and the participation rate of poor women rose from 36% in 1994 to 43% in 2002. But, although more women are employed and working in waged jobs, unemployment is still much higher among women than men, and women earn less and have a smaller social protection coverage.*

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Social Panorama of Latin America 2002-2003 (LC/G.2209-P), Santiago, Chile, May 2004. United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.G.185.

## Box II.2

### THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC AUTONOMY FOR REDUCING POVERTY

*An analysis of individuals with no income of their own provides a vision of female poverty from the viewpoint of economic autonomy, which refers to the capacity to generate income and make decisions on spending.*

*In 2002, almost 43% of women above the age of 15 in the region's urban areas lacked their own income, compared with only 22% of men. Women in rural areas were even more economically dependent, across all age groups. Furthermore, 61% of female spouses in poor households had no income of their own (42% in non-poor households), which reflects a lack of economic autonomy and the fact that a high proportion of the female population are likely to be poor or become poor, especially if their family or marital circumstances change (due to widowhood, marriage breakdown, and so on).*

*Women who do have their own income make a significant contribution to poverty reduction. In 2002, without the monetary contribution of women, total poverty would have been over 10 percentage points higher in eight of the region's countries (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay).*

#### B. Strategies to combat poverty

Mainstreaming the gender perspective in development refers to the "process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality" (United Nations, 1997).

As part of the project, the national machineries for the advancement of women analysed poverty within development strategies, which they influenced in many ways and to varying degrees, while incorporating the gender dimension into strategies to combat poverty (in Brazil, Ecuador, Honduras and Paraguay).<sup>14</sup> Most institutions tie in their proposals with decentralization policies under way (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Paraguay) and their strategies seek to promote women's citizenship and the protect their rights. In this rights-based approach, gender mechanisms advocate consideration of domestic violence and sexual and reproductive rights as part of poverty-reduction strategies. Tensions have arisen between this approach and a financial-efficiency-based strategy aimed at achieving results in the short term by means of targeting that attempts to combat poverty without necessarily tackling inequalities. Governments, machineries for the advancement of women and women's organizations view the fight against poverty as a priority. This was the starting point for exploring common lines of action by pooling their respective capacities in terms of bargaining, lobbying and pressure-wielding. Although there were common viewpoints, there were also different visions of the financial and political constraints imposed by the long-term vision, as opposed to the demands of electoral time scales. Women have constantly reiterated that institutional continuity is a necessary condition for the success of these policies.

### ***Brazil***

In *Brazil*, there were two major project outcomes. First, policies to combat poverty were analysed to produce diagnoses and timely proposals to strengthen the communication capacity of the women's advancement machinery as an interlocutor with the sectors responsible for poverty reduction policies. The second

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<sup>14</sup> In Bolivia, which was not one of the countries selected in the first stage, the gender dimension has also now been incorporated into the poverty-reduction strategy.



outcome related to institutional development is described in the section that deals with that issue.

This took place during the Administration of President Lula da Silva, when the project supported the coordination of various existing initiatives and the newly created Special Secretariat on Policies for Women. Together, these worked to include an equality agenda in the poverty-reduction policies that already constituted a priority for the women's movement, the State Secretariat for the Rights of Women (SEDIM) and the Government of President Lula da Silva with its "Zero Hunger" programme, which was subsequently integrated into a wider set of poverty-eradication programmes.

The Special Secretariat on Policies for Women incorporates the National Council for the Rights of Women (CNDM), which has existed since gender institutions were first set up in 1985. The project has provided support for mainstreaming the gender perspective in government policies, particularly those related to overcoming poverty.

The intervention strategy consisted in:

1. Defining the state of poverty in Brazil, and among women in particular.
2. Identifying the proposals of different national and international social and institutional actors for mitigating women's vulnerability to poverty, protecting their rights and promoting their economic autonomy.
3. Identifying the State bodies, authorities and public officials in charge of these policies, in order to argue for the need to include gender issues in their respective areas of intervention.
4. Facilitating the formation of linkages between academic output and the demands of institutions, organizations, authorities and other State representatives, through the normative and coordination activities of the Special Secretariat on Policies for Women.

5. Generating a public debate by disseminating research findings among women's organizations, the feminist movement, research centres, female academics, women parliamentarians and members of political parties.
6. Forging closer links with actors involved in solving the problem and heightening their commitment. In summary, then, existing networks were strengthened and new links were formed, with a view to ensuring continuity and sustainability for the future.

The experience of Brazil shows how to articulate the strategy of gender machineries with democratic governance by tackling substantive issues such as gender equity and poverty.

### ***Ecuador***

In Ecuador, the main achievements were the signing of an agreement on 14 October 2004 and the implementation of a joint action plan by the National Women's Council (CONAMU) and the Social Protection Programme, which runs the human development bond programme (considered the most effective subsidy programme for the poorest groups, and women in particular). This is consistent with the orientation adopted by Ecuador during an international meeting on the link between poverty, gender and governance.

The group of experts and the seminar on poverty from the perspective of democratic governance and gender equality (Ecuador, August 2004) reached the following conclusions:

- It is impossible to analyse poverty policies without reference to economic policy and the various mechanisms for redistributing opportunities. Poverty policies are relevant not only to the poor, but also to the relationship between poor and non-poor.
- Poverty programmes take on a very different meaning if they are accompanied by universal social policies. They then

become mechanisms of positive action for the poorest groups in society. Otherwise, narrower social policies tend to result in compensatory welfare programmes that lend themselves to clientelism.

- Poverty reduction is not a matter for poor women only; it concerns people of both sexes and other social and institutional actors.
- The scarcity of certain resources from women's point of view, or their excessive burden of responsibilities, demand a redistribution of resources and work among men and women in both the productive and reproductive spheres.
- The analysis of poverty programmes from a governance perspective should be informed by the participation and viewpoints of poor men and women, as well as other actors involved in policy design, implementation and assessment.
- Programmes should be approached from an institutional perspective, in terms of stability, links with other economic and social policies and the integral nature of any intervention. Strategies to combat poverty should consider policies on employment and on reconciliation of productive and reproductive activities.

In Ecuador, the project was run by the National Women's Council, as part of a wider mainstreaming strategy for public policies and other related initiatives. In its capacity as project leader, the National Women's Council brought together institutions, technical staff, women's organizations and female academics to identify the demand for technical assistance, work procedures and ways of cooperating. It was decided that the project would engage in gender monitoring of one of the Government's priority programmes—the human development bond—and the achievements and effect of that programme on women's acquired rights and their recognition as social subjects.

“The general objective stated in the agreement is to facilitate and promote coordination and dialogue between the National Women's Council and the Social Protection Programme, with a

view to encouraging proposals from a perspective based on rights and access to social services for women, boys, girls and adolescents as part of the human development bond programme, while applying the institutional mechanisms needed to implement the proposals.

The specific objectives were to promote gender mainstreaming in the human development bond programme, advocate local pilot projects and develop a joint communication strategy based on the promotion of women's rights."

### Box II.3

#### AGREEMENT SIGNED BETWEEN THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S COUNCIL AND THE SOCIAL FRONT AS A RESULT OF THE PROJECT

*"The general objective of the agreement is to facilitate and promote coordination and dialogue between the National Women's Council and the Social Protection Programme, with a view to encouraging proposals from a perspective based on rights and access to social services for women, boys, girls and adolescents as part of the human development bond programme, while applying the institutional mechanisms needed to implement the proposals.*

*The specific objectives established are to promote gender mainstreaming in the human development bond programme, advocate local pilot projects and develop a joint communication strategy based on the promotion of women's rights."*

## 4. Political participation

### *Honduras*

In Honduras, the project focused on creating links between electoral reform and the agenda for women's political participation. The main achievement in Honduras was the amendment of the electoral law and the introduction of a minimum quota of 30% of women in electoral lists.

Although Honduras has a law on equal opportunities that stipulates a minimum quota of 30% for women in candidacies for parliamentary election, female participation in Congress fell from 18% to 12% once the rule was adopted. It was therefore necessary to produce a strategy document to strengthen the leadership capacity and presence of women in politics at the local and national levels.

The project was thus part of the process of reforming the law on elections and political organizations by incorporating quotas for the participation of women in electoral lists.

Women's political participation was promoted through political-impact activities involving government authorities and members of political parties.

This experience has resulted in the approval of the following articles of the electoral law in favour of equal opportunities:

Article 103. Equal opportunities. The State guarantees participatory democracy and the full exercise of citizens' rights to both men and women, with equal opportunities.

Article 104. Guarantee of non-discrimination. The State, through the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, will ensure that the governing structures of political parties and candidacies for elections are free of discrimination based on gender, creed, race or any other consideration.

Article 105. Equitable distribution in positions of popular election. To ensure the effective participation of women, a minimum of 30% is established for leadership roles in political parties, members and alternates of the National Congress and the Central American Parliament, mayors, deputy mayors and governors.

## **Mexico**

### **Promoting a culture of gender equity**

The project's main achievement in Mexico was the creation of a network on democratic governance, gender and political culture, comprising representatives of the National Women's Institute (INMUJERES), the Secretariat of the Interior, the Federal Electoral Institute, Colegio de México (COLMEX), the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), non-governmental organizations, the Women's Board and the National Women's Civic Association (ANCIFEM).

Project activities were launched in Mexico in December 2002, with the holding of a conference on electoral systems and results, with a regional view from the women's perspective, and a seminar on the empowerment of women.

Among the main conclusions reached by the participating authorities was the acknowledgement that democratic governance is an up-and-coming international issue of major national importance to Mexico. Work is needed with the political parties to raise awareness and to monitor and compile high-quality quantitative information on their internal organization and structure as regards women's participation (candidacies, militancy and decision-making, and elective and municipal posts). It is vital to take into account the context and point of the electoral cycle that form the backdrop for project actions, especially those concerned with the work of political parties. This can be done by the Secretariat for Women's Affairs within each party.

It was also deemed advisable to set up inter-agency and inter-sectoral agreements in which INMUJERES will act as a focal point and catalyst for coordination, which will also impact on the Institute's own strength and visibility. Since some progress and initiatives for women's political participation already existed (in

the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) and the Ministry of the Interior (SEGOB)), it was suggested that an inter-sectoral group be set up to include government bodies, academia, NGOs and civil-society organizations, and to work on the project or the issue of women's political participation and the exercise of their citizenship. INMUJERES would coordinate the inter-sectoral group, which would comprise the Ministry of the Interior (SEGOB), Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) and, National Institute for Federalism and Municipal Development (INAFED), Interdisciplinary Group on Women, Labour and Poverty (GIMTRAP), Colegio de México (COLMEX), University Programme of Gender Studies (PUEG) and the Interdisciplinary Programme for Studies on Women (PIEM). Given the importance of information for policymaking, it was suggested that measurement instruments such as surveys should be checked for inclusion of the gender perspective in the context of political participation. It is also vital to have ready access to quality information on women's political participation.

Mention was made of some of the obstacles and limitations in terms of legal practice, and the lack of follow-up and momentum in terms of the rules that facilitate women's access to political participation and political parties.

The issue of women's political participation at the local and municipal levels requires political determination and commitment. There is a need for awareness-raising, basic indicators and monitoring. Academia could provide a forum for exploring and analysing the issues of political participation, in the form of doctoral or master's theses.

In the case of Mexico, the project opened up and intensified inter-agency dialogue for the strengthening of a political culture that includes gender equity. This involved analysing gender in the second National Survey on Political Culture and Citizen Practices, creating permanent discussion forums on political culture and

women's participation, and setting up a multi-sectoral network of government authorities, academics and members of civil society.

With the support of ECLAC, INMUJERES agreed to deepen its strategies to promote the inclusion of gender equality and equity in the values and principles of the political culture, as well as those aimed at making progress towards achieving the aim of the National Programme for Equality of Opportunities and Non-Discrimination against Women (PROEQUIDAD): to guarantee women access and full participation in power structures and decision-making, in equal conditions to men.

Reflecting the strategies of other countries, it was decided to:

Set up a forum for dialogue on political culture and gender equity among INMUJERES, other State institutions and NGOs.

The project helped to identify needs, weaknesses, obstacles and strengths in the process of incorporating gender equity into Mexico's political culture.

INMUJERES called on the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) and the Ministry of the Interior (SEGOB) to debate the issue and analyse the possibility of including questions on gender equity in the various national surveys on political participation. Progress has been made in including gender in the National Surveys on Political Culture and Citizen Practices carried out by the Ministry of the Interior. In addition, there are moves to set up a network on democratic governance, gender and political culture, involving representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), Colegio de México (COLMEX), Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), NGOs, the Women's Board and the National Women's Civic Association (ANCIFEM).



## ***Bolivia***

In Bolivia, the project made a contribution to the comparative analysis of constitutions from a gender perspective. In view of the government decision to convoke a Constitutional Assembly and the opportunities this provided for the recognition of women's rights, a study was conducted to identify recent experiences of constitutional reform (especially the most significant), the strategies employed by women's organizations and an assessment of their results by those involved. In conjunction with the National Electoral Court, an international seminar was organized in the city of Santa Cruz on constitutional reform and gender equity, and was attended by a broad range of representatives from the political arena and social organizations.

## **5. Institutional development**

### ***Brazil***

In Brazil, the purpose of the project was to support the institutional stature-building of the State Secretariat for the Rights of Women (SEDIM) (which was set up on 8 May 2002 and provisionally made into a ministry) and to facilitate links with the Special Secretariat on Policies for Women (set up during the Government of President Lula da Silva and transferred to the Office of the President of the Republic).

The resulting dialogue facilitated the inclusion of a gender commission in the governmental transition team, which had already created similar commissions for the rest of the government apparatus. This was indispensable for the operations of the future ministerial mechanism. The commission forged links with the Presidential Staff Office in charge of the transition process, which helped to channel the demands of the women's movement for the strengthening and positioning of the new institution, allocation of resources and influence in the appointment of the head of the institution.

## **Paraguay**

In Paraguay, the strategy was to strengthen gender machineries in the context of a change of government. The project provided support for the generation of consensuses leading to commitments with different government and non-government actors regarding the continuity and strengthening of the Department for Women's Affairs and the country's other gender institutions at the local, regional and national levels.

A meeting was held for Congresswomen, at which the main challenges and achievements in women's advancement were discussed and a work agenda defined.

The project also backstopped the efforts of the Department for Women's Affairs (within the Office of the President of the Republic) and the various State gender institutions to position the stability of gender institutionality as an item on the change-of-government agenda and within the public debate. The strategy included coordinating initiatives in this direction deployed by civil society and the State, as well as organizing political-impact activities with the new public and political authorities to safeguard the stability of the State's various gender institutions.

## **6. Strategies and tools**

### **A. Opening strategy: analysis, assessment and mapping of all actors within the national context**

#### **1) Analysis of national context**

Any actions should be preceded by a detailed analysis of the national context. Areas to be analysed include the following:

- The country's economic situation. Issues such as poverty, economic growth, income distribution, the employment rate

and satisfaction of basic needs are crucial for a country's governance.

- The political context. The level of institutional stability or instability, channels of citizen participation, the role of political parties and, in general, the existence of various mechanisms and means of conducting politics are a reflection of a country's level of democracy. The weakness or strength of democratic institutions should determine the strategy for achieving democratic governance.
- The political climate. The level of women's participation and, especially, the country's political climate at the time; whether there are elections or a change of government; whether the government has lost legitimacy or is facing a governance crisis.
- The social context, including the state of relations between machineries for the advancement of women and society, levels of citizen participation, poverty, inclusion of minorities, exclusion and other power relations.
- The cultural context. Cultural changes and changes affecting social, political and economic processes must be analysed.

Armed with a detailed analysis of a country's political, economic, social and cultural aspects and the processes that link them all together, it is then possible to focus on the institutions and movements that can be allies in taking action to promote democratic governance from a gender perspective. At this point, it is important to carry out an analysis that includes:

- Mapping the country's organizations and movements, such as civil-society organizations, women's and feminist movements, human rights organizations and minority groups.
- Analysing State machineries for the advancement of women, with special emphasis on those that are most stable and have most influence on government and State policies.
- Assessing the judicial, labour, social, political, economic and administrative reforms that affect democratic governance and any changes in gender relations and policy within the country.

## **B. Developing a strategy for the second stage: selection of key institutions and actors for pilot activities**

The foregoing analysis can then be used to define the problem and mobilize the institutional, political and social actors to tackle it. The analysis can also be compared with government priorities in order to:

- Select one or more key institutions for strengthening democratic governance from a gender perspective and assemble a group of independent national and international experts of both sexes to support the institutions selected.
- Carry out a detailed analysis of the relevance of gender equity in the selected institutions as regards the services they provide and their structure.
- Implement specific pilot activities that may include the preparation of courses or materials with a gender perspective and the training of male and female officials in contentious issues.
- Seek support and lobby male and female parliamentarians and other State actors after a process of awareness-raising in different spheres of the State and civil society.
- Produce and implement instruments to assess, follow-up and monitor advances in the mainstreaming of the gender perspective in democratic governance and the formation of an inter-sectoral committee comprising middle-ranking technical staff from the relevant institutions and representatives of international cooperation agencies and the gender institution in question.

### C. Communications technologies and governance from a gender perspective

One of the most interesting learning experiences of the project was the compatibility observed between the gender perspective in public policies and the introduction of new technologies.<sup>15</sup> One of the resulting hypotheses was that new technologies are disruptive, insofar as they are, by nature, radical, and that the strategic implications of their use are dramatic enough to directly impact on the strengthening or change of direction of an enterprise or, in this case, a government. These technologies are also said to form a bridge between the local and the global, making traditional ways of doing things obsolete. They transform outcomes and ways of achieving them, and often generate fierce resistance to change on the part of well-established institutions. Similarly, a gender perspective in public policy seeks a radical change in policy management. Although such a dramatic change is meant to be more of a process than a sudden transformation, the fact remains that such a policy change also renders obsolete the forms — supposedly neutral in effect— underlying the region's policies. What new technologies and the gender perspective have in common is that they introduce radical change. The project participants therefore had to face resistance to change and seek to overcome it. Female ministers and authorities in participating countries took a positive view of their access to new technologies, and realized the magnitude of the change involved in mainstreaming a methodological approach that requires inter-agency coordination, multidisciplinary efforts and internalization by all the actors concerned.

The introduction of information and communications technologies (ICTs) has given rise to new forms of citizen participation and

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<sup>15</sup> The project prompted reflections on new information technologies, and the limited research that had been carried out.

ways for the State and civil society to interact. Although these technologies have demonstrated their capacity for generating networks and exchanging information —thereby contributing to democratic governance in the region's countries— the authorities and officials of gender machineries and women's organizations have gained access to such technology only slowly. Most gender machineries remain on the sidelines of the digital revolution under way in the respective State. The issue of e-government was a major part of the project strategy, and female ministers and authorities were given training in the use of ICTs.

The virtual forums encouraged more direct forms of political communication that were conducive to dialogue and enabled the authorities and officials of gender machineries to share experiences and advance towards a common stance for participation in the ninth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Mexico City, where participants evaluated progress with respect to the agreements the States had made during the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995.

During the project, two virtual forums were held with the female ministers involved in preparations for the ninth session of the Regional Conference. The two-day forums provided an opportunity for information-sharing, as the participants answered questions in the virtual medium. Joint discussions were also organized on issues to do with the Conference, which resulted in more productive participation during the Conference and enabled the countries' various strategies to be compared. This was then used as a basis for a common agenda.

## **7. Strengthening machineries for the advancement of women**

The project supported strategies to strengthen gender machineries and validate them as serious interlocutors in the eyes of other State actors, mainstream the gender perspective and integrate the

machineries into the debates and programmes of democratic governance and State reform.

The experience showed the importance of defining the project aims and activities in conjunction with each country's gender machinery. In each case, this institution convened the various State bodies and civil-society actors in order to identify the area that the project would target.

The proposed target area and strategy were adapted to each country's specific situation and sociopolitical and cultural processes. This helped to foster:

- Interrelationships between the various political actors involved in gender equity.
- The generation of new political pacts and agreements to support gender equity proposals at the State level and position them within the most significant programmes for advancing democratic governance within the region's countries.
- The exposure of cultural, institutional and political obstacles and resistance to the objectives of gender equity, the political representation of women and their access to decision-making positions.

In every country, the strengthening or creation of new gender machineries has taken on a dimension of its own, shaped by the national political context and the particular needs of the women who live there.

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## 8. What we learned in this module

The main finding of the project was the strategic common ground between the agendas of governments, machineries for the advancement of women and the region's pro-democracy movement. Striking a balance between democratic principles and the need for institutional soundness, stability and continuity is a concern of both participating governments and women's movements. Democratic governance is seen as an objective with broad social legitimacy that requires the enhancing of links among stakeholders and broadening and deepening of the contents of the social agenda.

The project demonstrated that machineries for the advancement of women are necessary institutions for incorporating the demands and contributions of women's organizations and that the most institutionally developed countries have these mechanisms placed high in the decision-making structure.

Where these mechanisms channel the advance of the gender equality agenda and facilitate the dialogue with civil society, their

main contribution is to ensure that the governance agenda includes equality and non-discrimination as a core concern. All the cases studied showed development of capacities for argumentation, bargaining and partnering that carried progress in governments' governance agendas beyond expectations. While in some countries reforms focused on modifying the institutions responsible for economic and financial policy, the machineries for the advancement of women and women's movements took advantage of the reform drive to introduce a concern for creating new modernizing institutions capable of formulating and implementing gender policies inspired by participatory, decentralized management models that are accountable to citizens. These ongoing reflections have involved all the governments of the region and continued during the thirty-ninth meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The virtuous circle of social equality and political democracy and, hence, its treatment as a crucial part of democratic governance, was evident in the fact that concern arose in all the countries over the eradication of poverty not only as an impediment to the exercise of economic and social rights, but also as an obstacle to the exercise of citizenship —especially for poor women. The project broadened knowledge of the nature of poverty and underlined the need to make the differentiated impact of poverty visible statistically, socially and politically. It also identified the limitations of the methodologies currently used to measure poverty.

## Module III. Lessons learned

The project has shown that the development of any strategy to incorporate the gender perspective into democratic governance processes must consider the heterogeneous nature of the region and recognize that there are no recipes for success. It is necessary to be more attuned to the appearance of “virtuous clusters” that offer good conditions for establishment of solid and lasting democratic relationships. As pointed out by a former president of Brazil, participation in any process requires an acknowledgement of all the social and institutional actors involved and endowment with the conceptual, technical and political tools needed to overcome bureaucratic resistance to change (Cardoso, 2006).

As noted in the report of the preparatory meeting on democratic governance and gender held in October 2003, it is vital to know and recognize the national and international conditions that form the background to any undertaking. Machineries for the advancement of women and social movements have demonstrated that the institutionalization of the gender approach and opportunities for carrying their mission forward are closely linked to the historic context. Indeed, machineries for the advancement of women in Latin America, in most cases, are examples of institutions created during times of democratization. At such times, it was easier to link gender equity with the democracy-building and women were acknowledged as protagonists of that process.

Similarly, the international conferences of the United Nations emphasized the integration of gender equity in tackling global issues at the same time as the global gender equity agenda was being formed. The effects of this agenda were reflected in the

plans and programmes of machineries for the advancement of women and, significantly enough, in a greater social and cultural willingness to discuss the issues on the agenda and support the changes it advocated.<sup>16</sup>

It is also essential to bear in mind the importance of communication, especially the media as stakeholders with a voice of their own as well as intermediaries between the State and society. Gender bias, omissions, and discriminatory stereotypes in public debate need to be identified in order to raise awareness among communicators and the public, and to build a strategy that is an integral part of political strategy. In this sense, an important part of the learning experience was the use of new ICTs to build a network for the production and exchange of information among gender machineries and the female political leaders of various participant countries.

The project validated its own underlying assumptions:

- Information-sharing is a major source of knowledge creation based on the experiences of the region's machineries for the advancement of women.
- Female ministers responsible for machineries for the advancement of women work at the crossroads between the State and society, both in terms of bringing together and responding to the social demands of women's movement and negotiating with their respective States on the conditions needed for them to fulfill their mandate.
- Machineries for the advancement of women have developed in the last 20 years, during which time several generations of female ministers have, at different times and in keeping with

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<sup>16</sup> See Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Informe de la reunión Gobernabilidad democrática e igualdad de género en América Latina y el Caribe, Santiago, Chile, 27-28 October 2003 [online] <http://www.eclac.org/mujer/noticias/articulos/0/14880/informe.pdf>

their particular national context, contributed to the rapid spread of initiatives to promote the exercise of women's rights in the region.<sup>17</sup>

## 1. Pointers for a democratic governance strategy

Experiences in Latin America show that developing a democratic governance strategy with a gender perspective should involve the following steps, which may be divided into two stages:

### A. First stage: analysis, assessment and mapping of all actors within the national context

#### Analysis of national context

Any action should be preceded by a detailed analysis of the national context. Areas to be analysed include the following:

*The economic context.* Issues such as poverty, economic growth, income distribution, level of employment and the satisfaction of basic needs are crucial for a country's governance.

*The political context.* The level of institutional stability or instability, channels of citizen participation, the role of political parties and, in general, the existence of different mechanisms and means of conducting politics are a reflection of a country's level of democracy. The weakness or strength of democratic institutions should determine the appropriate strategy for achieving democratic governance.

The political environment must also be examined in relation to progress in women's participation, especially the political climate

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<sup>17</sup> For a full account of the meeting, see [online] <http://www.eclac.cl/cgi-bin/getProd.asp?xml=/mujer/noticias/noticias/4/13414/P13414.xml&xsl=/mujer/tpl/plf.xml&base=/mujer/tpl/top-bottom.xsl>

at any given time. It is necessary to consider whether there are elections or a change of government, a loss of government legitimacy or a governance crisis.

*The social context*, including relations between machineries for the advancement of women and society, recognized and latent forms of discrimination, levels of citizen participation, social organizations and movements and their impact on social and political life, the nature of poverty, inclusion of minorities, exclusion and women's contribution to welfare.

*The cultural context*. It is necessary to look at cultural changes affecting social, political and economic processes, the cultural suppositions underlying public policies, the impact of religious factors, the roles ascribed to the family and women's responsibilities, among other factors.

### **Mapping and assessing the actors**

Armed with a detailed analysis of a country's political, economic, social and cultural aspects, and the processes that link them all together, it is then possible to focus on the institutions and movements that can be allies in taking action to promote democratic governance from a gender perspective.

At this point, it is important to carry out an analysis that includes:

1. Mapping the country's organizations and movements such as civil-society organizations, women's and feminist movements, human rights organizations and movements of minority groups.
2. Analysing the State machineries for the advancement of women, placing special emphasis on those that are most stable and have most influence on government and State policies.
3. Assessing the judicial, labour, social, political, economic and administrative reforms that affect democratic governance and any changes in gender relations and policy within the country.



*"Linking the gender perspective with governance commands attention and adds solidity to the vision of gender as a lynchpin of institutional development and public policymaking."* Patricia Espinosa Torres, President, National Women's Institute, Mexico.

*"The debate generated by the adoption of the quota mechanism has helped the general population to see women as professionally and politically capable of holding a position of public responsibility."* María Isabel Rosas, Vice-Minister for Women and Social Development, Peru.

*"Mainstreaming the gender approach in public policies is a significant advance based on processes that have been under way in recent decades. This approach no longer focuses solely on the legal amendments needed to achieve gender equity or the most urgent problems of discrimination against women. It represents a dramatic shift in how politics are conducted, one that seeks out new forms of management."* Cecilia Pérez, Minister of the National Women's Service (SERNAM), Chile.

*"Gender institutionality can be strengthened during a change of government, provided that this forms part of a political process steered by the respective institution and supported by a President with credibility and the support of a public majority."* Martha Lucía Vásquez, Presidential Advisor, Colombia.

## **B. Second stage: selection of key institutions and stakeholders for implementing pilot activities**

The foregoing analysis can then be used to define the problem and mobilize the institutional, political and social actors to tackle it. The analysis can also be compared with the government priorities in order to:

1. Select one or more key institutions for strengthening democratic governance from a gender perspective and

- assemble a group of independent national and international experts of both sexes to support the institutions selected.
2. Carry out a detailed analysis of the relevance of gender equity in the selected institutions as regards the services they provide and their structure.
  3. Implement specific pilot activities that may include courses or materials with a gender perspective and the training of male and female officials in contentious issues.
  4. Seek support and lobby male and female parliamentarians and other State actors after a process of awareness-raising in different spheres of the State and civil society.
  5. Produce and implement instruments to assess, follow-up and monitor advances in the mainstreaming of the gender perspective in democratic governance and the formation of an inter-sectoral committee comprising middle-ranking technical staff from the relevant institutions and representatives of international cooperation agencies and the gender institution in question.

## 2. Conclusions<sup>18</sup>

At the end of the project, the government delegates carried out an assessment to identify the main learning experiences and achievements.

The representative for Honduras noted, first, that the idea that women had a role only in the private sphere and that they could and should work only in managing the home, as the sole place they could do as they pleased and use their energy and creativity, clearly belonged in the past and was now relegated to history. He then said that, thanks to the activities of the National Women's Institute, the link between gender equity and reform processes had

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<sup>18</sup> For a full account of the international seminar and democratic governance and gender, see [online] <http://www.cepal.org/cgi-bin/getprod.asp?xml=/mujer/noticias/noticias/4/19674/P19674.xml&xsl=/mujer/tpl/plf.xsl&base=/mujer/tpl/top-bottom.xsl>

been extended into the field of police work, where specific measures had been taken to promote equality between men and women.<sup>19</sup>

The representative of Ecuador referred to the opportunities the project offered to promote an equity pact as a contribution to democratic governance including the gender perspective and the protection of women's human rights as a key element of human development and the fight to end poverty. Including women in democracy and development, with full equality and rights, was a prerequisite for overcoming discrimination, and therefore formed the basis of governance. The Ecuadorian experience showed how a pilot project implemented by a vigilant and dynamic institution can disseminate that approach and adapt the experience to other areas of public policy.<sup>20</sup>

The need to forge links with civil-society organizations was underlined by the delegate of Mexico,<sup>21</sup> who emphasized the need to achieve consensus and coordinate collaborative networks around the gender agenda among women in government and social organizations.

In Mexico, the project had fulfilled its objectives to act as a means of transferring, generating and exchanging useful and expert knowledge on government capacity-building in democratic governance with a gender perspective.

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<sup>19</sup> Oscar Álvarez, Secretary of State, Security Bureau, Honduras.

<sup>20</sup> Rocío Rosero, Executive Director of the National Women's Council, Ecuador.

<sup>21</sup> Patricia Espinosa, President, National Women's Institute, Mexico.

